

THE GRACE OF INTERCULTURALITY

1. From which pulpit...

The pulpit from which I share this experience and reflection is that of my congregation. I will spend a few lines to present it. We are the *Consolata Missionary Sisters* (MC), we are 110 years old. We are an Institute of religious life with an exclusively missionary character, of Italian foundation, specifically from Turin. The Founder is Blessed Giuseppe Allamano, a priest of the diocese of Turin who before us founded the The Consolata (male) Missionaries (1901). Allamano conceived his men and women missionaries as a small missionary institute *ad gentes* regionally based, but, as often happens in the development of understanding of a charism, after a few years he expanded the perspective and began to welcome members from other regions of Italy. At present there are 540 of us, *Consolata Missionaries* coming from 16 nations of three continents - Africa, America and Europe - and we live in 17 nations in 4 continents - Africa, America, Asia and Europe.

2. The origins

Born in 1910, the first MCs left for Kenya in 1913. They used to be 15 young women missionaries who, after the initial formation at the Mother House in Turin, were part of the central area of Kenya, *Nyeri*, among the Kikuyu people. It is there that our Sisters grew up as religious missionary women. There, in Kenya, the charism increasingly took roots in their hearts, and revealed unexpected aspects. The Founder knew this and insistently asked the missionaries **to write down** what they felt in their heart, their impressions interacting with "diverse others", their thoughts and feelings. He constantly encouraged the MCs to learn the local language, do everything possible to communicate with people, and fill their notebooks with expressions picked up here and there, proverbs, words, sayings. In fact, many of these sisters would acquire an extraordinary mastery of *Kikuyu*, not only as the people's mother tongue but also as a language: expressive modes, narrative style, symbology, stories, metaphors, proverbs, etc. The Founder read with interest their diaries, drawing valuable suggestions and stimuli to develop our missionary methodology, already sketched through the experience of the Consolata (male) Missionaries who arrived in Kenya a few years earlier, in 1902. Since the first exchanges of Allamano with its missionaries in Kenya, the roots of a **missionary method of insertion and deep interpenetration with the life of the people** are recognizable. In a letter of 1904 to the missionaries in Kenya who had been living for two years among the Kikuyu people, Allamano invites his missionaries to patience and proposes the example of Fr. Matteo Ricci SJ: "I read a few days ago, how in China conversion proceeded triumphantly when Fr. Ricci tolerated certain oblations to the dead...; a few narrow-minded people opposed it, and this provoked persecution and the end of good. It

takes patience and time to take away evil"¹. On the occasion of the first meeting of all the *Consolata Missionaries* present in Kenya, that went down into missionary history as "The Murang'a Conferences», in March 1904, the ten fathers in attendance outlined the essential points of their missionary method. With the typical language of missionary theology of their own time, missionaries made explicit the interest in "formation of the environment», serious study of the local language, formation and collaboration with local catechists, the systematic visit to villages by establishing relationships of trust with the people and attention to the dimension of health care and education.² Certainly, at that time there was no talk of cultures, inculturation and interculturality, yet from the first sketches of our missionary methodology³ there is an orientation towards respect and appreciation of the environment in which women and men missionaries would fit, and sympathy for and interest in the language, traditions and world view of the people from which they are welcomed.

The Founder treasured what his women and men missionaries will give back to him in their frequent letters and diaries, regularly sent to the Mother's House. It can be said that from the beginning, the encounter with a different culture has helped us to shape the Institute, to develop a missionary methodology and to review the basic formation, so as to open the way to a clearer, more articulated and lively formulation of the Consolata missionary charism. We often say that we were born in Italy and our roots are unequivocally here, but we were raised in Kenya, therefore Africa is for us the first place of growth, missionary and charismatic maturation. To which, by grace, as the years pass, influence of other peoples will be added.

¹ C. Bona, ed., *Quasi una vita ... Lettere scritte e ricevute dal Beato Giuseppe Allamano con testi e documenti coevi*, IV, Roma 1994, 80.

