

# **CHARISM OF HOLY CROSS SPIRITUALITY, MISSION AND COMMUNITY LIFE**

A "charism" is a gift of the Spirit that is given individually or collectively for the common good and the building up of the Church. Inherent in this gift is a particular perception of the image of Jesus Christ and of the Gospel. It is, therefore, a source of inspiration, a dynamic commitment, and a capacity for realization.

## **THE CHARISM OF HOLY CROSS**

Basile Moreau was a man open to the world of his time, namely 19th -century France. He knew the effects of the revolutionary change and social upheaval of his century. He also experienced the often violent hostility towards religion and the Church, the growth of secularism, and widespread dechristianization. He wanted to be present to a society in search of itself. He felt called to work for the restoration of the Christian faith and through it for a regeneration of society. He was ready to undertake anything for the salvation of individuals, to lead them or bring them back to Jesus Christ. He participated in the work of Catholic renewal by his bold response to the wide range of needs both in the Church and in society. He asked his religious to "be ready to undertake anything ... to suffer everything and to go wherever obedience calls in order to save souls and extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth" (*Rule on Zeal*). He even went so far as to say that if a postulant or a novice did not have that inner zeal to work for the salvation of souls, he was not fit for Holy Cross. However, Father Moreau did not want to confine himself merely to post-revolutionary French society; he also wanted to devote himself to announcing the Gospel in other cultures. His zeal knew no borders.

The charism of Holy Cross is to renew the Christian faith, to regenerate society, to "bring about better times" by a constant response to the most pressing needs of the Church and society. The principal work that Basile Moreau advocated was education; he saw education as being explicitly a work of "resurrection," of rebuilding. In everything he undertook, he did not just want to re-establish it; he wanted to renew it, to refashion it, to reconstruct it. He had no fear of a brand new undertaking.

This charism, this mobilizing and efficacious strength of conviction, he drew from the perception of Jesus the savior, Jesus the liberator, and from the Gospel which leads humanity to fulfillment. "Once Jesus is known and loved in the world, everything will be renewed; the light of the Gospel will dissipate the darkness of the century; its morality will control customs and justice will reign" (*Sermons*, p. 455). A professor of Holy Scripture, Father Moreau arrived at a just and essential vision of the Gospel: the Good News of the Kingdom of God, the building up of the kingdom that is already coming, the rebuilding of a world according to God's heart.

The Congregation's charism is rooted in spirituality; it is expressed in mission and inspires community life. It is therefore made up of three elements: spirituality, notably a particular grasp of the mystery of Jesus Christ; mission, that is, its apostolic focus; and community life, in this case a unique style of community. The

spiritual and the apostolic direction received from the Founder is communicated to the members and influences the continuity and development of their works.

## **THE FOUR PILLARS OF HOLY CROSS SPIRITUALITY**

### ***Conformity to Christ***

The charism of the Congregation of Holy Cross is rooted in an experience of Jesus Christ. The founder's spirituality is fully centered on Jesus Christ, with access to his person notably in contemplation of the scriptures and the liturgy. Father Moreau believed that it is the essence of religious life to conform oneself to Christ, not only in his external conduct, but in his very being as a religious person. Father Moreau invites his religious to "re-enact the life of Jesus" and to make it "a faithful imitation": "Our spirit of discipline will imitate His habitual conformity to the good pleasure of His Father, while our community spirit will reflect His life in the company of Our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph and His apostles. Our life of edification will reproduce His life of good example in the midst of the world, and our spirit of work will mirror His labors and His cross." (CL 14). Father Moreau invites us to become "copies of the divine model" (CL 11).

Jesus serves especially as a model for us by his life, his words and his actions. He moved ceaselessly among people of all conditions of life, particularly among the poor, and he was compassionate towards every form of suffering. How are we to imitate him? "Our savior announced only the great and glad tidings which he had brought into the world, and spoke unceasingly of the Kingdom of God" (CL 36), and "We must seek above all things the kingdom of heaven and its justice" (CL 20).

### ***Trust in Divine Providence***

Jesus Christ, our model, is both the revelation of God's initiating love and the manifestation of human cooperation with it. Basile Moreau, convinced that Holy Cross is the work of God, demands of us "correspondence to the inspirations of grace and our fidelity in seconding the designs of Divine Providence" (CL 23). If we are to be faithful to this providential work of God in Holy Cross today, we must attend to God's constant presence and activity, for God himself gives us the desire to further his will in all things.

### ***The Cross, Our Only Hope***

Basile Moreau invites each religious person to carry his cross: "it is necessary to know the mystery of the cross and draw from it the apostolic strength of those generous imitators of Jesus Christ whose life here below was a continuous martyrdom" (CL 11). This invitation extends to courage in trials and demands that we "become more and more conformed to the image of the divine Christ crucified" (CL 34). Christ crucified, who gave his life for the salvation of the world, was so important to Father Moreau that he gave as a motto to his congregation:

*The Cross, our only hope*, and proposed as the patronal feast of the entire congregation, *Our Lady of Seven Sorrows*, the title of Mary at the foot of the cross.

This cross is a glorious cross. It is the love of the suffering Savior expressed in the cross which is glorious, not the instrument of torture or of pain. Jesus' death takes all its meaning in the love with which he faithfully accomplished his mission in life, a

love that goes to the end of its commitments. The cross is the source of salvation and liberation, and it is our hope.

