

April 2016 – Canada Charism

My dear friends,

Since I could not be with you in person this week-end, I am sharing some thoughts with you through this letter.

Let us begin by signing ourselves with the symbol of the cross, our hope! I pray that during this Easter Season of resurrection new life that the grace of our Lord, the blessing of His mother, and the protection of St. Joseph will be ever with you.

I. Introduction

Charism – a small word that denotes many thoughts and much reflection.

We know that by our Baptism we are all called to the mission of Jesus Christ. This call was renewed and deepened in us through the grace of the sacrament of Confirmation. We might ask ourselves: If each has been called to mission by Baptism, why do we pay special attention to the mission of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Charism of Holy Cross? Well before we look at Holy Cross, let's look at charism, in general.

We can imagine the riches of our Catholic tradition as a garden. In this garden of many flowers some attract us more than others; we resonate with their colors; we appreciate their fragrance; we respect and reverence them for their journey from seed, to plant, to bud, to flower. They touch us in a unique way as they influence and enrich our lives.

While we are enjoying our favorites, we are touched by the beauty of the surrounding space and we are grasped by a flower we have never seen, a fragrance we have never smelled, an unusual color. The one that first attracted and nourished us becomes the door to other garden experiences.

As a professor of theology and scripture, I used images in my teachings. One of those images was that of a garden. The gospel may be thought of as a garden of many and varied flowers. We enter the garden because of an appeal of a phrase which is in our memory; which has touched our hearts in the past, perhaps even as a child, and which continues to offer us comfort.

As we spend time with that phrase, we begin to see other words and phrases which touch our lives, which offer us encouragement or challenge, comfort or joy, or perhaps a mixture of all of these sentiments.

II. Charism

A Charism is like a unique flower cluster in the garden of the gospel. This cluster draws us by a special attraction and it catches our attention. Like the words in Jeremiah (20:7), “You seduced me and I let myself be seduced. You are stronger. You have prevailed.” We are seduced by its beauty and we desire to follow the attraction.

Perhaps this attraction occurred a long time ago, maybe only recently but we know that this flower touches our life and offers us treasures as no other can at this time in our life.

A Charism offers us an entrance into the gospel mission of Jesus Christ by charming us with its unique characteristics. In the theological sense, a Charism denotes extraordinary spiritual gifts conferred by the Holy Spirit to groups or individuals for the good of the Church. A Charism is a particular gift conferred by the special action of divine grace (Larousse-Lexis, 1975).

Therefore, Charism is a gift from God which is extraordinary, beyond the ordinary; hence it involves something new, and at times, sometimes radically new. This gift is given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church and for the good of humanity.

It is given at a particular period of history, situated in a distinct culture, and it is living and organic. It will continue to be shaped by the historical, situational, and cultural contexts in which it is planted and in which it develops.

This is important to remember. If we try to capture or immortalize it, the flower will wither and die.

III. Vita Consecrata and Charism

I want to speak for a few moments regarding charism and religious life and for those who are not vowed members, I hope you will be able to make applications to your own life.

According to *Vita Consecrata*, fundamental to the charism of religious life is a threefold orientation.

First, the charism of religious life leads to God, the Creator, in the filial desire to seek God’s will through a process of unceasing conversion, wherein obedience is the source of true freedom; celibate chastity expresses the yearning of a heart for God alone, unsatisfied by any finite love; and poverty nourishes that hunger and thirst for justice which God has promised to satisfy.

Consequently, the charism of each institute leads the consecrated person to belong wholly to God, to speak with God, and to taste the goodness of God in every situation, especially in those which are most difficult.

Second, the charism of the consecrated life leads to the Son, fostering an intimate and joyful union of life with him through service of others. Thus the charism of each religious congregation must be integrally connected to the life and mission of Jesus Christ and to the mission of the Church.

Third, every charism leads to the Holy Spirit, insofar as the charism prepares individuals to let themselves be guided and sustained by the Spirit, both in their personal spiritual journeys and in their lives of communion and apostolic work.

It is this three-fold relationship which emerges in every founding charism, though with the specific nuances of various patterns of living proper to each institute. In every charism there predominates *“a profound desire to be conformed to Christ and to give witness to his mystery.”* This specific aspect is meant to take shape and develop according to the most authentic tradition of the institute.

