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## THE OFS AND CULTURE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In paragraph 554 of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, it is well specified that culture must constitute a privileged domain of presence and commitment for the Church and for each Christian. We find this reminder for a more active presence in the world in certain articles of our Rule (art. 14, 15, 17 and 18) thus the importance of a reflection on this theme that is not always well understood. Very often, in effect, we tend to think that culture has nothing to do with the choice of Christian commitment or, in our specific case, with our Franciscan commitment. It is not always like this. Making culture signifies in effect bringing to the world and being witness to the values and foundations of our own manner of being, of our own spirituality.

Not being able to fully treat so vast a theme, this report is inevitably limited and also represents an invitation to all fraternities as well as to each of us, to answer this challenge, to deepen the message and to act in consequence, witnessing thus to the consistency of its options. However, to do this, a dialogue must be established with others and be ready for confrontation. We hope that the content of this dossier can help you to begin this process.

### 2. OFS AND CULTURE

Secular Franciscans, called to live in the world and for the world, lend their service by actively participating in the progress of this world. It is therefore important to recognize on the one part the change in society and on the other part the fact that as Franciscans, as expressions of this society in evolution, we represent a novelty for ourselves and for others. We must not make the error of thinking that the « world » changes while we, as Franciscans, are called to remain mentally, economically and socially as in the Middle Ages. If it is true that Good, Life, Love do not change, it remains that each period has known how to find its own way of living its values. The way in which one lives these values takes the name of « culture ». Everywhere in the world, in all the societies, « culture » signifies being aware of the proper values and knowing the means to promote the lives of people. Making « culture » signifies therefore being capable of transforming the knowledge, the values, the dreams and the projects into life experiences ; and the culture change as we succeed in promoting and cultivating life. The OFS's itinerary is conceived to be in the service of culture, that is, to be in the service of life, from the moment that one considers oneself as a cultural expression: a lively experience of human and evangelical values.



In fact, “the spirituality of the Secular Franciscan is a life project centered on the person of Christ, by following his footsteps, rather than a detailed program to put into practice.” (CC.GG. 9.1). This passage of the General Constitutions underlines our awareness of having been called to the service of one Person (Christ) and not to be part of an association or a club dealing with social or spiritual activities. Today again, we choose to live the Gospel, the same Gospel that from its origins, brought a new mentality, offering a style of living and a free relation with God and with men. We are today the expression of an evangelical culture that does not solely recognize itself in the exterior observance of the precepts and standards of the Church, but that makes of the Gospel an experience of hope and freedom in the love and reception of all. In the name of Jesus Christ, all are welcome especially the sinners, the offenders of the moral order and the law. There is no Jew, no Greek, no male, no female, no ritual obligations to observe to be free. The only thing that is asked of us is to be available to hear the Holy Spirit. It is in effect, the Holy Spirit, who will make us understand the power of the experience of Jesus.



All this has always manifested itself in concrete terms in the life of persons who have not let themselves be conditioned by « property ». A new culture, one that is not afraid of going against trends, takes a stand willingly for concrete choices of persons capable of welcoming the marginalized persons, the excluded ones. In the past, lepers or detainees or single mothers were the only ones to be marginalized, today we have to face this antique and modern suffering and experience the need to always have a pure gaze, the gaze of God. The service that the world expects from us is if anything, to know how to listen and to not turn our backs with moralistic prejudice. The past tells us that Saint Francis felt some repugnance for lepers, and yet he manages to overcome this repugnance and did not try to change

them, but let himself be transformed in body and soul by this encounter. Despite the bad actions of the brigands, he wished to receive them with kindness.

Today any of us might not tolerate the life choices that are different from ours. What to do? The progress of humanity becomes only possible if we are capable of reading reality and above all being capable of meeting real persons with their requirements and their different life styles. This is the reason for which it is required of Franciscans to be protagonists of the life where it changes its traditional manifestations. The attention to people leads to a concrete choice to live in the areas where they live, to read the books they read and write, to view the films and listen to the music that fill our spaces. At present, being in the service of brothers signifies meeting them in all the expressions of art that show their need for love and reception, in this manner showing the experience of the tangibility of the evangelical message. To learn the style of Jesus, who did not follow the traditional standards, does not mean to deny ones proper values but to meet real persons and let oneself meet them and be questioned by them.