### ***Spirit of Union***

Basile Moreau also insists on a union among the members in imitation of the union that existed in the Holy Family and in Jesus' relationship with his Father in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. This union is based on each individual's personal relationship with Jesus. Just as the members are organically connected to form a single body and as the branches are united with the vine and share the same life-giving sap, so also must the faithful of Holy Cross be united with Jesus and with one another.

## **MISSION**

The focal points proper to mission at the time of foundation were on the one hand, the evangelization of the dechristianized countryside for which Father Moreau formed a team of auxiliary priests and on the other hand, the education and Christian formation of youth confided first of all to the brothers. With the establishment of the Association of Holy Cross, Father Moreau provided a common mission, which was later expressed in the first constitutions of the priests and brothers as: "preaching the divine word in the countryside and in the foreign missions ... instruction and Christian formation of youth with a particular concern for poor and abandoned children." The mission of the sisters is to "instruct and raise youth in a Christian manner by establishing and directing, either in France or in its overseas colonies, not only elementary schools, but also boarding houses, sewing rooms, hostels, etc., especially for the poor and abandoned children."

The renewal of Catholic faith always involved the analysis of the needs of the Church and society, which, first of all, had to be discerned. The often bold response to these needs would lead to varied apostolic fields of endeavor. However, everything revolved around education, which Brother Moreau called a work of resurrection. We must be educators, witnesses showing the way to others. The common mission's point of cohesion is education, with a privileged position given to evangelization. This is a holistic education of individuals, preparing young generations to be responsible citizens and good laborers for earth and heaven, forming "men conformed to Jesus Christ" by education in the faith through activities of Christian formation and by putting in place pastoral activities based on local needs. Our constitutions take up this focus of mission by identifying us as educators in the faith. Recent general chapters determined our mission priorities: proclaiming the Gospel as educators in the faith and the preferential option for the poor, a privileged means for proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

## **COMMUNITY LIFE**

This charism of restoration for Christian renewal is also incarnated in community life. Institutional religious life, as a sign, seeks to anticipate the reconciliation, the collaboration and the communion desired by human beings. Basile Moreau was a pioneer when he founded a congregation that resembled no other of his time. He

called together priests, brothers, and sisters of Holy Cross who were to live and work together on an equal footing. The spirit of union and fraternity was to be the mark of this association. The source of the Founder's concern that the union of hearts was to assure this unique style of community.

"Here, notwithstanding differences of temperament and talent, the inequality of means, and differences of vocation and obedience, the one aim of the glory of God and the salvation of souls inspires almost all the members and gives rise to a oneness of effort which tends towards that more perfect union of hearts which constitutes its bond and strength" (CL 14).

Even today, despite the forced separation of the sisters' society from the congregation, the fact of being a religious family of three distinct societies united in equality is the most specific element in relation to other religious communities composed of several branches. Father Moreau endowed his foundation with a mystic intention: the union of hearts within the Holy Family of Nazareth is an example. The three societies would form a single family, the Family of Holy Cross: within these societies there would be established an effective collaboration in mission. His perspective was that of a community that was "the work of each and everyone and whose members are individually and collectively responsible for it" (CL 17). Holy Cross men and women religious are called to live out this evangelical call to union and to be conscious that they are members, each and everyone, in Jesus Christ, as the branches are to the vine. Wherever they may be, the lived union of hearts is at the center of their life in community, their efforts, and their mission. The world needs this union of hearts to show that hope lives and that another world is possible.

### ***Common Values***

To live faithfully in conformity to Christ, our life in Holy Cross must be marked by certain characteristics or common values that flow from our spirituality, mission and community life:

*Trust in Divine Providence* that makes us dependent upon God in all things;

*Union of hearts* that recognizes the presence of Christ within and among us;

*Compassion* that shares, even as Jesus and Mary did, in the lives and sufferings of others;

*Courage* that risks all for the kingdom of God;

*Zeal* that sets our hearts on fire, the audacity to make all things new, to make Christ known and loved;

*Competence* that marks every aspect of our ministry;

*Promotion of justice* and concern for the poor;

*Closeness* to the people we serve and to our lay collaborators;

*Family spirit* that binds our minds and hearts, in joys and sorrows, so that people will "see how they love one another."

## **A CHARISM FOR TODAY**

Father Moreau's firmly rooted life in the society and the Church of his time, and his determination to bring about a renewal capable of regenerating them, remain for us

part of the heritage he bequeathed to us. This should spur us on to reaffirm our missionary thrust in places where we live and work. We must re-capture the charism of Holy Cross in our present-day context, which in many ways is similar to the one known by our Founder: the crisis of religion, the climate of dechristianization, the growth of religious indifference and agnosticism, and the spread of violence and injustice are an urgent call for meaningful interventions.

We are called to re-evangelize and present the Christian faith in a new way. We must restore its credibility in our cultures. We must find concrete ways to rebuild our societies.

The charism of Holy Cross is still contemporary and urgent: to renew the Christian faith, to regenerate society, to "bring about better times" by a constant response to the most pressing needs of the Church and society.

***Congregation of Holy Cross International***  
***Commission on Consecrated Life***  
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