

Gianni Colzani

# Church's Mission

History, Theology and the Way Forward



*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth,  
will draw all people to myself*

(John 12:32)



Mission & Formation



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**History, Theology and the Way Forward**  
Mission&Formation

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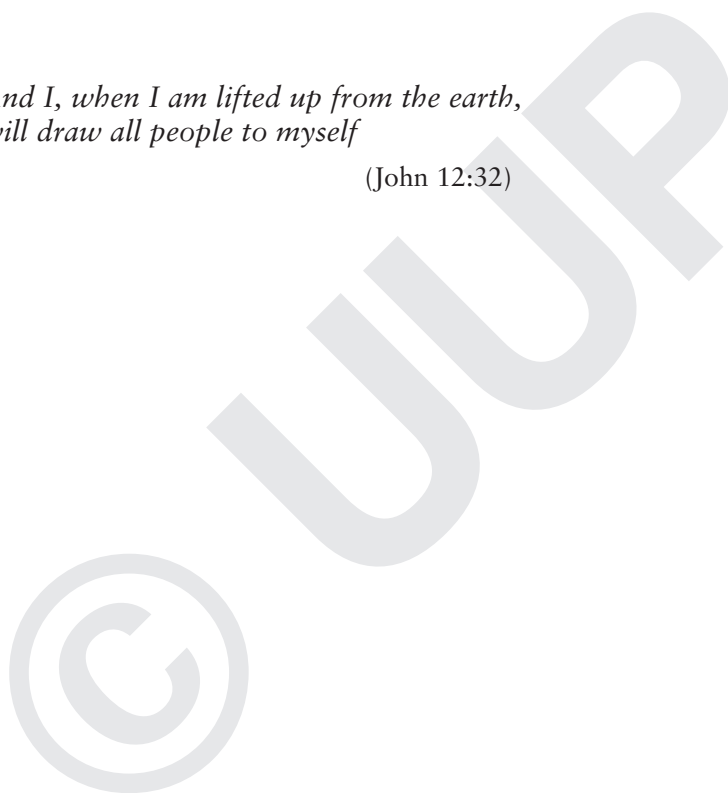


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## Preface

A book for the “providential occasion” of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019 announced by Pope Francis to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope Benedict XV’s Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*: this is *Church’s Mission: History, Theology and the Way Forward*, one of the latest work by Prof. Fr. Gianni Colzani, Emeritus Professor at the Pontifical Urbaniana University, featured within the series *Omnis Terra* – PMU CIAM Publications. At a time when all *Baptized and Sent* are urged to strengthen their missionary identity, awareness, and skills for the sake of *The Church of Christ on Mission in the World*,<sup>1</sup> Fr. Colzani here shares his reflections on the Catholic mission and witnessing of faith, as a tool for missionary formation and pastoral guidance.<sup>2</sup>

By tracing the various stages of the history of mission, which are deeply tied to the role of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and by addressing its theological foundations and the development of the Church’s magisterium, Fr. Colzani gives us the opportunity to understand how mission represents not only the very nature of the Church (cf. *Ad Gentes* 2), but also its origin, purpose, and life. Therefore, this volume is a precious contribution to the discussion encouraged by the Holy Father on “how to render the work of the *missio ad gentes* more effective”<sup>3</sup> for the sake of the young

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<sup>1</sup> The chosen theme for Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019, *Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World*, reveals “the missionary dimension of our Baptism”, as being sent on mission is a call that comes with Baptism and is for all the baptized (POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180601\\_pontificie-opere-missionarie.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180601_pontificie-opere-missionarie.html)).

<sup>2</sup> The content of this book features the author’s reflections on Church’s mission from a historical and theological perspective, as well as his insights on the contemporary challenges to evangelization.

<sup>3</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151203\\_plenaria-propaganda-fide.html/](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/december/documents/papa-francesco_20151203_plenaria-propaganda-fide.html/).

Churches in missionary territories, as well as of those Churches of more ancient tradition in need of renewed evangelization.<sup>4</sup>

The author is mindful of the necessity to bring about a major missionary awakening based on the revitalization of the *missio ad gentes* “as engine and horizon of the faith,”<sup>5</sup> as Pope Francis has advocated since his pontificate began. To this end, he offers an interesting examination of the Pontifical teachings and ecclesiastic policies revolving around the conception of *missio ad gentes*, which the Second Vatican Council confirmed as the ever-valid foundational model and paradigm of the mission of the Church throughout the whole history of salvation, until the coming of the Kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup>

The *Decree Ad Gentes*, as the author emphasizes, stems from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and from the “new and different ecclesial awareness” raised by the prophetic contents of *Maximum Illud*. In addition, he duly brings forth the Trinitarian, Christological, and pneumatological roots of the mission as defined by *Ad Gentes*, whose pronouncements frame the theological context in which the Church’s mission should be understood: from the creation in Christ through the redemption accomplished in the Paschal Mystery until its eschatological fulfillment.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the divine universal mandate to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19, cf. Ac 1:6-8) that the Church has derived “from the mission of the Son and from the mission of the Holy Spirit [...], in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (AG 2).

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<sup>4</sup> A valuable contribution to the publication of this volume was given by Mr. Emiliano Stornelli, Chairman of the Religion & Security Council.

<sup>5</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*.

