

Thy Kingdom Come!

# Our identity as Legionary religious

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Perhaps the two words which were more frequently used to define the nature and extent of the Church's renewal during the Second Vatican Council were *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*. *Aggiornamento* is the most popular by far, it has been sometimes misunderstood as a compromise with the spirit of the world, but in reality has to do with finding new ways to faithfully transmit and present the Christian faith in order to more effectively evangelize. By *ressourcement* the Council wanted to encourage the return to the authoritative sources of Christian faith to rediscover their truth and meaning and better meet the challenges of our times.

After the Council, all religious communities made an enormous effort to carry out the renewal mandated by *Perfectae Caritatis*. As some well-intentioned experiences proved to have a negative impact on the life and mission of consecrated men and women in the Church, Pope Paul VI consistently invited religious to carry out their renewal keeping always their own charismatic identity and mission in mind in order to avoid pitfalls<sup>1</sup>. It seems that, for the Pope, going back to the authentic sources provides a sure path to face the challenges which every age presents to the stewards of every charism.

In our effort to deepen into our Legionary identity as religious, we will first try to set up a framework for our conversation bringing to mind some notions of the identity of religious, apostles and priests in general. Then we will briefly discuss the role of memory and identity, and the dynamics involved in the formation a "charismatic personality". Last, we will try to apply these concepts in a more direct way to our charism as Legionaries of Christ, both on an individual and on a community level.

## A brief overview of the identity of a religious, an apostle and a priest

Religious in the Church have a distinct identity. First of all, they are men of prayer, called to be with Christ; men who imitate Christ and share in his lifestyle as friends as He forms them into apostles. They are men with a supernatural spirit, which is protected and, in a certain way, guaranteed by the interior freedom offered by the evangelical counsels. Religious are also dedicated to a simple way of life to imitate the Son of God, who emptied himself to serve (cf. Phil. 2:7) and who became poor to enrich us with his poverty (Cf. 2 Cor 8:9). Men who are consecrated to Christ recognize the ascetic and formative value of community life, defending it from the temptation of individualism while living the joy of being brothers and

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<sup>1</sup> Some examples: PAUL VI, *In Paschae solemnitate*, in: *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, XVI.1, 1973, 11-25.; PAUL VI, *Address to the XXXII General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, December 3, 1974.; PAUL VI, *Spontaneous address to Redemptorist Capitulars*, 1973, seen on December 25, 2015: <http://www.cssr.com/english/scalanews/spontaneous-address-of-pope-paul-vi-to-capitulars-1973/>.

friends in the Lord beyond accidental elements such as age, cultural background, ministry, etc.

As religious, we are also called to be apostles. Every charism is given for the benefit of the Church and is therefore mission-oriented. We are sent out by Christ to proclaim the Kingdom, and we do that with the traits proper to the Legion and Regnum Christi. Our ministry is exercised in a vast diversity of ways, but it is always an apostolate in communion, done in the name of the Legion. Our Legionary identity and our common spirituality grant unity to our action as a religious family and as members of the Regnum Christi Movement.

Our Legionary vocation is also enriched by the gift of the priesthood, which configures us to Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father to proclaim and build a Kingdom. From the beginning, the Legion is only made up of priests, since the ministerial priesthood is an objectively efficient instrument to help men and women enter the Kingdom through the sacraments and the preaching of God's word. We are at the service of the baptismal priesthood of the faithful. We do this in communion with other men and women who contribute their specific vocations to the building up of the Church and Regnum Christi in her.

We will not delve into the relationship with Regnum Christi as a whole, albeit it is essential to our mission. We need to strengthen our own identity in order to enter into dialogue and communion with others who participate in this same charism. However, it is still valid to remember what the General Chapter of 1980 said: "The Legion of Christ cannot be fully understood if we do not understand Regnum Christi".

## Memory and identity

We are celebrating 75 years of our foundation. Most of us have celebrated in the past weeks an anniversary of our ordination or will do so on the first days of January. It is a good occasion to bring back a few things into our memory, for it is precisely through our memory that our identity is forged. Our memory is, in a certain way, all the events which have made us be who we are<sup>2</sup>. In Scripture we can see, for example in Deuteronomy, how God is constantly inviting Israel to recall where it came from, to remember, and to transmit this memory to further generations. Sin is, in a certain way, forgetting who we are.