²Cf. the document of the "Conclusions of the Conferences held in the station of St. Heart of Jesus at Fort Hall on 1-2-3 March 1904, 10 missionary priests were present at the gathering" in A. Trevisiol, *Uscirano per dissodare il campo: pagine di storia dei Missionari della Consolata in Kenya, 1902-1981*, Rome 1989, 712-718.

³ For a deepening of the missionary methodology of the Missionaries of the Consolata, please refer to the following contributions: A. Castro, "La metodologia missionaria in Giuseppe Allamano", in: Documentazione IMC, 4 (1983) 26-35; Id., *Padre e maestro di missionari. Aspetti della pedagogia missionaria di Giuseppe Allamano*, Bologna 1986.

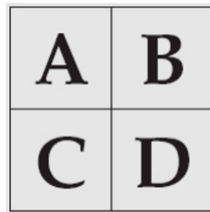
Istituto Suore Missionarie della Consolata, *La nostra metodologia missionaria oggi secondo l'Allamano. La sintesi del metodo – parte prima*, Quaderno 1, Grugliasco marzo-aprile 1989; Id., *La nostra metodologia missionaria oggi secondo l'Allamano. La sintesi del metodo – parte seconda*, Quaderno 2, Grugliasco maggio-giugno 1989.

3. The concept of interculturality and other related concepts⁴

We cannot address the concept of interculturality without clarifying other terms that are related to it and/or frame what interculturality means and proposes:

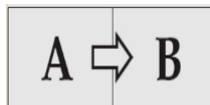
Multiculturalism:

when we talk about a group or an event or a multicultural life, we are highlighting the fact that its participants or members come from different cultures; for example, a parish a company a city and even a country can be multicultural. If we highlight the fact that people also come from different nationalities, we will say that this group is multicultural and international. However, this fact in itself does not imply any relationship or interaction between its members. I can live an entire life in a city inhabited by neighbors of different cultural origins without this leading me to want to learn their language, taste their typical dishes, understand their values, etc. Were we to represent this situation with a graph, we could visualize it in this way:⁵



Transcultural experience:

Let's now assume that a person belonging to culture "A" decides to move to a place of culture "B". The person would have an intercultural experience. Note that we are talking about a "transfer" for a period of time and not a simple sightseeing. The transfer implies, in this example, a degree of commitment and risk that we are not forced to assume when we are passing by and we consider ourselves tourists, visitors, explorers or, in the worst case, conquerors or colonizers... If we use a graph, we could visualize it like this:



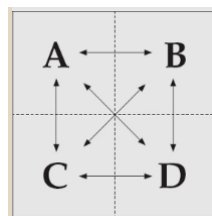
⁴ For this section of the presentation, we draw abundantly from A.C. Milmanda, *La vita interculturale come segno di speranza profetica*, Report to the UISG Plenary Assembly, Rome, 6-10 May 2019.

⁵ The following graphs and the way to present them are taken from Gittins, Anthony J., *Viviendo la Misión Interculturalmente: Fe, Cultura y Renovación de la Practica* (Kindle Locations 621-746). Liturgical Press. Kindle Edition.

This experience of learning and adapting to another culture, different from the one in which we grew up, is called acculturation. Acculturation is, in itself, a challenging and enriching experience once we have passed the stages that normally occur in greater or lesser degree, depending on the extent of the cultural difference and the personality and preparation of the person concerned. In general, these stages range from a first idyllic falling-in-love with the "different", to a deep rejection of that very "difference", until a balance is reached between the appreciation for the qualities and the recognition of the shadows of the other culture and of one's own. When that balance is not reached, a person risks of being stuck in a dream that does not correspond to reality (Sisters who "maternalize" the assumed culture and, then, act and speak of "them" as "poor little ones..." or who are unable to develop relationships with the local people, while all their friends and references, despite the passing of time, continue being, those of their place of origin with whom they maintain excessive connections and/or constantly updated with the news from home). Or, on the contrary, they suffer a cultural shock that plunges them into depression, apathy, hypochondria, excessive concern for their health and/or cleanliness, excessive sleep or food, etc. These are "symptoms" of a cultural shock to which we should pay close attention when they extend in time after a transcultural transfer.