<sup>6</sup> There can be no substitution for the *missio ad gentes*, which already encloses in the scope of its divine mandate every mode of dynamic presence of proclamation and conversion of nations, cultures, religions, and peoples who encounter and open themselves to the Gospel of Jesus and His Church (cf. F. MERONI, “The Mission of the Church and the *Missio Ad Gentes*: Some Initial Observations”, in CEP-PMS, *Baptized and Sent. The Church of Christ on Mission in the World*, EMMS OCT 2019, San Paolo, Milano 2019, 77).

<sup>7</sup> The Paschal Mystery and the historical mission of Jesus highlight how the need for love, the need for salvation from evil and death, sin and pain, hatred and division, is constitutive of the human person who, through creation in Christ, longs for divine sonship. The interest in dialogue, peaceful coexistence, social and economic justice, ecology, and otherness, must be profoundly configured and built upon the superabundant offer of salvation the heart of which is the Paschal Mystery (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 22).



Furthermore, Fr. Colzani reviews other official Conciliar documents relevant to the *missio ad gentes*, such as the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions, along with the post-Conciliar papal doctrinal efforts: inter alia, the Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Encyclical Letters *Redemptoris Missio* and *Deus Caritas Est*. The *Acts of the Apostles* are also singled out as a major source of biblical “inspiration”<sup>8</sup> for all Christians in the mission of faith witness that they are called to execute as members of the Church, coherently with Pope Francis’ definition of the *Acts* as the “regular book for prayer and meditation”<sup>9</sup> for the *Baptized and Sent* of all times.<sup>10</sup>

The author’s presentation of these documents is an invaluable compendium of the fundamental theological teachings of the Church on the *missio ad gentes*. The author highlights the fact that *missio ecclesiae* does not respond to a human initiative: it is *missio* and *actio Dei*, “a fundamental work of God”, as he has termed it.<sup>11</sup> The principal agent is the Holy Spirit, and mission is His project (cf. RM 21).<sup>12</sup> The Church is servant of the mission. It is not the Church that makes the mission, but the mission that makes the

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<sup>8</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. F. MERONI (ed.), *Missio Ad Gentes in the Acts of the Apostles*, Urbaniana University Press, Roma 2019.

<sup>11</sup> The divine nature of the missionary mandate of the Church was reaffirmed also by Pope Benedict XV: “Before He returned to His Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ addressed to His disciples the words: ‘Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation’ (Mk 16:15). With these words He committed to them a duty, a momentous and a holy charge, that was not to lapse with the death of the Apostles but would bind their successors, one after another, until the end of the world as long, that is, as there remained on this earth men whom the truth might set free. Entrusted with this mandate, ‘they went forth and preached everywhere’ (Mk 16:20) the word of God, so that ‘through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message’ (Psalm 18:5)” (*Maximum Illud* 1).

<sup>12</sup> “It is the Holy Spirit who sends us, accompanies us and inspires us. He is the source of our mission. It is he who guides the Church forward, not us. [...] He, the Holy Spirit, does everything; we are simply His servants” (POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*).

Church.<sup>13</sup> Mission is not the instrument, but “the point of departure and the goal,”<sup>14</sup> and Church’s mission is to proclaim the Gospel and to witness it among those who have yet to embrace the Christian faith. In doing so, the Church opens the way to the divine action of the Holy Spirit in places where women and men still yearn for salvation from sin and death.

The author focuses notably on *Evangelii Gaudium*, “a turning point for the Church and her mission”. This Apostolic Exhortation identifies *missio ad gentes* as the paradigm of all the Church’s ordinary work and pastoral action (EG 15). Mission is a force capable of transforming the interior of the Church even before the life of peoples and cultures. Therefore, Fr. Colzani upholds Pope Francis’ appeal to everyone throughout the world to be “permanently in a state of mission” (EG 25), meaning a permanent state of intimate missionary communion with Christ, and a personal encounter with Jesus alive in His Church, as the only way to bring about an authentic missionary and pastoral conversion of the Jesus’s disciples and of the structures of the ecclesial community (cf. EG 25, 27).

An evangelizer by nature, the Church should always begin by evangelizing herself to preserve the freshness and Apostolic courage required to be re-created and reformed with new modes of Christian presence and witness. This will allow the Church to continue to effectively respond to Jesus’ command “to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG 20). The mission of Jesus placed in the heart of the Church thus becomes the criterion of spiritual discernment to evaluate the effectiveness of her pastoral structures, apostolic work, and ministers<sup>15</sup> being engaged in “the communication of the Gospel in the testimony of living faith”, as the author puts it.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. F. MERONI (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church*, Aracne Editrice, Canterano (Roma) 2017.

<sup>14</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*.

<sup>15</sup> Every parish should make the style of the *missio ad gentes* its own, so that the Holy Spirit will transform habitual faithful into disciples, and dissatisfied disciples into missionaries, drawing them out of fears and closures and propelling them in every direction, to the ends of the earth (cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Meeting with the Executive Committee of CELAM*, Bogota, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170907\\_viaggioapostolico-colombia-celam.html/](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/september/documents/papa-francesco_20170907_viaggioapostolico-colombia-celam.html/)).

Fr. Colzani reminds us that Jesus' mission, the heart and motivation of the very Church's mission, is indeed a true communication of divine life, of eternal life, of the life of daughters and sons who have always been loved by God, our creator and Father in Christ. Quoting John Paul II, Pope Francis tells us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that "the Church's closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; 'communion and mission are profoundly interconnected'" (EG 23).