Allow me a short digression on the topic of memory<sup>3</sup>. According to some authors, like Fr. Amedeo Cencini, we may distinguish three levels of memory. One is objective memory, which are the events that occur every day, the things we read about on the media. There is a second, deeper level, which we can call the subjective or affective memory. It recalls and treasures our emotions or the traces events of our lives have left behind in our hearts. It is at this level that the disciples of Emmaus recall: "Didn't our hearts burn as we were walking with him?". However, these two levels are not sufficient, since they have to do with events

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. EDEN, D., *My Peace I Give You: Healing Sexual Wounds with the Help of the Saints*, Ave Maria Press, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. CENCINI, A., *Los sentimientos del hijo: itinerario formativo en la vida consagrada*, Sígueme, 2000. Cf. DANIELOU, J., *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History*, Longmans, 1958.

which may be isolated. We need to reach the third level of memory, which we may call the religious or biblical memory. Here is where we believe remembering and remember by believing. It is here that we can discover the thread which guides our personal history and gives it a purpose and a meaning, it unites the events into a story. This is the memory which the Lord constantly invites his People to recall. It is at this level of memory where the Holy Spirit reminds us of everything Jesus has said.

At this third level, we can discover a project (a charism!) which is given to me by God and which I can accept and try to embody in my own life<sup>4</sup>. This is also the case for the charism of a religious institute, which enjoys the approval of the Church's Magisterium as a legitimate way of reading and living the Gospel (its Magisterium) and as an accurate re-presentation of an aspect of Christ's mystery<sup>5</sup>. Once our Constitutions have been approved by the Church, it is our turn to fully embrace what they describe and mandate as God's project.

Our identity flows from the capacity of finding this silver lining in our history, both personal and institutional. We need to acknowledge "something previous to us" to which we have been associated, and accept how this gift thrives in us and through us for the good of others and for our own benefit. The opposite, a denial of this reality we have not given ourselves but was bestowed upon us as a gift from on high, would be the temptation to try to start always anew, as if we did not have a history or as if we could perform magical transformations.

Recognizing that we are a part of a larger project is an act of humility in which we see ourselves as we truly are. In our case we have accepted that deep desire that Christ would be the center of our lives, and that the Legion of Christ would be the path to achieve this. We have given our yes to our progressive identification with Jesus Christ in his humility, obedience, and tireless formation of apostles, and decided that his way of life would also be our permanent way of life. These acceptances are indispensable, since they are the only way in which we can take ownership of our charism and make it fruitful<sup>6</sup>.

Our history thus becomes, as we experience in our daily examen prayer, the place for our encounter with God. That way we can recall our "Galilee"<sup>7</sup>, our roots, where everything started. It is only thus that we can resist the temptation to forget or deny the path through which God has led us and walked with us. Pope Francis wrote to us at the beginning of the Year of Consecrated life:

"Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them [...]. In this way we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. CENCINI, A., *Amarás al Señor tu Dios: Psicología del Encuentro con Dios*, Ediciones Sígueme, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. CLARIOND, B., *Las Constituciones: camino de santidad*, *Semillas de Espiritualidad*, seen on December 22, 2015, <http://www.repositoriocafi.org/items/show/10>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. CLC2014, 4; Cf. BERGOGLIO, J.M., *Reflexiones espirituales sobre la vida apostólica*, Mensajero, Bilbao, 2013. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. FRANCIS, *Homily on the Easter Vigil*, 2014.

the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some essential aspects of the charism. Yet everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts”<sup>8</sup>.

As we acknowledge our history, we prepare ourselves to look forward, into the future filled with hope. In a certain way, having a clear identity allows us to live every day as a “new beginning”, in which we work towards the incarnation of our charism in the here and the now, being faithful to its nature and expressing it with creativity. In our particular history, we are to be witnesses every day of God’s mercy and of his paschal mystery, of the power of the resurrection which can bring hope into a broken world.

## The challenge of forming a “charismatic personality”

The charism is not some abstract concept. It is a gift from the Lord which will configure our very existence as individuals and as a community in the Church. It plays a crucial role in the healthy development of the personality of a religious. Our self-realization consists not only in developing our own qualities, nor in our success in what we do, which could end up in a narcissistic attitude. It is above all entrusting our lives to a project larger than ourselves which we discover as we move forward, and where we can find what we are called to be. In our case, this is the charism of the Legion: when we discover it, we get to know ourselves better, we find a sense of belonging. When we live it, we also live fully. In a certain way, the charism traces the path for our own self-realization, which is the formation of a “charismatic personality”.