Vita Consecrata, Par. #36

In this three-fold relationship, we are called to say “yes” to God who is constantly re-creating us as a potter does in the breaking and re-shaping of a pot. (Jeremiah 18:1-6)

And we can add that this re-shaping is meant to grow and develop according to the most authentic tradition of each one’s life and, as religious, within each one’s religious congregation.

For example, today in Holy Cross, we are speaking of an apostolic religious community as our most authentic tradition. Our tradition is not monastic or contemplative although elements of these traditions were interwoven into our spirituality because I was influenced in my own spirituality by these traditions. However, our authentic tradition is apostolic.

IV. Charismatic Call

Let us take a few moments to probe further into charism and the charismatic call by reflecting on the characteristics of every spiritual call since that first call to Abraham:

“Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing... Abram went as the Lord directed him and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai... Abram came to the land of Canaan... From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel, pitching his tent with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east, Abraham built an altar there to the Lord and invoked the Lord by name.”

(Gen 12:1-9).

The characteristics or elements we see:

- The Lord initiates the call at any moment in life (At 75 years of age, the Lord called Abram).
- The call is to move, to start out on an unknown path (Abram was told to go forth).
- The call is to let go of the familiar, and in some respects to let go of family and community (Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk).
- The Lord will lead and will direct the journey (Go to a land that I will show you).
- The Lord's blessings will be found on the journey and the person called will be a blessing for others (I will bless you and you will be a blessing).
- An ongoing relationship with the Lord is integral to the call (Abraham built an altar to the Lord, one stone upon another stone, and there invoked the Lord by name; in scripture naming always indicates relationship).
- Experience is shrouded in mystery.

The call is a great adventure on an unknown path to a strange land confident in God without knowing where God is leading, as if "seeing the One who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27); journeying with courage and audacity because the "One who has called is faithful" (1Cor. 1:9).

By God's grace in my own life, I experienced some of the elements of this charismatic call.

- The Lord initiates the call at any moment in life (call came early while I was rooted in the faith life of my parents and those in the parish).
- The call is to move, to start out on an unknown path (Go forth from this small rural village of Laigné-en-Belin).
- The call is to let go of the familiar, and in some respects of family and community (Leave Le Mans and go to Paris).
- The Lord will lead and will direct the journey (Go to a land that I will show you. The journey took me to new parts of the world).
- The Lord's blessings will be found on the journey and the person called will be a blessing for others (Through God's grace and fidelity, I was blessed and a blessing for many).
- Ongoing relationship with the Lord is integral to the call. (Abraham built an altar there to the Lord and invoked the Lord by name. With God's grace I helped to establish a congregation and a group of associates and an actual church in Le Mans.)
- Experience is shrouded in mystery. Throughout the experience, God calls and God is in charge! From the beginning and all along the way, I was clear that this work was not my own, I was carrying out the Lord's plan: *"I have been but a simple tool which*

the Lord will soon break that He may substitute for it others more worthy.” (CL #14)

Abram was told to take with him the members of his household. They, too, were essential to the call. I wonder who walks with you on the journey? How do they connect to the roots of Holy Cross?

God placed key people in my life all along the journey – clergy, religious, laity. Each contributed to the foundation of Holy Cross.

V. Personal Call: How do you see your own call mirrored in these elements?

God calling you and naming you.

God directing you on the journey.

God leading you on unknown paths.

God blessing you and enabling you to be a blessing for others.

God calling you into an ever deeper relationship of mystery and transformation.

I am very grateful that you invited me to spend some time with you today and I continue my prayers for each of you as individuals and all of you as a group sharing this corporate experience.

Let us pray together that this sacred charismatic gift, this special cluster of flowers of the Holy Spirit, entrusted to us in Holy Cross, will be reborn anew in our world for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ.

Like Abram, may we walk so intentionally these days that we will go forth both blessed and as a blessing for others allowing something essential and joyful to happen in us.

I place my hands in yours and keep you in my heart as I remain affectionately and deeply united with you in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Fr. Basil Moreau

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CSC Congress
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