To explain this interconnectedness, the author refers to the *Acts of the Apostles*, where testimony is described as "a gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ac 1:8) that incorporates the communion with Jesus in the understanding of His person in the light of His resurrection". Giving the life of God the Father, offering the life of the Holy Spirit, and sacrificing oneself for life in Christ, represents the origin and purpose of mission, from its original form of the *missio ad gentes* led by the Apostles to its fulfillment in the Jerusalem of Heaven, the dwelling place of God among humanity.

The journey starts with Him, Colzani observes, but culminates in the Paschal Mystery of the Crucified Risen One, the heart of the Catholic faith. In the footsteps of the "community of missionary disciples"<sup>16</sup> that began evangelization from "Jerusalem [...] to the ends of the earth" (Ac 1:8), a renewed missionary awareness, ardor, and engagement on the part of all Christians is all the more necessary to meet the challenges to Church's *missio ad gentes* in the contemporary times, which the author helps us to discern.

The inculturation of the Gospel, the evangelization of cultures, the witness and transmission of the faith in ever-changing scenarios and non-Christian majority contexts, in the growing metropolitan areas and in the era of mass-media and technological preeminence, amid migration and humanitarian crises and the ruinous advance of a misleading notion of secularism. The People of God must fully embrace the "evangelical approach to the Church's mission in the world"<sup>17</sup> already urged by Pope Benedict XV in *Maximum Illud*, "so that the spirit of the *missio ad gentes* may animate the path of the Church" also in our current troubled days and in the future to come.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Go Forth: Toward a Community of Missionary Disciples*, American Society of Missiology Series, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 2019.

<sup>17</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Otherwise, Christians will keep sliding into the socio-cultural irrelevance, ill-driven by the demand to be accepted and perceived as commercially appealing, and to conform themselves to the spirit of the times at any cost.<sup>19</sup> If this is a crisis of faith, which brings with it a strong centripetal temptation, the maturity of the Church's faith lies in the effectiveness of the "missionary outreach" (EG 15, 17, 28, 32, 147, 262). To address this crisis, Fr. Colzani shows the way forward for the Church's mission to regain its actual significance and evangelizing force, and fulfill its divine task to transform human history by attracting everyone and everything to Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 12:32).<sup>20</sup>

Vatican City  
June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
*The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity*

Fr. FABRIZIO MERONI  
*PMU Secretary General*  
*Director of CIAM and Fides*

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. F. MERONI, "The Mission of the Church and the Missio Ad Gentes: Some Initial Observations", 73.

<sup>20</sup> "Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people's hearts: 'The missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation'" (*Evangeliis Gaudium* 265, quoting JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio* 45).

## Introduction

The conviction that the mission is the heart of Revelation is finding ever-greater acceptance and support today. The mission is not just one of the subjects the Scriptures talk about, but it is the ultimate criterion and predominant perspective. This is not a completely new fact; for example, already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Martin Kähler pointed with surprising foresight to mission as “the mother of theology”.<sup>1</sup>

Similar observations were reiterated continuously for about a hundred years. In 1961, Rudolf Schnackenburg argued that the mission is one of the four basic characteristics of the Church.<sup>2</sup> The Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Corinth bear specific characteristics that differentiate them. However, they share the unique mystery of the Church along with its fundamental qualities, of which the mission is one of them. In more recent times, Martin Hengel condensed his research on the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures into one concise conclusion: “The history and the theology of early Christendom are ‘the history and theology of the mission’”. A Church, he therefore concludes, that neglects her apostolic duty in serving this history and theology of salvation would be detaching “herself from her vital center and, as a consequence, also from herself”.<sup>3</sup> Similar convictions were upheld by Ferdinand Hahn, who acknowledged, albeit ruefully, that “if at some time the Church’s missionary service seemed natural, it was only in the first fifty years”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. KÄHLER, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission* [1908], Ch. Kaiser, München 1971, 190.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Church in the New Testament* [1961], Seabury Press, New York 1965.

<sup>3</sup> M. HENGEL, “Die Ursprünge der christlichen Mission”, *New Testament Studies*, vol. 18, n. 1, 1971, 38.

<sup>4</sup> “The early Christianity was a missionary Church. Her proclamation, her doctrine and her practice had a missionary dimension. In reality, in the New Testament, there is no reference to the notion of ‘mission’, but this absence does not change the fact that the first Christianity, in all its existence and in all its activity,

Although several authors claim that the missionary activity of Jesus is not intended to form a new Church but to renew Israel,<sup>5</sup> they all share the certainty that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by its eschatological character, definitively determines the ultimate meaning of human history, with the mission having the task of bearing witness to them. The result is a multiform presentation of Jesus' mission, which is the inauguration of His Kingdom. The biblical texts recall the formation of the disciples, "fishers of men", but also focus on them being with Jesus, sharing His journey, adhering to His word, and to a supranational openness. This multiplicity has not been missed by the New Testament evangelists, whose work features a variety of facets and teachings. Matthew, in particular, puts forward a vision of the mission whereby the fidelity to the Gospel is not similar to the fidelity to a doctrine, but to Jesus Himself who, even though ascended to heaven, always remains with us. For Luke's Acts, the mission is an "ecclesial" commitment, guided by the Spirit and organized around the testimony of the Apostles, often in a context of adversity and suffering.