Fr. Amedeo Cencini proposes four areas through which we can interiorize our charism, that is, make it our own<sup>9</sup>:

1. A sense of belonging: first of all to the specific charism which is received from above and discovered by grace, and also to the community of people who live out this gift which precedes them all, but which has been entrusted to them. It is that experience which many have had visiting one of our houses, or talking with a Legionary priest: “I can relate to that. This is my home.”
2. A unique experience of Christ, which may also be called a mystical experience... This flows from the charism found, and must be deepened constantly, very much like Mary did, keeping all these things in her heart. This experience of intimacy with Christ is also an invitation for a greater freedom, which may take the form of a commitment to live as He did, in poverty, chastity, and obedience<sup>10</sup>. These commitments of love are not lived in the abstract, but are colored by the charism

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<sup>8</sup> FRANCIS, [Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life](#), November 21, 2014.

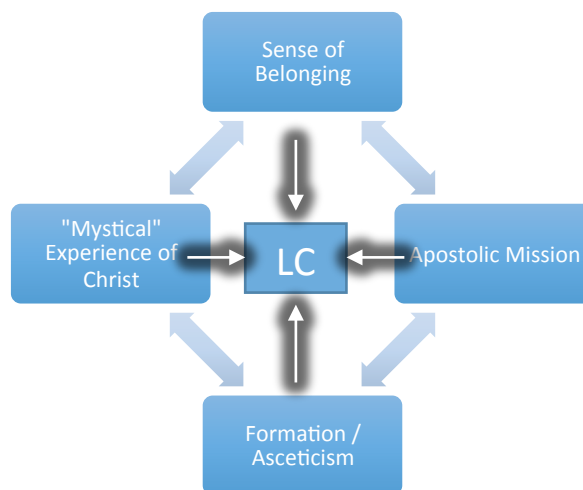
<sup>9</sup> Cf. CENCINI, A., *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 44; Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12-14.

itself, the memory of the experience of the Lord, and the approval given by ecclesiastic authority.

3. A corresponding path of formation which is a response to the grace given in the mystical experience. God always takes the initiative in this love relationship, but man feels compelled to respond. This answer takes the form of concrete in a life of asceticism and a specific path of formation designed to dispose the person called to an ever greater acceptance of the gift received and the fulfillment of the specific mission.
4. A way of doing apostolate, a mission, which is permeated by the charism. This is the aspect which is usually most perceived by one and all and the purpose for which the Lord gave this gift to the Church. A life of prayer and of consecration would not be authentic if not directed towards a specific mission. It would be like getting married without the intention to have children. This mission allows for diversity within the unity of one same calling and spirit. The charism is also a criterion to undertake or not specific expressions of the apostolate<sup>11</sup>.

The following diagram may prove useful to grasp how these elements contribute to the formation of a “charismatic personality”<sup>12</sup>:



## What our Constitutions say

Our Constitutions give us God’s playbook to grasp, accept and live our charism. The Chapter documents and other texts and norms provide guidance so that we may live with an increasing fidelity the gift entrusted to us by the Church and make it flourish. Yet, the Chapter Fathers have drafted them in such a way that we need to become proficient in

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, May 31, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. CENCINI, A., *op.cit.*

discerning and reading the signs of the times<sup>13</sup> so we may live with the necessary adaptability to the times, places and persons we are called to serve.

If the charism is God's project which is revealed to us as a gift, the Giver of the gift may determine how he wants us to respond to his calling. This is the ascetical dimension of our religious life, according to a certain formation plan. It consists not only in the practice of certain virtues and acts of piety, but rather in an invitation to configure our lives, as a response to grace, to the aspect of Christ's mystery which we make present in the Church today<sup>14</sup>. We can deepen our knowledge and understanding of God's gift in prayer and sharing with others in significant relationships. We are challenged by it to exercise our freedom so as to live it to the full, supported by grace and by our brothers who share in the same charism and build our religious family.

Our Constitutions clearly state that:

En su misión de formar apóstoles, líderes cristianos al servicio de la Iglesia, los legionarios hacen presente el misterio de Cristo que reúne en torno a sí a los Apóstoles, les revela el amor de su corazón, los forma y los envía para colaborar con Él en la instauración de su Reino (cf. Mc 3, 13-14; Mt 10, 5-10; Mt 28, 18-20)<sup>15</sup>.

This aspect of Christ's mystery is not something accidental. It should permeate our whole personality as Christians and religious. Various relationships develop from Christ's mystery: with God, with others, with the world. From this source spring forth a distinct spirituality, a way of living communion, and a specific mission<sup>16</sup>. These traits encompass not only our personal lives, but also our Congregation and, ultimately, our Movement.