I mention these processes that occur in transculturation because they often coincide with the formation of a multicultural community. Therefore, it is very important to take into account that oftentimes the person is not only adapting to the culture of the new place, and most probably is also learning a new language - but also, and simultaneously, he or she is interacting with multiple cultures inside, and perhaps even outside, one's community. Sometimes, when multicultural communities are formed, personal processes of transculturation and inculturation of the individuals, who are at the same time facing community and pastoral challenges, are not sufficiently addressed. Basically, truly intercultural processes can only be initiated with people who have already been experiencing transculturation for at least 3 years.

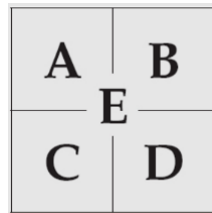
Interculturality: Let's now return to the graph of cultures A, B, C and D, to illustrate the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism.



While the first graph highlighted the coexistence of different cultures in clearly delimited compartments, in this second graph we see arrows coming out of each group or person towards each of the other groups or people, emphasizing the interrelation between all. At the same time, the arrows do not indicate a single direction but a two-way path: an outreach to and a reception

of the other person. Moreover, the dividing lines are not continuous but dotted, making the boundaries between some cultures and others not so sharp and clear.

However, this graph does not yet illustrate the intercultural community. Good relations, communication and good coexistence - although they are very important and necessary - are not enough. The intercultural community is called to go beyond tolerating differences and to engage in a process of **transformation or conversion** aiming to create, as a result of such interrelation, a **new culture**.



In this third chart, we will call "E" this new culture that is the fruit of intercultural life. The "E" culture will be composed of a new and unique combination of some elements of each of the participating cultures, making each person feel, both "at home" and facing something "new" as well.

This combination will emerge as an ever-dynamic result of a process of interaction and agreements reached between the parties. In this process, the community mutually enriches itself with the values and lights that each culture brings, but it also has to face the challenge and confront the shadows and blind spots that each culture contains. This model of community interaction between cultures operating on a symmetrical and equal platform is diametrically opposed to the assimilationist model that has prevailed (and still survives?!!) in groups where minority cultures or supposedly "underdeveloped", "uncivilized", or "pagan" cultures had to adapt, align and assume the higher or majority culture, leaving behind their own. This assimilationist model has guided most of our congregations in the "recruitment" of vocations in so-called "mission countries". The assimilationist model is part of an approach that implies integration as a hegemonic affirmation of the culture of the host country. According to this model, it is expected that the migrant or person, in formation in our case, will behave and adopt the culture of the host community, regardless of or even removing their culture of origin.

On the contrary, instead of seeking "assimilation", which denies and wants to erase differences, the model that presents interculturality seeks to know, enhance, deepen and integrate these differences. As a result of the interrelationship and encounter between cultures, we are invited to create a new "E" culture, in which each one can give the best of oneself, share one's gifts and let himself/herself be challenged by the encounter and relationship with the "different" so that our shadows may be transformed into light of the Gospel. Humanly speaking, interculturality is a counter-cultural movement. Our cultures "sets us up" in such a way that we tend to relate to "our own", to defend ourselves from "others", "the different" their potential threats. However,

starting from faith and the power of grace, inclusion in equality is the Project of the Kingdom which Jesus preached and, as such, is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Cultures: What has just been presented leads us, in turn, to deepen our understanding of the term "culture". The concept as such, of anthropological origin, does not have a single definition, has changed over time and can be analyzed from hundreds of different perspectives. For our purposes Sr. Adriana Milmanda, Ssps, suggests using the following formulation:

Way of life of a group of people -behaviors, beliefs, values and symbols- who accept, generally without thinking about it, and who are transmitted through communication and imitation from one generation to another.