Among the theologians and the scholars of the New Testament,<sup>6</sup> Hahn observes that the coming of Christ establishes the mission as the service of the Church, opening the way to the eschatological event of salvation,<sup>7</sup> while according to David Bosch "the New Testament has to be understood as a missionary document".<sup>8</sup> Therefore,

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was determined by this reality. If at some time the Church's missionary service seemed natural, it was only in the first fifty years" (F. HAHN, *Mission in the New Testament* [1965], SCM Press, London 1981). See also K. KERTELGE (ed.), *Mission im Neuen Testament*, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1982.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. PESCH, "Voraussetzungen und Anfänge der urchristlichen Mission", in K. KERTELGE (ed.), *Mission im Neuen Testament*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Another scholar who deserves to be mentioned in this context is Eckhard J. Schnabel, the author of the two volume-work *Early Christian Mission*, focused on *Jesus and the Twelve*, and *Jesus, Paul and the Early Church*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove 2004. In the first volume, Schnabel distinguishes Jesus's mission to Israel (209-262) from the mission of the twelve Apostles (263-380). Moreover, as far as the life of the Church is concerned, he distinguishes a Church's mission limited to the Jewish world as ultimate horizon (381-542), from a Church that expands its mission to the ends of the world (543-ss). The latter is the kind of Church advocated for by the author. See also E.J. SCHNABEL, *Urchristliche Mission*, Brockhaus, Wuppertal 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. F. HAHN, *Mission in the New Testament*.

<sup>8</sup> D.J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 1991, 54. The entire first chapter (15-55) of

it remains to be understood when, why, and how the mission lost its centrality. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explains the reason for the marginalization of the mission in theological studies as follows: “Many exegetes do not presently perceive the history of early primitive Christianity as the story of a propagandistic-missionary endeavor. Instead they consider the New Testament writings primarily as documents of an inner-Christian doctrinal struggle and they understand early Christian history mainly as a ‘confessional’ history, as a struggle between different Christian parties and theologians”.<sup>9</sup>

In a few dense pages, Hendrikus Berkhof believes that the ultimate cause of this approach is found in the ecclesial style.<sup>10</sup> By identifying the Church with the historical form it adopted in a given era and in a given society, spreading the Gospel to the whole world was certainly considered a duty of the Church, but what pertained to the history and life of the peoples to be evangelized were of no cultural and religious interest.

The geographical discoveries of the 16<sup>th</sup> century brought along a remarkable missionary effort also in the theoretical field. Notwithstanding this progress, it failed to fill the already existing abyss between mission and ecclesiastical theology. In addition, no real change occurred not even when missionary groups were set up to create a ‘science of the mission’ in the first-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Centered on the role of the missionary, that attempt had an approach more justificatory and practical, rather than theoretical. It was only after World War II, with the establishment of the World Council of Churches and the Second Vatican Council, that a really new phase began.

Mission cannot be understood as a practical tool for something else: the salvation of souls, the *plantatio ecclesiae* or the Christianization of the world. As a fundamental act of God, the mission is a value in itself. It is in fact so central that the Church itself, and its

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Bosch’s work – titled purposely “Reflections on the New Testament as a Missionary Document” – is dedicated to support this conclusion.

<sup>9</sup> E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA (ed.), *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 1976, 1.

<sup>10</sup> H. BERKHOF, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: The Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures, 1963-1964*, John Knox Press, Richmond, VA 1964 (Italian edition: *Lo Spirito Santo e la Chiesa: la dottrina dello Spirito Santo*, Jaca Book, Milano 1971, 38-40).

life, “would never be known as mighty acts of God without this last one: the movement of the missionary Spirit. [...] Of its ongoing accomplishment we are witnesses”.<sup>11</sup> Berkhof, therefore, draws the conclusion that it is not the mission that is an instrument of the Church, but the Church that is an instrument of the mission initiated by Christ and that continues through the work of His Spirit. With regard to what is usually referred to as ecclesiocentrism, Walter Kasper affirmed that an ecclesiology built from pneumatology views the Church primarily “as an event, in which the truth, freedom and justice which entered the world with Christ remain alive in history and are constantly given new life. The Church is then where the reality of Jesus, through the Spirit, is made present”.<sup>12</sup> Without the mission, the Church ends-up folding herself up into sterile introversion.

In this work, I will try to develop this discourse in four chapters. The first, will have a strong historical focus and analyze the development of western mission, which is characteristic of modernity, and illustrate its limits; the second, will address theological issues, furthering the elaboration of a different theology of mission and explaining its salient features; the third, will try to translate these theses into the life of the Church, so as to shed light on its pastoral commitment, while the fourth will examine Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* as the main expression of this journey.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 35 (Italian edition).

<sup>12</sup> W. KASPER, *An Introduction to Christian Faith*, Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, Mainz 1972, 139 (Italian edition: *Introduzione alla fede*, Queriniana, Brescia 1972, 147). All texts, sentences, and expressions in languages other than English were translated by PMU and reviewed by Urbaniana University Press, both from original and non-original sources.



## Chapter 1

# The Post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation and the Church's Missions

From the second-half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, geographic discoveries determined a widening of the world's boundaries, ushering in a new era in the history of Europe and Christianity. On the one hand, the Europeans' conscience took the form of colonialism – which regulated their relations with the rest of the world for centuries. On the other, in addition to common terms such as westernization or colonization, some authors – including Tzvetan Todorov<sup>1</sup> – introduced the notion of 'otherness', which is also crucial when deciphering the events that set in motion a complex exchange between cultures on the global level.<sup>2</sup>

This exchange did not take place without affecting the European and Christian identity significantly. The Europeans found themselves flung into a vast universe in the making, where the encounter with new lands and peoples raised problems that could not be addressed only by referring to an understanding of the social order grounded on the Christian religion. These new lands and peoples

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. T. TODOROV, *Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, Harper & Row, New York 1984; E. GARIN, "Alla scoperta del 'diverso': i selvaggi americani e i saggi cinesi", in ID., *Rinascite e rivoluzioni. Movimenti culturali dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1976; E. DUSSEL, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*, Humanities Press, New Jersey, NJ 1996. Dussel describes a dialectical evolution between the discovery and concealment of the "other".