As reminded in the introduction above, we, as Secular Franciscans, also must feel called to build « culture », to participate in this way in the mission of the Church and become

« heralds » of the New Evangelization. This mission consists in presenting once more, following the requirements of our time and with the specificity of Franciscan spirituality, the beauty and eternal newness of the meeting with Christ, firstly in ourselves and afterwards in the heart and spirit of the women and men of our time, often tempted by other proposals, less vital but, apparently, more important.

How to realize this mission? By living and favoring dialogue between the different cultures in the spirit of universal fraternity that should lead to the service of brothers and sisters in a style of minority. As Pope Paul VI affirmed it in his encyclical letter « *Evangelii Nuntiandi* », the breakdown between the Gospel and the culture is no doubt one of the dramas of our epoch. Also all efforts must be made in view of a generous evangelization of cultures. During the last years, many aspects and situations have changed so much that it becomes truly difficult to condense in a few lines. However, the importance of the liberating dimension that must be considered in this process is only achievable through meeting and dialogue. Once again, Saint Francis offers the most instructive example during his meeting with the Sultan, lived an enriching experience on a personal as well as a spiritual plan and found myself profoundly reinforced in his faith. This opportunity is offered to us in a very simple way by the phenomenon of immigration and globalization that, transforms the world into a single large village, putting us in direct contact with other realities, other cultural expressions and other religious beliefs very different one from the other. We must be ready to stand up and live this challenge in the same spirit that Saint Francis, in the First Rule, recommended to his brothers who were about to go toward the 'infidels'.



### 3. A TESTIMONY: *Gabriel Garcia Moreno, President of the Republic of Ecuador*



Garcia Moreno was born in Guayaquil on December 24, 1821 and at his baptism received the name of Gabriel. His father, Don Pedro Garcia Gomez de Villaverde, in Old Castile, has felt drawn to the New World to find fortune. He really succeeded well, and in a few years, had become one of most well-known men in Ecuadorian commerce. His mother, Mercedes Moreno, was the daughter of one of most considered persons in the municipality of Guayaquil; she joined to her profound Christian feelings, brilliant qualities of heart and spirit. God visibly blessed the union of these two souls by giving them a large family, of which our Gabriel was the eighth and last child, and the « youngest ».

Very quickly, the family found itself in great and hard economic restriction due to incessant revolutions that were ravaging South America in general and Ecuador in particular. It was in this scenario that little Gabriel made his appearance in the world, bringing his parents to pour out all their solicitude on this child, who came into their home at the same time as the disgraces. Madame Mercedes devote herself to forming the heart and spirit of her son while Don Pedro, unblemished and fearless Christian, undertook to fortify his will and give him the lessons of invincible courage. Soul of great and noble character, these were the fundamental qualities that the young adolescent developed in his lifetime.

In 1830, Don Pedro died ... Gabriel was only 9 years old. Mercedes wanted to make of her son a Christian so she placed him with a religious, Father Betancourt who followed him during 5 years, orienting him toward university studies that he started attending in 1836 at the University of Quito. A year later, he entered the National College of the University. His satiable thirst to know all, to understand all and to penetrate all, makes him throw himself with ardor and surprising passion into the study of literature, history, philosophy, poetry, eloquence, mathematics and natural sciences... and to relax in his moments of pleasure, he learns foreign languages: French, English and Italian, which he speaks with ease. All the city of Quito speaks of this child prodigy. Many a time, he supports in public, theses in which he reveals his profound scholarship and manifests the logic of his reasoning.