In the definition of the Second Vatican Council,

By the generic term "culture" we want to indicate all those means by which man refines and develops the multiple capacities of his soul and body; he seeks to reduce the cosmos itself to his power with knowledge and work; he makes social life more human, both in the family and in all civil society, through the progress of custom and institutions; finally, with the passing of time, it expresses, communicates and preserves in its works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations, so that they may serve the progress of many, of all mankind. Consequently, culture has necessarily a historical and social connotation, and "culture" often has a sociological and ethnological meaning.⁶

I find it useful also to quote the definition of Carrier, more articulated, that tries to understand and expand what other definitions are trying to convey:

Culture is the whole environment humanized by a group, that is, its way of understanding the world, of perceiving man and his destiny, of having fun, of expressing himself with the arts, of transforming nature with techniques and inventions. Culture is the product of man's genius, understood in the broadest sense; it is the psycho-social matrix that creates itself, consciously and unconsciously, a community: it is its framework of interpretation of life and the universe; is its representation of the past and its future plan, its typical institutions and creations, its habits and beliefs, its original way of communicating, producing and exchanging goods, to celebrate, to create works that reveal one's own soul and intimate values. Culture is the typical mentality that every individual acquires by identifying with a collective, it is the human patrimony transmitted from generation to generation. ... Being a phenomenon of collective psychology, it involves a large part of the unconscious, aspects that

⁶ GS, n. 53.

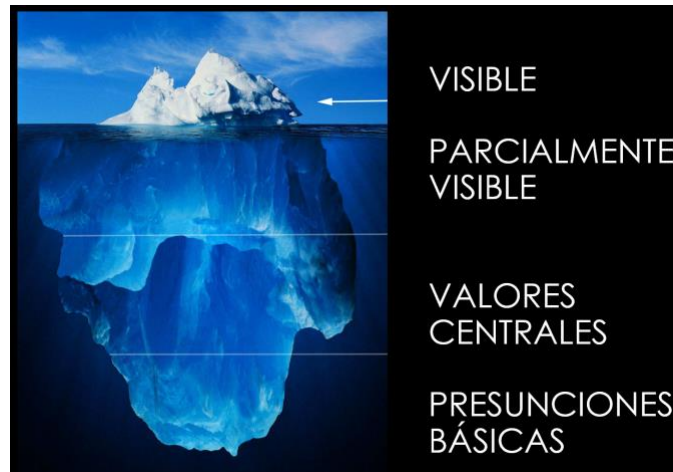
*foreign observers can often grasp with greater acuteness than the members of the group being observed.*⁷

A significant aspect that emerges from the different definitions, is that culture is not an amorphous collection of customs, values, institutions and techniques, but a unitary whole, a structure with its own internal logic and dynamics, that expresses and gives reason for the way of being in the world of a certain people or social group, from the interpretation of the universe and life to the uses and techniques that characterize the individual and daily social life. It is these internal structures and dynamics, expressed also in external institutions and organizations, that cultural anthropology intends to study, and that for our purposes it is indispensable to keep in mind. Culture, as such, does not exist; but there are people who embody a certain culture or use selective "cultural lenses" that give meaning to their lives and allow them to communicate and organize. My culture is the best way that "my people" have found to survive and develop in the context and place where we had to live. Therefore, no culture can claim the right to become a universal "norm" for other cultures. Our challenge, as a Church, is that, for centuries, our faith has been confused with the culture that mediated its transmission (both the cultures that mediated the writing of our Sacred Texts and the western culture that later made possible the settlement of the Church in other places).

Let us take a look at some of the characteristics of culture: culture is learned and transmitted, through socialization in the primary and secondary groups in which you grow (family, clan, neighborhood, school, city or country, social class, religion, profession, and the different groups of identification and membership). Culture is stable and dynamic, it changes very slowly, but it's so much part of ourselves that we don't know it until we "get out" of it.

We begin to know in a reflective way our own culture and that of others only when we get in touch with "another culture", "different", ... It is a knowledge that is therefore born of a confrontation with the "others", those people who are "outside" our group. This division between "us" (men/women, Catholic men/women, religious men/women, professional men/women, European/men/women, Italian/men/women, from the north, etc.) and "them" (those who are not like "we") protects us and gives us a sense of identity and belonging, but it also isolates us, challenges us and fills us with fear in the face of the "unknown". There are no higher or more developed cultures and less developed or lower cultures, but different cultures. And every culture thinks it's the best because it's the best way that has allowed its group to adapt to the context in which it has developed.

⁷ H. Carrier, *Dizionario della cultura per l'analisi culturale e l'inculturazione*, Città del Vaticano 1997, p. 122.