<sup>2</sup> To understand the newness of this approach, it is sufficient to compare it with the traditional appeal to the crusades and to the use of force against the Muslims, as well as the endless confrontation with the Jews; the behavior during the Hispanic conquest takes inspiration from the same background of ideas. With its motivations and fruits, the *reconquista* was able to engage more easily the social basis of Moors, prompting the Spanish to travel and meet people who did not oppose them. The Franciscans will find the basis for their project of an *ire ad infideles* with peaceful ways and an evangelical style.

required to be properly studied and embraced, as the only way to defining a successful approach to interaction. While the act of seeking how to figure out the world is surely as old as mythology and philosophy, this era required new roads and paths to travel on: “The key issue was to understand what was necessary to observe and how to describe it. In this regard, the formulas were as numerous as there were travelers”.<sup>3</sup> The missionaries were on the frontline of this increasing attention to the new realities and very much committed to deepening their knowledge of them.<sup>4</sup>

Among the various missionary organizations, the Jesuits stood out for their achievements. I will mention two of them: José De Acosta<sup>5</sup> (1539/1540-1600) and Daniello Bartoli<sup>6</sup> (1607-1685). Although belonging to a period successive to the earliest stage of the discoveries, they were perfectly aware of the nature and significance of their work.

The underlying intention driving these missionaries and their popularizers was religious. Faced with people who did not know Je-

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<sup>3</sup> A. PROSPERI, “Il missionario”, in R. VILLARI (ed.), *L'uomo barocco*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1991, 184.

<sup>4</sup> Cardinal Marcello Cervini asked the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, through St. Ignatius of Loyola, the following question: “Como andan vestidos, de qué es su comer y beber, y las camas en qué duermen, y que costa haz a unos dellos. Tambien, quanto a la región, donde está, en qué clima...” (Letter dated July 5, 1553: *Monumenta Ignatiana. Epistolae V*, Roma 1965, 165).

<sup>5</sup> De Acosta's work and thought had a substantial impact on the shaping of the Jesuits' approach to the mission, as it will be illustrated more broadly in subsequent pages.

<sup>6</sup> Daniello Bartoli, the historian of the Jesuits, has left us an impressive mass of data. Without ever leaving his little room, but by working on firsthand letters and manuscripts, he offered an accurate account of the missionary journeys and experiences. According to Bartoli, it was not just a matter of publishing historical sources but communicating an experience. Therefore, through a task of selection and censorship, he aimed at arousing certain emotions in his readers to bring them closer to the apostolic enthusiasm for the spread of the Gospel. By way of example, we can mention the volumes regarding the Asian continent: D. BARTOLI, *Dell'Historia della Compagnia di Gesù*. I: *L'Asia*. II: *Il Giappone*. III: *La Cina*. The first two volumes were printed by Ignatio de' Lazzari, Rome 1653, 1660, while the third is the work of the Stamperia del Varese, Rome 1663. The work was republished several times both entirely and its individual volumes. One of the most important editions is the one in three volumes published by Giacinto Marietti, Torino 1825.

sus Christ, they had the impression of going back to the very beginning at the time when Christ entrusted the evangelization of the world to the Apostles. All their efforts were thus aimed at converting these peoples, incarnating in them the view of life and the language of the Christian faith. Even where the mission favored submission to the colonial authority, it recalled forcefully the limits of this submission and laid the basis for it to be overcome in the equal dignity of the children of God. While it is true that many missionaries adapted themselves to a pragmatic relation with the colonial world, not rarely subordinating to it, many times they also came into conflict with the political power, precisely because they upheld demands of the evangelization. Indeed, by delving into this aspect of missionary history, one becomes aware that the relationship between the mission and these peoples was not just instrumental, but was an instance of real and proper cultural mediation.

## 1. The Missionary Background of the Tridentine Reformation

It should be borne in mind that the demands of mission were ultimately secondary in the life of the European Church, which was more focused and concerned with the division between Catholics and Protestants, and the rise of humanism and a kind of scientific mindset whereby knowledge progressively detached itself from religion. In addition, since Europe was promoting the evangelization of the discovered territories based on its set of ideas and convictions, it is not possible to separate the history of evangelization from the events occurring at religious level on the European continent. It should be acknowledged that the Church as a whole did not have a clear perception of what was happening. Among the few who did, two Camaldolese monks and former ambassadors of the Republic of Venice – Vincenzo Quirini and Paolo Giustiniani – sent Pope Leo X in 1513 a *Libellus* exhorting him to give universal scope to a ministry that was too closely bound to diplomatic and political interests.<sup>7</sup> After singling out three kinds of peoples –

