

Service, Vocation and Mission

Humans are the center and purpose of the world. Humanistic culture teaches us to respect and take good care of all men, women. Each human freely chooses for whom to live, who is at the center of his or her lives.

God has revealed to us that every human is important and precious. In his eyes; that all humans have been created to live in communion of love with God and each other. God calls us humans to become His children and heirs, co-heirs with Christ. The Father wants to share the fullness of Trinitarian life with all humans. The heavens and the earth have been created for this purpose.

God's creation is still unfolding, still unfinished. Every human is God's unfinished work of art and we are invited to cooperate with Him in creating a pure heart and steadfast spirit in all humans (*tạo cho mọi người một tâm lòng trong trắng, đổi mới tinh thần cho mọi người nên chung thủy*).

Christ teaches us how to love: "*Deny yourself, take upon your cross and follow me!*" Based on this 'Principle and foundation' we can better understand: "Service, Vocation and mission"

Vocation is God's invitation to be united with Him in love. Only love brings persons together in unity, and love blossoms in freedom. That is why God's vocation is offered as an invitation, and our relationship with Him is always dynamic and changing, never static.

Vocation is felt as a longing from the Lord who delights in our presence, and appears as our deepest and most authentic desire. When we hear God's vocation we are able to give an answer to the question: ***To whom I wish to belong? For whom do I want to live? Who is the lord of my heart, the center of my life?***

God's vocation is the rock upon which we can build our lives, because God is faithful, never stops loving and calling us to be in communion with Him. God's call is the foundation of our faith, hope and love. The Vocation to be in communion with God is the source of life, of inner energy, purpose and direction.

Mission is the task every human receives from God in His kingdom. Mission is the invitation to cooperate with Him in bringing forward the new heaven and the new earth. In God's project, nobody is a victim, everybody has a purpose and a task.

Yet, we humans can be deaf to God's call, and live distracted with our little projects, entertained with our hobbies, seduced by some idol, disappointed by our leaders, burnt out after investing our best years and energies in our own projects to save the world.

God's mission fosters our compassion, our generosity and wisdom, helping us to discern our course of action and to make better choices. Being sent by God, we may fail but we never lose hope. The Lord always gives us a new task and mission.

Our mission is always dynamic and changing, especially when we move into a new environment, grow in age and our health improves or deteriorates.

The call to mission enables us to answer the question: ***What does God want me to do?***

The three basic elements of mission are: a) To whom am I sent? b) What do they need or desire most? c) How do I better answer these needs and aspirations?

Service is a qualified contribution to the needs of aspirations of other people, such as teaching the ignorant, healing the ill, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, consoling the afflicted, advising the stranded, improving family or community relations, empowering people.

Aware of our qualifications, rich experience and expertise, we offer a service to those who need or like it.

There are three basic elements in service: a) what do I know and like to do? b) Who needs or wants this service? c) How many people welcomed my contribution?

1. What is the relationship between vocation, mission and service?

In service we choose the purpose, the contribution and the target people of our contribution. *In Mission*, the Lord sends us to a target group, with a purpose; we do not choose by ourselves, neither the target group nor the service we offer them.

In service we offer a contribution according to our qualifications, expertise, availability of time, means and disposition. *In mission* we look for what the target persons need most, and try to find the answer to these needs. We may feel challenged and even inadequate to the task, because it often demands an expertise and qualifications we do not possess.

In service the task's success is the source of meaning, life and energy. *In Mission*, the interaction with the people we serve as well as within the team, is where we live, grow and bear fruit, but it is not the source of life and meaning. In mission it is **vocation** the source of life and energy. *If mission* is considered as the source of life, meaning and purpose, then we are most vulnerable, and can eventually burnt out, because oftentimes the target persons will not be willing to receive the gift we offer them, they may be indifferent, or even show opposition and rejection.

An *intelligent mission* always answers deep needs which are at the roots of the problem, so that the people we are sent to serve may overcome their problems or reach the goals has in store for them.

In mission, the person sent is always searching for better ways to serve, looking for the experiences from others, is open to suggestions, fosters team work and delegates tasks to others.

When successful, they are happy for the improvement in the lives of the people they are called to serve rather than for their personal name and glory; they report to the one who sent them and listens for further instructions. When failing, they also report to the one who sent them, and if confirmed in the mission, they continue and persevere, despite the meager results or even utter failure.

In service we are the protagonists and tend to work alone, surrounded by a group of faithful supporters. *Mission* brings us to teamwork and fosters multiplying initiatives.

In service, if successful, we may find the performance particularly gratifying and eventually allow our own gratification to become its main target, motivation and purpose; the quality of our contribution will depend on the likes and dislikes of the target group; we will keep offering it for as long as there is enough people who welcomes our service and for as long as we are successful; We will discontinue our service if the results are below my expectations, if we experience rejection or opposition or do not find enough gratification in it.

There are many kinds of gratification: physical, psychological, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. All gratification is by definition self-centered. Loving, however, is by definition unselfish. We become Christ-like by loving as He loved. "Christ learned to love the Father by suffering" (He 5,7). But it is not suffering that brings us closer to God. It is love. Suffering doesn't make anybody child of God (người con có hiếu thảo với Chúa) Christ-like, loving does. The characteristic of God's action and presence in our lives is not that He makes us suffer but that He teaches us to love. Love renders suffering bearable and light. Love brings peace and even joy to our lives, taking away the sadness and weariness this imperfect world can sometimes bring to our lives.

2. How to go from service to mission:

To receive a mission, we ask the Lord to inspire, send and confirm us in our service; we try to go to the frontiers, where the needs of our brothers and sisters are most urgent, where we can do what others cannot, where there will be a multiplying factor. Enriched by the personal communion with the Lord (our vocation), we try not to depend too much on the success or failure of the service. The Lord may bring us through periods of misunderstanding, meager success, or even failure. We evaluate honestly every aspect of our service.

We always prefer teamwork to working alone. We foster teamwork by adapting our service to the team's lines of action, explaining our projects to the team and always trying to get their approval, even if by a thin majority. We never split and go completely on our own. We foster team programming and team implementation.

a) Team programming. The first step in better programming our service is identifying the deep needs and aspirations of the target people. Listening to the cries of the poor, of the ignorant, hungry, thirsty, sick or lonely, the team will identify their needs and aspirations. By pulling together the cries we have heard, looking for the roots of these needs and aspirations we will better identify their *basic needs*.

The second step in programming is understanding what are the possible answers to these needs. Answering to these needs will require the contribution of everybody, each one with his or her gifts and charisma. The answer may demand further training and the cooperation of more people. By doing so our personal experience will be enriched by the experience of other persons and groups.

Identifying the critical points. The significant turning point in mission planning takes place when the team identifies and formulates the *critical points* of the target group. A *critical point* is a situation that will inevitably take place if some important decisions and changes are not put into effect as soon as possible.

b) Team implementation. Once the "critical points" have been identified and formulated, the team agrees on the "lines of action", by which the critical points will be addressed. These "lines of action" are conceived as "activities" - something we do - but above all, and more important as "a way to act, live and work".

The "activities" we plan as a team, concern necessarily a limited number of members. The "way to do things" as a common answer to a core need, and concern everybody. Thus we reach a new understanding of "mission" and of "common mission".

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