At a time, Garcia Moreno believed himself called to the priesthood; he also received the tonsure from the hands of the Bishop of Guayaquil but God's plans for this soul were of another kind. After having searched the will of God in prayer and having opened up to his confessor, Gabriel returned to secular life and chose the law. He wanted to be, a « great upholder of the law », an arbitrator for the poor, the « tireless defender » of the Church and of the Homeland. In the Republic of Ecuador, the Church was being persecuted. Gabriel had assigned himself the duty of defending and protecting it from the attacks of its enemies and having Christ reign in the hearts. In addition, to realize his program of moral and religious recovery he will handle the arms, often peaceful but sometimes terrible, of the pen and the word. In 1844, at the age of 23, Garcia Moreno becomes a doctor of law and registers himself as a lawyer, trainee at the college of lawyers in Quito.

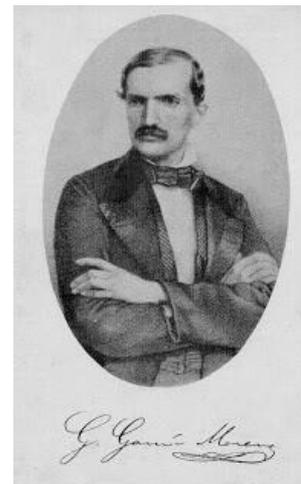


Of pleasant face, high stature, frank and penetrating gaze, distinguished manners, friendly character, docile intelligence, brilliant and amiable conversation ...he was the fulfilment of the perfect gentleman. The salons of the great city would fight over him; he accepted the frequent invitations with good grace and joined in the distractions with the ardor of his twenty-three years. Similar to the king of the youth of Assisi, Saint Francis, whose noble uniform one day he will put on by joining the Third Order, Garcia Moreno understood the danger, he corrected himself with vigor and took on a life program from which he would never again depart. « *Life is too short – he notes – to lose a single instant on futile things* ». Student, Gabriel had succeeded; as a lawyer, he had even more success. Every day, he saw the study assailed by persons of all conditions. Being a lawyer, for him, did not signify muddling up the cases clarifying them; he defended just causes and not those where justice was disputable. One day that the President of the Order of lawyers wanted to be violent toward the conscience of the great Christian and to his honesty, he proposed a cause clearly unjust, Garcia Moreno answered: « *Mister President, know that it would be easier for me to assassinate someone than to defend an assassin* ». In addition, since that day the young and brilliant lawyer ended his career and never appeared again in the courtroom. Two years later, in 1846, Moreno marries Rosa Ascasubi, the sister of two of his friends whose ideas and aspirations were in accord with his. They had two children, a boy, Gabriel, and a daughter, Monique, who died at the age of 4 years old.

After abandoning the bar, he devotes himself to literature. His indisputable talent as a writer opened the eyes of his admirers who, one day, asked him to write the history of Ecuador. « *It is best to do it* » was the answer he gave them with a smile. His history and his whole life will henceforth be merge with the history and life of his country. He sees the

country going in ruins because of incompetent and indignant men to governing it. The Freemasons, who find willing accomplices in the Presidents of the Republic, try to destroy the happy influence that the Christian faith had exercised until then on the people of Ecuador.

Journalist full of verve and arguments, he successively founded different newspapers in which the new apologist denounces the corrupt and the corruptor President Roca, preaches a patriotic crusade and unmask the diabolic projects of President Flores, the sorry successor to Roca. In a new newspaper, «the Nation», Moreno attacks so violently the government that Urbina, the most sectarian of the Presidents of Ecuador, pronounces against its director the penalty of deportation. Arrested with three of his friends, he is brought under strong escort to the frontier with New Grenada. He must embark for Peru where he learns the news that the province of Guayaquil is looking to elect him as a representative in the Senate, but Urbina has placed his veto on this election. Garcia Moreno answers this arbitrary act by an indictment in which he fires inflammatory remarks against the behavior of the President and his clique, but he also understands that, to carry out his project to term, he must learn many more things. In 1854, we find him in Paris where he attends different formation courses but in the meantime, many events were happening in the Ecuadorian Republic, among which is the end of the presidency of Urbina and the election of Robles to the presidential seat. The true patriots will use this event to request the return to the country of Garcia Moreno. The favor was immediately granted by Robles who hoped that this measure of clemency would regroup the conservatives to this cause.