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<sup>7</sup> “B. Pauli Iustiniani et Petri Quirini Eremitarum Camaldulensium Libellus ad Leonem X Pontificem Maximum”, in *Annales Camaldulenses ordinis Sancti Benedicti*, t. IX, Monasterii Sancti Michaelis de Muriano, Venetiis 1773, 612-719. Translation in S.M. BEALL – J.J. SCHMITT (eds.), *Libellus: Addressed to Leo X, Su-*

among whom it was easy to recognize the newly-known populations, the Muslims as well as the Orthodox and Protestant Churches that had split from Rome<sup>8</sup> – they argued that “the inhabitants of those very far-distant parts of the world, in truth, do not honor Christ because they do not remember ever having heard of Christ’s name until this day”.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, their invitation to the Pontiff “to think about their salvation, not less but indeed more than the conversion of the Jews, because it should not escape you that they are our brothers [...] and, above all, because if they have committed something for which they are to be pitied more, it is that they act out of mere ignorance and not perfidious obstinacy and, for this reason, their conversion will be easier”.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, the invitation to a missionary commitment animated “not by the reasoning of the philosophers, not by the power of our teachers, but by the force inherent to the Scripture”, so that “the light of Truth and the Holy Gospel will shine in them”.<sup>11</sup> In the end, they expressed their wish to the Pope in the fol-

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*preme Pontiff* by Blessed Paolo Giustiniani & Pietro Querini, *Hermits of Camaldoli*. Latin & English, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, WI 2017. As for the Italian translation, see G. BIANCHINI (ed.), *Lettera al Papa – Libellus ad Leonem X (1513)*, Artioli, Modena 1995. Interesting comments are the following: H. JEDIN, “Contarini und Camaldoli”, *Archivio italiano per la storia della piet *, vol. 1, 1953, 51-117; G. ALBERIGO, “Vita attiva e vita contemplativa in un’esperienza cristiana del XVI secolo”, *Studi veneziani*, vol. 16, 1974, 177-225; S. TRAMONTIN, “Un programma di riforma della Chiesa per il Concilio Lateranense V: il Libellus ad Leonem X dei veneziani P. Giustiniani e V. Quirini”, in A. NIERO, A. ALTAN, S. TRAMONTIN, B. BERTOLI, *Venezia e i concili*, Quaderni del Laurentianum, Venezia 1962, 67-93.

<sup>8</sup> As for the Protestants, Quirini and Giustiniani said that “some men are so radically outside of the religious practice of the Church that obviously they have never been in it. On the other hand, those who used to be in the area of the Church, but now are completely outside the righteous faith, should be judged differently than the previous ones. However, those who seem to welcome some aspects of the Christian truth are much more numerous” (G. BIANCHINI (ed.), *Lettera al Papa – Libellus ad Leonem X (1513)*, 12).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19. The two authors go as far as to envisage the use of the financial resources of the Church to entice the poor into converting: “If they want to convert to the faith in Christ, surely the things they need for living and clothing will be obtained from the Church’s resources” (*Ibid.*, 17).

lowing way: “We are of the opinion that all your attention should be turned to these situations”.<sup>12</sup>

The concerns of the two Camaldolese monks are to be placed in the context of the broader debate on the role of the Church in the newly discovered lands, involving prominent theologians among the members of the clergy and religious Orders. The evangelization beyond Europe did not catch the full attention of the Church, as entreated by Quirini and Giustiniani. However, issues relating to the mission would be tackled in earnest by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the Valladolid debate (two months in 1550 and 1551), which brought about a degree of convergence of views on the ecclesiastic approach to be adopted in the new worlds.

### 1.1 The Council of Trent

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1536, with the Bull *Ad Dominici gregis curam*, Paul III convened a Council in Mantua scheduled to begin on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1537. The Council was deserted by the Protestant delegates and ended in failure. Other meetings were held afterward but to no avail, paving the way to the Council of Trent. The venue was selected because it was politically acceptable to the European powers. At the same time, the Bull of Indiction also reached the bishops of the new Churches, stirring up great enthusiasm.<sup>13</sup>

Two letters by Juan de Zumárraga, the Archbishop of Mexico, reveal the expectations that had been raised with regard to the Council: the first, dated 5<sup>th</sup> February 1537, is addressed to the Council of the Indies, while the second, dated 13<sup>th</sup> February 1537, to Emperor Charles V. In both letters, Zumárraga expresses his wish to take part in the Council of Trent and to this end, he had consulted “personas

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>13</sup> P. DE LETURIA, *Relaciones entre la Santa Sede e Hispano-América, 1493-1835. I: Epoca del Real Patronato, 1493-1800*, Universidad Gregoriana – Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela, Roma – Caracas 1959, 405-509. See also ID., “Perché la nascente chiesa ispano-americana non fu rappresentata a Trento?”, *Il concilio di Trento. Rivista commemorativa del IV centenario*, vol. 1, 1942, 35-43; F. MATEOS, “Ecos de América en Trento”, *Revista de Indias*, vol. 6, 1945, 559-605. Regarding the consequences of the Council in America, the following work is very useful: R. LEBROC, “Proyección tridentina en América”, *Misionalia Hispánica*, vol. 26, 1969, 129-207.

de conciencia” if they felt he should take part in the future Council. The response he received from these persons of conscience was positive, for they felt that “muchas necesidades espirituales que de cada día se ofrecen y al presente hay en estas tierras tan remotas de donde se halla el remedio dellas”.