Knowing the culture is not easy. To illustrate this arduous task, we can use the image of an iceberg; only the surface accounting for 10% of the whole ice mass can be seen, 90% remains under water. In the same proportions, the material elements of each culture (such as typical clothes and foods, traditional artifacts, dances, etc.) account for 10% of what we can see, hear, listen to, smell and name with ease. The remaining 90%, which corresponds to the intangible elements, can be classified within 3 levels: the first one is a partially visible level that we can access when we intentionally look for it (what lies behind the language, communicative styles, leadership styles, conflict resolution, etc.), a second level (that of central values) can be accessed with great difficulty and introspection and a third level (that of basic assumptions) which is so deep and unconscious that we cannot really know: it is what we consider "normal", "what is given".

Starting from this brief terminological framework, we try to clarify that living interculturally is a vocation and an option against-culture and that, as such, appeals to faith and the life of grace. Humanly speaking, we all tend to seek out and interact with those with whom we identify and, as a result, make us feel understood, included, accepted.

The "different", on the contrary, tends to frighten us, challenges us, makes us be wary. This distrust, especially towards those cultures which have suffered the experience of colonization or the invasion of their nations, is not unjustified or of little account; on the contrary, it is a collective wound that has lasted for generations and that must be healed on a personal level, in order to engage in a project of life and intercultural mission. Intercultural life is not something automatic, which comes from the mere coexistence of people of different cultures, on the contrary, it must be built and claimed intentionally as a process of personal and community conversion. In contrast to transnational companies, which seek to make interculturality a tool for increasing their sales, we are invited to transform it into a lifestyle that makes us more faithful in following Jesus and in building the Kingdom.

4. Milk of the people

Isaiah 60,4-6.16

*Raise your eyes and look about;
they all gather and come to you—
Your sons from afar,
your daughters in the arms of their nurses.
Then you shall see and be radiant,
your heart shall throb and overflow.
For the riches of the sea shall be poured out before you,
the wealth of nations shall come to you.
Caravans of camels shall cover you,
dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;
All from Sheba shall come
bearing gold and frankincense,
and heralding the praises of the Lord. ...
You shall suck the milk of nations,
and be nursed at royal breasts;
And you shall know that I, the Lord, am your savior,
your redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.*

The experience of coexistence with different peoples, of contact with different experiences of the sacred, has widened and deepened in us the understanding of the charism that is translated into a particular vision of mission. I speak of contact with the different experiences of the sacred because the very experience of the sacred constitutes the core of every cultural building. The vision of life, of the person, of the cosmos, the thought models, the relational configurations, the affective-symbolic world, in short, what constitutes the soul of the people and that structure their existence finds its center in the **experience of the sacred**. Access to these deep levels of culture, that is, **the contact with the soul of the people**, is an essential condition for an evangelization that can be called such: "It is necessary to evangelize - not in a decorative way, in the likeness of superficial varnish, but in a vital way, in depth and down to the roots - the culture and cultures of man, [...] always starting from the person and always returning to the relationships of people between themselves and with God⁸, Paul VI warns us in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Then the commitment of inculturation is ultimately a commitment of spiritual contact

⁸ Paolo VI, Esortazione apostolica *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Roma 1975, n. 20.

with the people, with the person. But in spiritual contact communication does not take place in a one-way manner. Rather, it is an exchange of gifts, a reciprocal transformation, the art of letting the Spirit build bridges on which knowledge and experiences can pass through and meet.

If all this is true for inculturated evangelization, it is so in the same way for the grace of interculturality within our Institutes, grace of transformation, grace that nourishes and makes us grow.

5. For inculturation and charismatic interculturality

I would like to share here six points that, in our experience, are important for a journey of inculturation and evangelical and charismatic interculturality:

- 1 Growing together
- 2 Caring for the language
- 3 Learning to receive
- 4 Descending to the heart
- 5 Discovering the wisdom of ignorance
- 6 Eating in the same pot

5.1 Growing together

Walking a journey together, overcoming its difficulties and enjoying its joys together, makes us "companions", makes us more brothers and sisters. The initial formation lived in intercultural groups is revealed for us as one of the greatest opportunities of openness to the other, to the different, so that this different becomes "mine": my sister belongs to me. It is also a very precious occasion of "collection", of reaping the charismatic resonances reflected and reworked according to the different cultural experiences and relationship with the sacred. In this sense, our Institute since the 80s has resolutely oriented itself to an intercultural formation, that is, able to promote the interaction between sisters of different backgrounds and cultures. The One International Novitiate, opened in 2016 by decision of the General Chapter, is a blessed expression of the beauty and prophecy of the intercultural journey.

