

*Fr. Amedeo Cencini*

## **New scenarios of Evangelization for Consecrated Life in a synodal-intercultural context**

Thank you for the invitation to make this presentation which touches on some of my sins: among other much more serious ones. I am happy to share this theme with you which is very relevant today in these difficult times; as new scenarios are opening up for evangelization and for Consecrated Life in the current synodal context, — precisely the synodal-intercultural context. Therefore, a very important topic that we consecrated people must face with the primitive spirit, face new scenarios, probably abandon others, change our mentality to live this situation, which is a crisis from many points of view, in the perspective of the newness of the Spirit that is opening up these new scenarios and new realities for us. And where there is newness of spirit, there is the effort for us to learn new things: a notable effort because we are all attached to what we have learned and do, and have always done; what we call our ‘holy traditions’. We wish to break away from them because there is something new. God always opens new paths with full spirituality, even today. The Lord is calling us to a new vocation, every day. He eternally calls, he does nothing but call us: in Italian ‘**to call is the verb to love**’. Therefore, every day God calls us without repeating himself, because love does not repeat itself. Every day he calls us to something new. This spiritual perspective is the basis of everything, of all I know and do.

For the Introduction I have prepared this PowerPoint which I hope will help you to appreciate the signal effort the Cyrenean Saints, Cyril and Methodius, made as translators. When I speak fast, I usually repeat myself. So don't worry.

This reflection has four reference points:

### **1. The nature and history of Consecrated Life that is the teacher of evangelization**

Consecrated Life was born to evangelize; therefore, it cannot fail to continue to be an expert in these new ways.

### **2. The ecclesial Synod is underway, where everyone is given the floor**

In the past, Synods were all celebrated in the Synodal Hall where some elected delegates of the Church gathered to discuss. This Synod, however, has already been born and celebrated in all the churches: naturally more and less. Generally, it is celebrated in the parish, through various commissions, meetings, sharing. This Synod was born from everyone's word. In the new scenario everyone intervenes. Everyone has a say. Everyone must contribute; everyone must listen to what the other says in the Church.

### **3. The Renewal of Mission is no longer unidirectional**

Here we shall talk about what can specifically generate renewal, because mission today is no longer conceived of as unidirectional. That is, a Master who teaches others, an Evangelizer who evangelizes others. This is no longer the case.

#### 4. The theme of interculturality goes far beyond multiculturalism

The theme of interculturality is not just about multiculturalism; our religious institutes today are all international, it is nothing new. There are many cultures, but saying *multiculturalism* does not mean interculturality. Do you understand the difference? Multiculturalism simply means that we come from different nations and cultures. **Interculturality** means that these cultures are communicating with each other. I shall not analyse each of these points, but limit myself to reflecting on just one point, namely the relationship between acculturation and inculturation. What difference is there? Is it the same thing? No. These two terms are often used with the same meaning; instead they speak of a distinct reality expressed in these three things:—

- A community journey, synodal path. Synodal means that everyone intervenes in an active and passive sense. All are subjects of evangelization and objects, or rather recipients, of evangelization. This synodal community journey forces us to recognize the difference between acculturation and inculturation.
- The two terms used together with different meanings are the expression, the precise meaning, of the mission, as we shall see. We will try to see this.
- The perspective in which initial and ongoing training is placed. Because today training for life is a real problem. Initial training, always monitored, subject to attention, is also criticised; precisely sexual abuse — for many years the blame was placed on initial formation. They are not trained enough in the passive affective spiritual field; it's like shooting at the Red Cross. And the problem of sexual abuse today affects ongoing formation/training because the initial training was formed in the social sphere. The permanent vocation exists because the initial formation exists. But where is the permanent training? Who has seen it? I am very interested to see where it originated. We talk a lot about permanent formation. But how much do we actually do about it? Not ongoing formation from conferences every now and then. Ongoing formation can be extraordinary but it must be ordinary every day in your community with your Brothers, your Sisters, and the people you meet. Always do ongoing formation. Every day we will try to make it happen.