Zumárraga intended to act in coordination with the civil authority, and paid a visit to the viceroy, his majesty’s representative, for a more reasoned opinion. Nevertheless, the viceroy dampened his enthusiasm because war had broken out with France and because participating in the Council would have forced the Archbishop to an unsustainable absence from his Church of at least two to three years. Faced with the negative opinion of the viceroy, Zumárraga decided to forego the journey, seeking instead to appoint proxies to represent him. According to some sources, he delegated four bishops, namely Cardinal Francisco de Quiñones, the Bishop of San Domingo, and two religious people who were about to return to Europe. While news regarding the last of these three delegates are available in the Spanish archives, canonical records do not provide clear proof on whether Zumárraga was ultimately successful in his intentions to be represented at Trent.

There were several reasons ruling out the American bishops’ participation in the Council. The main reason was the structure of *royal patronage* which was turning into a form of *royal Vicariate* as the tool of ordinary and extraordinary action of ecclesial life. Lack of knowledge of the problems faced by and the conditions of the Church in that part of the world justified the application of this ecclesial policy and even compounded its effects. It should also be considered that too long an absence from the diocese did not help the cause of the bishops. These reasons were also upheld by those who took part in the Council, which tackled the issues relating to these faraway communities only in a marginal way. This is confirmed by the opening remarks that the Bishop of Bitonto, Cornelio Musso, delivered on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1545, and by the Decree on Justification. The fact that the Council of Trent developed a strategy revolving around the preaching of the Gospel, the evangelical content, and the ministries that proclaimed it, was most certainly a key factor; however, the text does not contain any indication or provision concerning mission countries.

In the fourth session of 8<sup>th</sup> April 1545, the Council stated that “in the Church errors must be removed and the purity of the Gospel

must be preserved”, and the understanding of this was regarded “as the source of all saving truth and norms of conduct”.<sup>14</sup> For this purpose, the fifth session on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1546 published the Decree *Super lectione et praedicatione*. Described as a “saving ministry”, preaching is an obligation and commits to “teaching what everyone must know to be saved”, and to “denouncing [...] the vices to keep away from and the virtues to be practiced in order to avoid eternal punishment and attain heavenly glory”.<sup>15</sup> This exaltation of preaching, in itself aimed at regaining faith for those who had lost it and consolidating Christian life in those who remained faithful, generated a spiritual and pastoral climate as the basis of a new apostolic strategy.<sup>16</sup> The points mentioned above – *Evangelium in Ecclesia* and *evangelium fons omnis et salutaris veritatis et morum disciplina* – became the cornerstone of Christian and apostolic life. The path leading to an authentic ecclesial renewal and to a new world missionary responsibility had to go through this juncture.

Some seventy years later, this relation between Gospel and mission was once again reiterated in the circular letter to the *Nuncios* of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1622 announcing the establishment of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*. The letter expressed ideas that had already been circulating in the Church for some time, maintaining with clarity that there were two ways of taking “care of the Catholic faith. [...] One is to preserve it in the faithful by forcing them to firmly uphold it through the infliction of punishment; the other is to spread and propagate it among the infidels”.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Church singled out two ways of proceeding: the judicial, by instituting the office of the Holy Inquisition, and the moral and rather apostolic, where the workers in the missions among the neediest peoples are

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<sup>14</sup> H. DENZINGER, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, P. HÜNERMANN, H. HOPING, R. FASTIGGI, A. ENGLUND NASH (eds.), Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA 2012, n. 1501; G. ALBERIGO (ed.), *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Dehoniane, Bologna 1991, 669.

<sup>15</sup> “Decreto ‘Super lectione et praedicatione’”, n. 11, in G. ALBERIGO (ed.), *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 663.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. M. MORÁN – J.A. GALLEGÓ, “Il predicatore”, in R. VILLARI (ed.), *L'uomo barocco*, 139-177.

<sup>17</sup> Circular letter of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* dated January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1622. The text is available in J. METZLER (ed.), *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, vol. 3/2, Herder, Rome-Freiburg-Vienna 1976, 656-658.

constantly addressed. The first way involved the use of force and was applied inside the Church, whereas the second was aimed externally and was the gentle or the ‘apostolic’ way.

Adriano Prospero described it as the missionary ideal of the 17<sup>th</sup> century: “The non-violent exercise of the conquest required the building of a didactic relation in which teaching implied the affirmation of the superiority of one’s knowledge”.<sup>18</sup> Before the method of gentleness or persuasion became well-established, the Church had to deal with a different view advocating the legitimacy of the use of force also in the missions. This came down in history as the Valladolid debate.

## 1.2 The Valladolid Debate

This debate<sup>19</sup> took place in 1550 at the *Colegio de San Gregorio* in Valladolid, when Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566) and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490-1573) discussed publicly the thorny issues raised by the missionary evangelization of the time.

The premises to this disputation most likely dated back to the prophetic cry of Antonio de Montesinos († 1545), when the Spanish missionary proclaimed in 1511 the humanity of the indigenous peoples arguing that Christians must behave towards them in full compliance with the Gospel and the command to love one’s

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<sup>18</sup> A. PROSPERI, “Il missionario”, 186.