5.2 Caring for the language

Growing up together also means having concrete opportunities to break down prejudices. The sincere friendship between two sisters from different cultures is the best antidote to prejudice and racism, which unfortunately can also creep into our circles. Much more effective antidote than many lectures on the subject. If your sister, who you love, is Chinese and you are not, you will hardly be willing to accept prejudices about the Chinese. You will also learn to care for the language, too often succumbing to stereotypes and revealing of a thinking and feeling still

colonized by prejudice. When it comes to "we" and "you" and therefore to "them", it turns the light of a problem. What differentiates "they" from "we"? Who are "they"? And who are the "we"? What or who qualifies membership? Generalizations are another warning sign: you are from Italy, you are from Germany, you are from the United States and you are from Africa. From Africa! As if it were a single nation, a single culture, perhaps a single village! But Africa is an immense continent larger than 30,000,000 square kilometers, composed of 54 states and a variety of differentiated peoples, cradle of ancient cultures... In the annual statistics of a congregation one can find a column that records the Italian nuns and another that records the "foreign" ones. Foreign!

5.3 Learning to receive

Cultivate that exquisite expression of love which is receptivity, welcome. Which then is a very feminine prerogative. I believe that caring for the "feminine" dimension of our being (yes, even for men...) and mission is one of the most powerful factors of charismatic inculturation⁹. It is not for nothing that the Incarnation takes place in a woman. I live the charism if it becomes "mine", if it becomes flesh in me. I really welcome the other one if it becomes "mine", of my blood, really belonging to my own family. Then yes, I take care of it. And I let him take care of me.

5.4 Descending to the heart

If the charism does not descend to the heart, it does not become an integral part of the system that motivates the person, that structures its existence... If the charism does not somehow become the metaphor that sustains the life of the person, then the person has not internalized it. It is not enough to study the charism, the documents of the Founder. It is necessary for the charism to descend to the heart, to become the heart of the person. Then the person will inculturate it, because from the treasure of the person's heart the charism will be able to draw old and new things and give them an unprecedented light. Obviously, for this to happen the heart must be sufficiently open and able to let itself be transformed in the sense of life. Access to the heart of the person also means access to his cultural heart. We spoke before of contact with the soul of the people. And if we really want to reach the deepest layers of the person and the people, an essential attitude is listening and willingness to learn. In an atmosphere of true, empathetic listening, the heart of the person and of the people can open and make emerge from its chest desires, dreams, experiences that interact with the charism, enriching it with new expressions and suggestions and at the same time gaining, in contact with it, new splendor.

⁹ To deepen the theme of the female dimension of mission, cf. Brambilla, S., *"La dimensione femminile della missione"*, in: *L'interculturalità: nuovo paradigma della missione. Atti del Convegno IMC sull'interculturalità - Roma, 4-7 dicembre 2009, Roma 2010, pp. 45-57.*

5.5 Discovering the wisdom of ignorance

Ignorance can play a fundamental part in the path of inculturation and charismatic multiculturalism. Ignoring the world of the others (person or people), their culture, the metaphors that sustain their life means depriving oneself of getting in touch with their souls, and thus it precludes the possibility of a meaningful relationship in the evangelical and charismatic sense. On the other hand, one's acknowledged ignorance can be placed at the service of evangelical relations which can humbly mediate the passage of charismatic grace. The ignorant, he/she who comes from outside and knows nothing about the culture of the place, has in fact an advantage: that of being able to ask questions which those who are in the place would never dare asking, because "obvious" or inconvenient. However, these questions are allowed to the ignorant, because "he/she comes from outside" and he/she apologizes. He or she **who comes from outside**, by the very fact of his/her diversity or extraneity, has the power to ask or raise questions that, otherwise, would remain unexplored. Sometimes the seemingly simplest questions are the ones that open new paths because they lead the person (or the Institution) to acknowledge that what was considered "obvious" or taken for granted, and established, was no longer, or had never been, the object of reflection. How much we need those who "come from outside" to widen the personal, community and charismatic tent!