##### 1. Acculturation

What does the attempt to make it come about mean? Attempt at acculturation? Try to think first of all about how to re-express the Gospel, or your own spirituality, in the culture of those who listen to you? Your attempt to express it in the simplest terms of the local language and dialect is acculturation. This morning's Gospel Reading, for example, expressed my charism, my spirituality, and my experience of God, and this must be conveyed in terms that he/she, the person who listens to me, can understand in his/her language, in his/her dialect, in keeping with the culture.

Culture means three things:

- Mentality: values, ideals, and underlying conviction, the way of reading life.
- Culture means sensitivity, intellect/mental capacity. Sensitivity, on the other hand, is the fruit of an experience. It is subjective, what a person feels in his/her life; the sense of beauty; what is beautiful, what gives joy. Seek to make this word enter the people's sensitivity. To make the Gospel understood, tell some good news, something beautiful. Does saying that the Gospel is beautiful, mean that it is beautiful for this person, for those who live in this culture distinct from mine? I must speak of the beauty of the Gospel according to their ideal.
- Culture means a way of life: culture has three things: mentality, sensitivity, praxis or lifestyle. Acculturation expresses the wisdom, humility, and pure love of one person for another. Not an

intellectual gesture, rather a spontaneous gesture from the heart, from the mind of every person. In Latin it is called *ad-culturam Altrui – ad culturatum*.

I leave my position to come to meet you. I don't simply repeat the Gospel, which is understood with a loving gesture. Because beautiful things must be offered, beauty must be shared; I cannot keep it to myself. Then I have to find a term to say that the Gospel is Good News. And I say it then, according to your mentality and sensitivity. And see reality through your eyes, with the eyes of the people, of those who listen, to the point of using the same words as those who listen to me. The parables too; culture is expressed in parables, that's why Jesus spoke in parables. Jesus was the first to do acculturation. The whole Gospel, all acculturation, the mystery of God, was told according to the Jewish culture. Let us look for what Jesus did wonderfully. Parables are a very concrete, living, existential, colourful way to make people understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Parables are symbols, images, examples, colours, feelings, expectations, evaluative parameters, criteria of the other, of the listener. When I evangelize who has priority? I evangelize a person who then evangelizes. The priority is the person to whom I proclaim the Good News. I want to stress that I care about communicating with the heart; to praise I must give priority and precedence to those who listen to me, for the Proclamation must be expressed in the language of those who listen to me.

## **2. Conditions and attention in training**

In this context, initial and ongoing training must be kept in mind.

**First point**, acculturation cannot be improvised. Acculturation is the fruit of *ascesi*/asceticism – it's an old term – asceticism – let's try new contents. Asceticism is learning another language. The first condition, self-decentralization, places the other person at the centre.

Relational immaturity is the first victim of abuse, the inability to live a relationship. I put the other at the centre of my attention. The other has the right to be addressed in his/her own language. Therefore, pay attention to the other's history, culture, because the other is worthy of this. Pay attention to his/her diversity, life; to diversity on the synodal path. The Gospel asks me to pay particularly delicate attention to the diversity of others. It asks me to find a different way, it provokes me, which I find very helpful. If I always repeat the same Gospel, with the same words, the same Message, there is no provocation; but saying it in a new way is a very solidary exercise.

**Second condition** — asceticism is learning a new language. Many of you are missionaries. When you go to another country you learn the language. However, this not just learning words, it is much more than learning the language, the local dialect, expressing oneself according to their sensitivity. It is about learning new languages to convey the Gospel Message according to this or that culture. For example, don't just think about the individual cultures of the places where you have been, but about the experience. Today, all over the world, there is a language that creates many problems for us. What language is it? That of secularization. Secularization is what reduces all transcendental values to mere earthly realities, because happiness and well-being are needed in this life. Down here there are material goods and a culture that appears to be distant from the Gospel. We must learn to translate the Gospel into the secular idiom. Enough complaining about secularization. Instead of complaining about this trend, let us learn to talk about the Gospel in accessible terms that can be understood by those who live in a secular culture. We have to learn this language which is a bit complicated and difficult because it is a particularly difficult language. Yesterday, a person gave me one of my books, which has been translated into Arabic. I can't even read it! I'm not clever enough to learn this new language.