Applying what we have said so far to our reality, we can delve deeper into these three relationships:

In our relationship with God, our spirituality, we can find some shining features of the Legionary religious:

- Christ-centeredness<sup>17</sup>: Jesus Christ called us to be his disciples and friends, to carry his message into the world, to help establish his Kingdom in the hearts of men and women, and society at large. Putting Christ in the center of our lives is, in a certain way, the norm for every action, a kind of litmus test for our authenticity as Legionaries. Here is a source of interior freedom as a consequence of living in poverty, chastity and obedience<sup>18</sup>.
- Contemplative and evangelizing dimension (or conquering, if you will): this balance of apparently conflicting values makes us distinct, as Fr. Owen Kearns and Fr. Patrick

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. ROBLES-GIL, E., [Carta a los legionarios en ejercicios espirituales de mes sobre el discernimiento](#), August 4, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. CLC 2014, 16.

<sup>15</sup> CLC 2014, 4.

<sup>16</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> CLC 2014, 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> CLC 2014, 18.

Langan have tried to show in *The Quest for the Core*. We are called to be men of prayer, of the Eucharist, and missionaries. Our prayer kindles our zeal for the salvations of souls and our ministry urges us to be men of prayer.

- We live in step with the Church and the Pope, in obedience to pastors and to truth, which we try to present in fidelity and charity.
- We form and irradiate an ardent zeal for the salvation of souls, fruit of the experience of Christ's charity for mankind, his loving mercy. We feel challenged by this to reach out to others: *caritas Christi urget nos*.
- Tender love for Mary, our Mother, who teaches us her compassion and mercy, as well as her own following of Christ. She sustains us as she did with the apostles as they awaited the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In our relationship with others, our charism wells up communion, with some shining features:

- *Esprit de corps*<sup>19</sup>: we are members of one body, with one strong identity which allows also for healthy diversity and permits us to be open to other vocations that share in the same charism, offering our own gifts to them and receiving theirs. This unity is not forged exclusively from externals but rather on principles. Nevertheless, external expressions are also important if we follow the logic of the incarnation to the full.
- Community life: it has always been present in the Legion, but at some times, not so explicitly. We have come to realize that we have spread ourselves too thin, and started feeling how we need our brothers. The General Chapter presents community life as the locus where the heart of the Legionary matures in its various dimensions: a son, a brother, a spouse and a father<sup>20</sup>. The community is also a space for meaningful relationships, mutual support and accountability. This, in itself it is an evangelizing witness. We could also say that the Legion's understanding of the role of the superior as a father, brother and friend is also special, as well as the respect for our human and natural capacities.
- Capacity to work in teams and collaborate among us, as well as with lay members, etc.: use of talents for the mission, finding talents in others and fostering them.

Regarding our mission, which stems from our relationship with the world, we can find topics for reflection in the Chapter document on our apostolic renewal, where the Chapter fathers made an assessment of the bright and dark spots in our apostolic action and give the Legion a sense of direction for the years to come. Nevertheless, here are some salient traits:

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<sup>19</sup> CLC 2014, 16.

<sup>20</sup> CCG2014, 53-56.

- We form apostles and leaders: we do not see ourselves as sole providers of quality religious services, but want others to experience Christ's love so they may commit to him.
- We believe in a *person-to-person* approach. Here we could also note a special gift in the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation.
- We seek to evangelize culture being fully orthodox, but try to do so with a dialogical and non-confrontational approach. We also try to do it effectively.
- The Legion has a great adaptability to time, place and peoples. The way our norms are now written out give space for great flexibility.
- We strive to form an apostolic communion of disciples, where all may contribute their gifts to the mission, so that Christ may reign.

## Vibrant communities as a place where the Legionary of Christ is forged

A few decades ago, Karl Rahner wrote an article about the spirituality of the future Church. I think it reflects the paradigm shift on religious formation after Vatican II and the tensions which may arise in any effort of renewal in the Church:

“[...] a fourth characteristic of the spirituality of the future [...] is the fraternal fellowship in which the same all-sustaining experience of the Spirit becomes possible: fraternal community as a real and essential element of the spirituality of tomorrow. [...] Looking back over the whole course of the history of spirituality it is possible frequently to discover something of the kind. By origin and education we older people were spiritual individualists, even though we gladly carried out the communal liturgy as our obvious, objective duty. [...]. Where was there a communal experience of the Spirit, clearly conceived, desired, and experimented in a general way –as it evidently was at the Church's first Pentecost– that was not presumably an accidental local gathering of a number of individualistic mystics, but an experience of the Spirit on the part of a community as such? Such a ‘collective experience’ cannot and of course is not meant to take away from the individual Christian his radical decision for faith coming from his solitary experience of God nor to spare him this, since human individuality and solidarity are not factors to be balanced against each other nor can they replace each other. [...] I suspect anyway that the element of a fraternal, spiritual fellowship, of a communally lived spirituality, can play a great part and be slowly but courageously acquired and developed”<sup>21</sup>.