5.6 Eating in the same pot

Happily contaminated by the Bantu-Macua¹⁰ thinking, I like to imagine our congregations as a kitchen: all of us sitting around the one pot, each bringing some ingredient of life to cook a good polenta that will then feed everyone. Macua says: "The pot of *polenta* is one, the portions of *polenta* are different". For the Bantu-African cosmology, we all come from the same "pot", we are composed of the same "dough", we feed on the same life. In a family, it is not conceivable to cook polenta in many different pots: the pot to draw is one, the flour the same, while distributing in separate portions. The Church, nourished by the same and unique Bread of Life, cannot fail to recognize herself in this image, and she is called to make it ever more real and visible, not only at the liturgical and celebratory level, but also at the level of structures, economy, pastoral practice, of life styles and relationships. But this also applies to our congregations. Inculturation and charismatic interculturality are an absolute necessity if we want to accept the invitation to eat in the same pot. Dialogue between charism and cultures is not only a necessity: it is an opportunity and a gift, an opportunity to **discover** the original riches that God has placed in every people, **receive** them in the **charismatic pot** and to **share** them with the rest of humanity. To miss the opportunity to get in touch with the human and spiritual experience of a people also means to miss the chance to 1) enter into contact with a unique and original experience of God,

¹⁰ The Macua people represent the majority ethnic group of Mozambique, where I had the grace to live for two years.

given to that people to be shared and 2) enrich, increase and transform the Life of all those who are willing to "eat from the same pot". What is the original and proper ingredient that this people can bring to the congregation? What new light, does their experience of walking with God cast on the understanding of the charism? What have we received from this people? How did this people evangelize us? How did it contribute to the vitality of the charism?

6. Following the turtle

A Macua proverb says: "The turtle travels with his house". Macua people often apply this proverb to God and everything that belongs to him: God has life in himself, precisely for this reason he has no fixed home, he goes everywhere and sleeps where he is: his house is everywhere, and everywhere and with everyone he is "at home". A beautiful icon of charismatic inculturation! A living charism has no fixed abode, and where it arrives it is at home. The relationship between the consecrated person (or Institute) and the people from whom it is welcomed is reciprocal: the charism "passes" from the consecrated person/Institute to the people but the people gives back an original charismatic elaboration, which bears the imprint of the "genius" of the people themselves¹¹ The turtle eats the vegetables from where it is and this vegetable feeds it and makes it grow. Charismatic inculturation then becomes a true source of renewal: the stimulus given by contact with other experiences, the different ways of receiving and restoring the charismatic heritage contribute to enriching it. In the words of Cencini: "It is this exchange, this communion of wayfarers that makes consecrated life rich, prevents the stagnation of its blood and opens its lungs to the pure air, encouraging the circulation of its vital energy"¹². A charism that does not know to inculturate itself is dead or is about to die, sick of cardio-circulatory arrest, asphyxiated, like a turtle that is prevented to appear out of its shell. A charism that is not exposed to the provocations of different cultures, that cannot "learn the language" of other worlds goes crazy, like the turtle that is forced to repress its nature of being a walker. Yes, because the nature of a charism, being ecclesial, is in itself missionary, and asks to move, to pilgrim, to meet with other expressions of the Spirit that dances in the world. From these encounters, the charism comes out regenerated, strengthened, grown, multiplied, fruitful, colorful, and becoming increasingly itself, vigorous, refined, purified, able to give new life and new perspectives to the congregation.

Sr. Simona Brambilla, MC
July 2020

¹¹ Cfr. Giovanni Paolo II, *Esortazione apostolica Vita Consecrata*, Roma 1996, n. 80.

¹² Cencini, A., *"Com'è bello stare insieme..."*. *La vita fraterna nella stagione della nuova evangelizzazione*, Milano 1996, 85-86.