**Second point:** abandon traditional religious culture without any nostalgia for a certain past, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to abandon our traditional religious culture, which is familiar to us but which has a small flaw today. What flaw? Today, it is a dead language, because no one speaks the traditional religious language anymore. In a large part of the world no one speaks it, no one understands it anymore. So speak a current language today; we cannot be satisfied with repeating what our mother or father said, not even those who love tradition so much. Now, we can be certain that the past of the great institutes, of the many vocations, of the many communities, of the many increasingly larger buildings, is over; this past will never return. Now, we can be certain, not only that it will never come back, but that it is a good thing that it will never come back. These people have no perception of history. History is moving, and we cannot be afraid of history walking. Of course, this history is open. We must abandon a certain type of mentality in order to enter the new *scenario*, in these new scenarios we must always read the spirit of the origin: the Holy Spirit, who will suggest how to understand it, without any nostalgia for the past. It is well that it won't be coming back.

### **3. Challenge**

The challenge here is how to interpret it, it's not intellectual at all because you can translate it into another language or another culture.

- I know how passionate are about your own language. I can only translate what I am passionate about, only what I love deeply. I will only find words for what I feel deeply. Then I will find the words to translate it into the local language/dialect. If you are not in love with the spirituality of the Gospel you will never be able to translate it for others.

- It can only be translated if you have knowledge of other languages, because each one has its own values. Because every language, every culture, even of the most dispersed tribes in the heart of Africa, or of India or Latin America, has its values. Don't translate them into your own language or spirituality. According to the spirituality of today's Gospel, one must know the other's language and its values very well.

- One must have the happiness and the good of others at heart. I am concerned for his well-being. That's why I'll tell you a lovely story, the story of Jesus Christ.

### **4. Principle and Reason**

Why? What is the principle or reason for acculturation? There are three points, in-line with Jesuitical formation:—

- That no culture can communicate all the richness of the Gospel, embody the Gospel, we agree. No culture is able to express all the richness of the Gospel, but,

- That each culture can reveal particular and new aspects. Every culture, even that of the tribes dispersed at the ends of the earth, can reveal new aspects of the Gospel.

- That, only together, all these cultures and languages of the world can make the Gospel shine in all its beauty, wisdom. No culture can exhaust all the riches of the world. Every culture of the world can, synodically, reveal and make the Gospel shine in all its beauty and wisdom.

### **5. Fruit and Consequence**

#### **What is the fruit of this work of acculturation?**

The future of Consecrated Life, and of every Institute, is linked to its ability to acculturate, its intelligent and creative effort to adapt its spirituality to embrace the surrounding culture. A charism

that is translated, acculturated, remains alive through acculturation that gives life to a charism. Don't we want our charisms to remain alive? Well, this is the only path, its vocation. May be some vocations and charisms are dying. The life of an Institute, its charism, has adapted if it is still alive today. How stay alive? Evidently, by reading the culture of the time it is strengthened. The future lies in a new and true culture of acculturation. If our charisms die without our doing anything fraternal with joy; Pope Francis says, 'We become custodians of a museum', and he is right. Acculturation makes us live evangelization in a spirit of service, without imposing anything. Create fraternity, co-workers in joy, because we offer something fresh, like daily bread. Do not be content with repeating, as we do most of the time. In how many Institutes there is always the same situation of the Founder, of the Foundress? And we, lazy and passive, are without creative imagination, perhaps with little faith or poor spirituality, and little missionary passion. But if we consent to communicate our faith and spirituality according to the mentality and sensitivity of those who listen to us, we would both be enriched. When you make the effort to explain your faith in terms that are comprehensible to those who listen to you, it is your faith that grows, you enrich yourself because you have discovered a new way of speaking; new aspects of the Gospel, of our charisms, and we will be blessed. It's clearly not just a question of language, of words. To transmit the Gospel, as a proposal for everyone, have a sense of happiness. What is man looking for, even man in the secularized sphere? Every human being needs to give meaning to life; he needs Truth, even if he doesn't know it.