A vibrant community plays an essential role in our spirituality as religious. Our community is a gift from God, “who has given us brothers”, as Francis of Assisi liked to say. However, our community is also a project which we build together and where one and all must contribute. It is also a school of realism, since we are all wounded by original sin, yet chosen to be close

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<sup>21</sup> RAHNER, K., “The Spirituality of the Church of the Future”, *Theological Investigations XX: Concern for the Church*, Crossroad, 1981. 150-152.



followers of Christ. In this sense, the General Chapter's treatment of community life is very eloquent<sup>22</sup>, highlighting aspects which make up religious life in general, and legionary community life in particular.

Community is the place where we encounter Christ truly present where two or more are gathered in his name. It provides the context for intimacy which is essential for a healthy adult personality. It is a place for sharing a common mission, the joys and pains of life. It is not a place for fuzzy "care and share" activities, but a place for manly friendships in the Lord as we walk together following his footsteps. It is a protected haven, where others may reach out to us and we can reach out to our brothers, and sustain them in their vocation. A vibrant community helps one and all feel at home with the Lord and feel challenged to conform ever more to His will.

We have just traced out a few elements of religious life in general and legionary religious life in particular. Discussion that follows is a chance to share with our brothers and start a conversation about who we are, as men called by Christ to his same lifestyle, living the evangelical counsels, and living in community to be sent out to evangelize. We are still in an ongoing process of renewal, and by analogy we can apply to the Legion what Romano Guardini said of the Church:

"[The Church] is not an institution conceived and built in theory... but a living reality.... She lives through the course of time, in becoming, like every living being, in undergoing change... And yet in her nature she remains ever the same and her heart is Christ"<sup>23</sup>.

## Questions for discussion in small groups:

What first attracted you to the Legion of Christ as the concrete path to follow Christ as a religious and a priest?

What has helped you in your legionary life to acquire a deeper understanding, acceptance, and living out of our charism?

Which are the "shining features" of Legionary poverty? Legionary chastity? Legionary obedience?

## Conclusion after the presentation in the large group

We are still a young congregation and we are recovering from a very difficult experience which has allowed for a purification and a renewal. We are also aware of the challenges which we face regarding vocations, and the fulfillment of our mission.

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<sup>22</sup> CCG2014, 52-58 – Elements for renewal; 59-63 – concrete aspects.

<sup>23</sup> GUARDINI, R., quoted by BENEDICT XVI, *Farewell address to the Cardinals present in Rome*, February 28, 2013.

According to sociologists Pasquier, Fitz and Cada, Hostie, all quoted by Fr. Cencini<sup>24</sup>, we can trace four phases in religious families. It is interesting to note how the distinctive trait of each is how the charism is transmitted:

1. Foundation: a highly charismatic time. The very real poverty of means and manpower is solved due to the great enthusiasm of the members. The charism is transmitted in an attractive way mainly through the life and ideals of the first group of members and the founder. There is usually a very limited sense of a canonical culture. This usually lasts 10 to 30 years.
2. Rapid growth, with the first attempts to institutionalize the charism. The different provinces or territories grow and develop, with the first works of apostolate. During this period the founder is usually no longer present, and the charism is transmitted mainly through a written rule of life as well as through the witness of commitment of members.
3. Stability: At this stage, the largest growth of the religious institute is reached. The Constitutions, norms and other codes are basically finished. The charism is transmitted mainly through a fixed system of norms and traditions contained in a *Ratio Institutionis*, and less by the living witness of others. In this period, what is proper to the charism may be obscured and what is unique may be diluted into a more "general" spirituality.
4. Decadence: it is usually the consequence of transmitting the charism through a system of formation, rather than through the lives of members. There may be a forgetfulness of the elements that build a charismatic personality: sense of belonging, experience of God, ascetic path, specific apostolate. The possibility of avoiding this phase of decadence becomes a reality when a group of people are capable of showing and transmitting the charism in its integrity through their lives. They are aware that, notwithstanding their importance, Constitutions, devotions, and strategic plans, are not enough to guarantee the charismatic fidelity and the purpose of their Institute.

It is therefore necessary that we recall our love story with the Lord. That we bring it back to our memory and share it, since it is there that our identity is strengthened. Above all, we need to present Jesus Christ to others as he has captivated us, or even, stolen our hearts. This is not the time to talk mainly about the Christ who we have read about, but the one we have encountered in our lives, the one who has called us to himself, revealed to us the love of His Heart, and sent us to form apostles who will help him establish His Kingdom in the hearts of men and women and in society.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. CENCINI, A., *op.cit.*