The great «upholder of the law» for the Republic returns and the capital happy to again find within its walls the knight of law and liberty, chose him as the rector of the University. Moreno was only 30 years old but he put himself to work arduously on his project of reconstruction. With the confidence given him by the youth of the University of his Country, Garcia Moreno rapidly entered the elite of men who had a hand in the future of the country.

Towards the end of 1857, senatorial elections were to be held. The Rector of the University, on the insistence of his numerous friends, decided to put forward his candidacy. On the day of elections, there were disturbances and, in one camp as in the other, they were many injuries... and deaths. The victory came back to the serious representatives, thanks to the influence of their leader, Garcia Moreno. As a senator, he fought against all laws contrary to the interest of faith and to the true happiness of the people. He succeeded having a law voted for the «abolition of secret societies, masonic lodges and other associations condemned by the Church». It was too much! The Free Masons declared war against him, but surrounded by the youth who followed him, Moreno succeeded in escaping his assassins.

The explosion of war between Ecuador and Peru and the revolt of young Ecuadorians against the dictator Urbina (1859), who was later exiled, brought about the constitution of a provisional government with leader Garcia Moreno. Amid thousands dangers and renouncing no sacrifice, he employed himself to raising up his country. From the first days of his presidency, he took the task very seriously: «the power, in effect, was in his eyes a very important task, for which God and the Nation would demand rigorous accounting; he was an instrument not of pleasure but of beneficial works». He was obsessively preoccupied with choosing and placing intelligent, honest devout and hardworking men in all the administrations and all levels. He re-organized the army and worked at ensuring that the new generations would have a healthy and strong education. He accomplished the famous project

of building a great highway between the two largest cities in the country, Quito and Guayaquil. However, what he held to most was to have recognized the rights of God and the freedom of the Church. He fulfilled this with the conclusion of the Concordat, signed on April 23 1863.



In 1873, he solemnly consecrated the Ecuadorian Republic to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The following day during the festive ceremony, the Free Mason tried to satisfy their hatred and thirst for vengeance against him, which they called « the implacable tyrant who relies on religion to oppress the people ». On August 6, 1875, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord and the first Friday of the month, about one hour in the afternoon, Garcia Moreno leaves his house to go to the Palace of government. Passing by the cathedral, he goes in to adore the Holy Sacrament. Moreno immediately rises, leaves the sanctuary and goes in the direction of the seat of government. While he is climbing the steps to the building, one of the bandits jumps him and strikes him a violent blow with a knife between the shoulders. Then he continues the attack against him inflicting other terrible wounds while others discharge their arms on the unfortunate victim who, with his last breath, whispers, « Dios no muere ».

At the time of his death, Gabriel Garcia Moreno had been for twelve years a Franciscan tertiary. He wanted to be a saint and, to be successful, he knew that, in spite of the multiplicity of his commitments as chief of State, he would add to his very full days, the practice of a fervent secular Franciscan.

#### 4. REFERENCES

- Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church – Editrice Libreria Vaticana – See analytical index in paragraphs n. 554 to 562
- OFS Rule : Art 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18
- New Evangelization and OFS/YOUFRA: Document presented to Asia-Pacific Congress OFS/JYOUFRA in May 2013.

#### 5. A FEW QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In your Fraternity, has it ever happened that you dealt with a theme on the rapid changes occurring in the world?
2. Does globalization and the cultural integration required by the presence of immigrants give us hope for a more just and fraternal future?
3. Do we succeed in making concrete the values of our spirituality?
4. Are we witness to a world redeemed or do we prefer to evolve only in the little circle of our fraternity refraining from bringing our contribution to the cultural growth of our time?