- You need to be cheerful to communicate this proclamation. We must communicate happiness, liveliness and pleasure, not only in eschatology, but already now in this life.

## **6. Pedagogy of the least.**

Infuse acculturation and its pedagogy with authentic spirituality.

- It must be accessible to everyone. An authentic spirituality must be preached as it is, not just as a term according to a category. You understand, including the others. An authentic spirituality — if it is authentic; is it authentic for everyone? It must be said in simple words, so it becomes pedagogy, a lifestyle, otherwise it is not true spirituality. When we talk about spirituality, about charisma, we alone understand that. We work for others; schools are the essential centre, for the good of the poor. Since only we see the spirituality, isn't that so, it is not right; we must give the first good to others, give them our spirituality in a simple way so that they can understand it. Keeping this kind of mystery veiled, inaccessible, is not good. Authentic spirituality must be expressed simply so that everyone can understand and enjoy it. For this reason, if the evangelizer really wants to communicate to everyone, he must adapt his words, so that those who find it most difficult can understand him.

- Acculturation is not a particular sign for the intellectual, but for a person who stoops to the level of the least. I speak to a group of fifty people at the most basic level of understanding, to the person with the least ability to understand. If I address the lowest intellectual level, I speak to everyone. This is the precious principle: the choice of acculturation which favours the pedagogy of the least, which is the typical evangelical pedagogy. Jesus' words were clear to all. Even the poor understood him. They said "ah ... he speaks like someone who has authority, not like the scribes". I wanted to say this, Someone who touches the heart whom we know. Now, the other method to do this work is for everyone to work hard together.

## **7. Everyone's Effort.**

The process of acculturation cannot be managed by one person alone, because it needs to be done together in community, this is *synodality*. It is better to be synodal because it is not easy. Indeed,

cooperation becomes another way of living in community. Without this sharing there is the risk that most of our charismatic content has never been “translated” into modern secular language; nor in the different places where we are present.

Thus, all their wealth has never been released. Let me explain, this is quite terrible. In fact, we have never translated much of the spiritual content, linked to the charisms of our original Institutes, into secular language. They are in the archives, oh ... jealously guarded, in our archives in the Generalate, in the historical Institute. Do you know all the laws of the Foundress of the Founder that no language has ever voiced? And that was never even translated? We are responsible. The Lord asks, “What have you done with all the good you have, the spiritual good?” What we don't translate for others means that we haven't understood it either. Now, we have planted the model that matters to others today, namely, acculturation. Which is the theological model *par excellence* of acculturation? It is the Word. It is the Incarnation, what is the Incarnation? The Incarnation is a process of acculturation. A very simple way to explain the theological mystery is this: Divinity, translated into humanity. Incarnation equals translation.

The Logos, translated into words, is the mystery of life, seen in the face, in the smile, in the hands that touch Jesus who caresses. Jesus touching the lepers is the acculturation of the mysterious divine Being, which becomes gesture, word, look, behaviour, the way of speaking, the way of relating life. Throughout his life, Jesus is like this. An extraordinary model of acculturation: the model we must imitate. It is *kenosis*. Whoever feels divine sensitivity must translate it into human sensitivity. Let us not forget, we who believe in God, that everything that is sensitive, is God, who is very close to humanity. God who listens to the groan of prisoners, counts their tears, I mean readily pays them attention. It is not humiliation but revelation. Just as each of our charisms reveals an aspect of the divine sensibility, each charism highlights an aspect of God's sensitivity.

## **8. Cultural Sensitivity.**

What does cultural sensitivity mean? It means training young people. When I talk about initial training/formation I also mean ongoing/permanent training. Having ‘respect for others’, is not just respect but an education in selflessness/otherness. It means not being afraid of others because they are different from you, not being afraid of those who don't believe, not being afraid of acculturation, not being afraid of people who contest those who are of another opinion, not to be afraid of the world. We must truly welcome this world deep in our hearts, because we were sent to this world. Furthermore, that cultural sensitivity makes us welcome the positive aspects of other people's culture. Know that consecrated life does not have its own perfection. We are the recipients of our charisms. The recipients of our charisms are the world and the Church. We are only temporary recipients, those entrusted with the Proclamation. All of our interest lies in this cultural dialogue. And all our interest was born from charity, it is not condescension. Let me explain, from my superior position, I come to meet you, right? Because that is the only way to understand the gift we have been given better. We can only understand what we proclaim to others: only what we have had the opportunity to proclaim to others.

