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General Chapter as a tool to give directions to the multicultural religious Congregation (“clash” or inculturation)

Huntington did not study missiology. Therefore, he did not know the concept of Inculturation, which is deeply theological perspective (“Incarnation” of the Gospel of Jesus Christ into new cultures). The differences in the world lead Huntington to develop the idea of “Clash of Civilizations”. Can we see the General Chapters of the large missionary Congregation as the “**clash of civilizations**” within one Congregation? Or rather we should perceive the existing variety of the cultural expressions of one charism in the perspective of **inculturation**?

This short presentation is based on the one hand on personal experience of participation in the last General Chapter of the Congregation of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate last Fall (September-October 2016). On the other hand I tried to check main themes of the presentations of the General Chapters of the Catholic missionary congregations as they are presented in the official websites.

Experience of the Chapter shows how many problems the General Government of the missionary congregations have to face. Huntington did his analysis from the perspective of **sociological sciences**. In relation to the issues of proclamation of the Gospel and inculturation of the Church communities into new cultural circumstances, one should take first of all **theological perspective**.

During the presentation of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Fr. General Louis Lougen wrote: *Our Congregation is global and it is localized in specific contexts. [...] As a **living organism**, the Congregation is **changing constantly** and shows different movements in each locality. The various ecclesial, social, political, economic and cultural facets in each local reality affect us and the mission. **Where the Church is dynamic and growing**, we generally follow that movement. **Where there are difficulties for the Church**, we experience that same reality.*

Trying to answer to this question one has to take into account few realities. The first issue is “**listening to others**”. In our case (OMI) we were “called to conversion”. It is not easy for some people who grew up in societies (provinces) with a sense of superiority. The good example of it is the issue of language. Representatives from some regions, who were in the past guiding the Congregation (France) were now present but just as equals among many others. Even if there is one (or more) vehicular language for the debate, usually it is not the native language of all the participants, some are more comfortable in it, some use it with problems. Listening is not, therefore, on the equal terms. The most powerful opinion is not the one of the main groups, but of the native speakers of the main language. Therefore, the choice of the language is so important.

Next issue is **local theology**. Even though all the participants are of the same faith, the circumstances of living faith are underlying some aspects. In all the websites there was a call to pray in the intention of the Chapter. The belief that it is Holy Spirit who guide the process is common. But some concrete questions are different. For instance the witness to the faith is seen differently in countries of Catholic (Christian) tradition, and differently in the regions, where Christians form small minority groups [e.g. Poland and Pakistan, but also Indonesia and Philippines – on the issue of contacts with Muslims].

Thirdly, life is **“glo-cal” and never static**. A Missionary Congregation has never finished cultural shape. Practically the work of the Chapter is more of showing directions and do necessary legal work (adjusting the rules whenever and wherever it is possible). Practically the Congregation lives not as **one** congregation in different provinces / countries, but as **many** different provinces **under one** umbrella. In practical terms it means that the Provincials have more power than the General (because the practical life goes on local level, although of course General has some power over Provincials).

Making analogy with *Redemptoris missio* 56, let me say that this **constitute a positive challenge** for the Congregation; it stimulates to discover the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply Congregation's own identity.

Fourthly, so-called **“democracy”**. I use here the quotation marks, because the Church in her structure is not “democratic”. However, Chapter is a democratic body with advantages and all the problems related to it (high cost, different “options” or “parties” for some votes). Chapter is a big chance to “give” something and to “receive” something from other confreres in internal dialogue.

Finally, the Chapter may show also a need for new **missiology**. The document from our before-last Chapter recalled: “Our Oblate specialists in missiology and our institutions of higher learning are called to define a way to understand the challenges of modernity, secularity, inculturation and religious fundamentalism as well as our own way of witnessing to the Kingdom of God in the midst of these challenges.” Why this question is so important? For instance 1) Today's missionary world is no longer divided between countries who “send” missionaries (and finances) and countries who “receive” missionaries and financial help [example from London]. 2) In the past, when the missions were guided by the principle “*ius commissionis*” different missionary congregations have been founding different local Churches. Is there a difference (or should it be?) between local Churches founded by Oblates, Verbists, Franciscans, Dominicans or Jesuits?

Last word: Translations of “Hail Mary”. Sometimes literary contradiction, sometimes misunderstanding of some words. Nevertheless, powerful when said in a serious, real prayer.

Conclusion

Huntington's hypothesis do not apply to the case of General Chapter's of missionary congregations. Even though there could be some “clash” of understandings of religious life in different cultures and of evangelization, the Chapters are the prove that this could be overcome, when there is higher unifying reason. On the other hand I agree that Huntington's idea of “The West versus the Rest” within the missionary congregations is still to be overcome.