The rest is an illusion, which is why already in community, everyone can and must learn the other person's language. *Language* in the metaphorical sense, only from the historical perspective; since in the Novitiate there are those who come from Africa, every now and then they speak English. No, it is not just a question of words, but of welcoming the different way of living the faith, spirituality, the Gospel, interpreting Christ. This too is synodality, the current one. I propose it because I find that it is always particularly expressive: a practical example of acculturation. We could see many things in this great Figure, the theological Example, that is, the Incarnation of the Word. There are

many examples and I think you all personally know those who live this, those who appear to be a luminous model.

There are two passions: *the passion to Proclaim Jesus*, and the other passion: *The passion for the good of the people* who live in that place, that territory of the Sahara Desert. There, you enter with your whole self, practically merge with the Bedouin level, where you put the other at the centre. Thus, begins the pedagogy of the least.

Little brother — really little — give priority, as soon as you arrive, to learning the local language and culture to help, at the level of grammar, those who will automatically come after you. Have you thought spontaneously to prepare the texts that will help future missionaries. About twenty Institutes are returning to the spirit of those who are free of heart.

Third, only speak with one's way of being; maintain an extremely poor lifestyle: a smile does a lot to defend life. Divided they were always the object of attacks, it was a massacre. Do not aim to gather vocations nor even to convert, nevertheless proclaim to everyone with one's lifestyle the Good News, beautiful, good, and luminous.

**Second step** – What is the difference between inculturaion and acculturation, where is the difference? What does acculturation mean?

Acculturation is very simple. This involves speaking the language of those who listen to me, translating the local dialect, the language into simple terms. What is inculturation?

## **Inculturation**

### **1. Definition:**

Inculturation is the response given by those who listen to my message of faith as an evangelizer. Who do I evangelize thanks to the gift of the Spirit? Evidently it is the other, and I give the Spirit to everyone. Because in the Acts of the Apostles the Spirit is given to everyone, and no difference is made between “Jews and Greeks”. He then proclaims the Gospel, thanks to the gift of the Spirit, to everyone. Whoever receives it can translate the Gospel according to his culture and sensitivity, according to his experience of life: God is life. At this point a new translation will be even newer, because he has made it. I have always sought to belong to another culture. Whoever was born in that culture will be able to repeat the Gospel he has already heard — he will be able to repeat it again in his turn, even better; that novelty for his culture.

Two different terms. **Acculturation** means, I move towards the culture of others. **Inculturation** means, “I, an indigenous person who belongs to that tribe, have received the proclamation of the Gospel from a missionary. Now, I, a native, repeat the Message I have received according to my language”. Each of us speaks another, different, language that he has studied. I try to speak Italian; I cannot speak English or Spanish. **There are two phases:** when does acculturation work well? Acculturation works well when it produces inculturation, if not, it doesn't produce inculturation. That means that you, the evangelizer, haven't made enough of an effort. So you didn't produce anything. Acculturation produces inculturation aroused by the Word. The true missionary is the one who not only retells the Gospel in his own words, but is the one who gives the Word. For example: “As an Indigenous person, according to my mother tongue, my life experience, I translate the Gospel I have received”.

### **2. Fruit:**

The perfect fruition of something absolutely new, unprecedented, that only those who are born in the culture, with their native language, can realize. This is where the charisms stay alive, thanks to

the acculturation provoked by lively inculturation. A charism does not only look back at the Holy Spirit given by the Foundress or Founder, but continuously looks backwards and forwards from the start. It always comes from behind to look ahead, resurrect. This is the life of the Institute, never say regretfully, “we no longer have vocations” to secular people: we account for the numbers from within.

### **3. Inversion of Roles:**

The reversal of roles in evangelization has a double meaning. Because at this point the evangelized person evangelizes, while the evangelizer discovers he is being evangelized. I should say, blessed is the evangelizer who allows him-/herself to be evangelized. We must give our youth this very spirit, but not only to the young, also to the middle-aged.

### **4. Reciprocity and sharing**

This synodal sharing indicates the full freedom of the consecrated person who is no longer limited to the role entrusted to him. That is, he does not presume to be a master, his role is only to teach. The missionary only teaches. Formerly, students were told to be ‘*docibilis*’. I discovered this term used in ancient Rome called *docibilitas*, which is much more than *docibilis*. *Docibilitas* means telling the person learning to always learn from everyone, and at every stage of life. Wonderful to be docile.

I let myself be shaped by life. This principle is fundamental in permanent formation. I let myself be formed by life, by those who proclaimed the Gospel. I allow myself to be evangelized by the poor and by those far away.

### **5. Circularity of the charism and its progressive revelation**

**First point**, the charism is renewed thanks to this sharing and cross-reading, it allows itself to be provoked by history because it thus returns to its natural recipient, the ordinary man. And this, you see, is the circularity of the Proclamation. The Gospel returns, makes us more and more faithful, at this point, once received we can evangelize the Gospel. Even better would be a word that evangelizes us.

**Second point**, a charism dies if it always stays in the same things, the charism needs new space and fresh air. It needs a broad geography, if it always stays in the same place there is no breath, there is nothing to say.

This is the authentic ongoing formation that is transmitted in the Apostolate. The Proclamation takes place through relationships and thanks to others (even pagans). Even the pagan can evangelize our perseverance in faith. Do you know the difference between being persevering and being faithful? And I conclude, the persevering person is one who remains in the expression that does not fail, gives voice and has proclaimed the Word properly, and let's say that this experience does not displease. A persevering person is someone who says, “Lord, give us holy perseverance,” but perseverance is not more than faithfulness. Fidelity always indicates a person who remains in his vocational plan, but not by simple repetition is he persevering. The persevering person is the one who repeats, “Lord, give me the enthusiasm of the first time, when I made my vows the first time, give me the passion I had then”. The faithful is not like that. He/she becomes a new person, one who is faithful, one who reactivates his/her consecration. Every day he finds new reasons, and why does he do this? The Lord is eternally calling. Every day he calls me and he doesn't repeat himself. Every day the Lord calls us, he proposes something new to us. This is where fidelity comes from.



Fidelity is the response given every day for an ever-new gift. Perseverance is not enough, one needs to be faithful; an adjective is added to faithfulness. Creative, called *creative fidelity* — in itself — creative. *Perseverance is repetitive, faithfulness is creative.*

## **6. Community — laboratory (or communicative-relational style)**

The community could, should be a laboratory, it has this style of acculturation; inculturation is sharing, speaking, listening to the other's words, forming others, it should also become a style of common life, of fraternal life. This implies, as we have said, the initial and ongoing formation of the individual, of the group, which evokes this style of evangelization through a corresponding relational-communicative style to be lived in community. The laboratory/community prepares for this type of evangelization. In fact, no one can improvise outside the Apostolate what he has not learned to do there.

This communication/relational style make the community a “place of training/formation” and at the same time a “laboratory”. In the faith there are the tools for integrating good and evil.

### **A) Tools for integrating the good**

Sharing the word of God, community discernment, is a formidable tool for learning to walk together, to choose together, to scrutinize together and understand what is pleasing to God, what he has said. The freedom to express your opinion, that is better than mine.

**Fraternal obedience** was an idea of Saint Benedict. Monks, he said, must be obedient, obey, *ob-audire* — must listen to each other. The monks obeyed and not just obedience, which is not a virtue, but simply refers to the authority of the Superiors. Obedience is life-long. Every moment may be a time of transition.

### **Tools for the integration from evil**

Tools of integration from evil can help one to grow, increase fraternal correction. Forgiveness — we do not learn to review life and all the tools, which can be very good if put into practice; educate how to relate, and allow us to move from communication to communion and enable us to adopt a corresponding style of dialogue and sharing. Then, by evangelizing and sharing already in community, we can go and Proclaim the Good News.

Thank you for your attention.