<sup>19</sup> This debate took place in two different moments of approximately one month each. The first begun on August 15<sup>th</sup> and then between August and September of 1550; the second after mid-April of 1551. See A. LOSADA, “Controversy between Sepúlveda and Las Casas”, in J. FRIEDE – B. KEEN (eds.), *Bartolomé de las Casas in History: Towards an Understanding of the Man and His Work*, Northern Illinois University Press, Champaign, IL 1971, 279-309; L. HANKE, *All Mankind is One. A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda on the Religious and Intellectual Capacity of American Indians*, Northern Illinois University Press, Champaign, IL 1994; B.L. HERNANDEZ, “The Las Casas-Sepúlveda Controversy 1550-1551”, *Ex Post Facto: Journal of the History Students at San Francisco State University*, vol. 10, 2001, 95-104. See also the collection of some texts in B. DE LAS CASAS – J. GINÉS DE SEPÚLVEDA, *La controversia sugli indios*, S. DI LISO (ed.), Edizioni di Pagina, Bari 2007. For an analysis of the debate, see F. FERNÁNDEZ BUEY, “A proposito della controversia tra Ginés de Sepúlveda e Bartolomé de Las Casas”, *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, vol. 2, 1992, 153-187.



neighbor. This appeal decried the abuses faced by the indigenous peoples, calling the Church to rethink the way it performed her preaching and missionary action. The debate at Valladolid also provided an early assessment of the work carried out by missionaries and how it should be further pursued. The debate concerning the Jews and Muslims of Spain who had been forced to choose between conversion or exile had now shifted to the evangelizing mission in the colonies and its key issue regarding the precise determination of the indigenous people's world and the legitimacy of using force.

In considering the indigenous peoples as cannibals devoted to diabolical human sacrifices, Sepúlveda justified the use of force and violence as a preliminary propaedeutic step for any subsequent evangelization. Based on a view of a society that advocated the right of fathers over their children, of husbands over their wives, of kings over his subjects, of masters over their servants, Sepúlveda concluded that "the domination of perfection over imperfection, of force over weakness"<sup>20</sup> was natural. Consequently, he viewed the dominance of virtuous and upright men over those who were not endowed with such virtues in keeping with natural law. On the other hand, Bartolomé de Las Casas regarded the indigenous peoples as created in God's image and likeness, and endowed as much as anyone else with reason, will, and freedom. While it is true that everyone needs to be introduced and guided into the problems of existence by others born before, in his opinion it was impossible for an entire nation to be incapable of governing itself and being led to ethically good behavior. As for the use of force (Lk 14:23), Las Casas legitimized it when dealing with sinful peoples who had never heard the proclamation of faith.

Clearly, the debate had expanded from the legal question of whether or not the indigenous peoples were subjects of law, to the anthropological debate regarding their nature and position with respect to God. This matter exceeded the strict boundaries of the de-

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<sup>20</sup> J. GINÉS DE SEPÚLVEDA, *Democrates segundo o de las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios*, vol. 1, A. LOSADA (ed.), Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 1984, 20. An anthology of this literature, including Las Casas and Sepúlveda, is included in the following volume: G. GLIOZZI (ed.), *La scoperta dei selvaggi. Antropologia e colonialismo da Colombo a Diderot*, Principato, Milano 1971.

bate, for the clash here was between the prophetic value of the truth, which the Scriptures understand as written by God for man who was created in His image, and the responsibility of human history that called for conduct consistent with the institutions and their concrete development. Sepúlveda believed hierarchy, not equality, was the natural state of every human society, thereby shaping a way of thinking that appeared as the expression of the social and political conscience of the vanquishers. On the contrary, while acknowledging an obvious, incontestable diversity of traditions and customs, Las Casas maintained that these peoples possessed the same human dignity as anyone else, and that the use of force to the detriment of the innocent was contrary to Christ's teaching and a crime against humanity and God. For this reason, he proposed evangelical gentleness and not the use of force.

This disputation brought to the surface the problems that were affecting the mission: the principal issue at stake was the type of humanity incarnated by these peoples and, consequently, the kind of evangelization – whether *evangelic* or based on force – that applied to them. No one went as far as to formulate conjectures on the real significance of this encounter/clash between European identity and the otherness of the indigenous, and what it actually meant for the humanity of the time and the future. Awareness of any form of interculturality was lacking. However, it was obvious that any significant anthropological and sociocultural change – today we are experiencing a radical one – called for a resetting of the mission. At that time, and in that context, it was above all the Jesuits who tackled this issue in full earnest, making the new world issue the foundation and specific trait of their missionary commitment.

## 2. The Modern Mission and its Different Interpretations

The Jesuits arrived relatively late on the missionary scene bringing a viewpoint that was not in line with the missionary sensitivity of those who preceded them.<sup>21</sup> For many people of the era, the discov-

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<sup>21</sup> On the mission of the Jesuits, see G. IMBRUGLIA, “Il missionario gesuita nel Cinquecento e i ‘selvaggi’ americani”, in F. CUTURI (ed.), *In nome di Dio. L'impresa missionaria di fronte all'alterità*, Meltemi, Roma 2004, 61-73; G. IMBRUGLIA, “Ideali di civilizzazione. La Compagnia di Gesù e le missioni (1550-1560)”, in

ery of the new world carried a profound meaning. In the *Libro de las Profecias*, Christopher Columbus commented that when he beheld the new lands, *Revelation* 21:1 regarding “a new heaven and a new earth” came to his mind overwhelmingly, giving him the strong feeling that he was the envoy the prophet Isaiah had spoken about.<sup>22</sup> The idea of being chosen by Divine Providence to fulfill the ancient prophecies lay at the root of the reflections that accompanied him in the last phase of his life. Sustained by the texts of Gioacchino da Fiore, of whom Columbus was a zealous reader, he interpreted history as a sacred history, as the work of God and his envoys. Consequently, the novelty inherent in the discovery of the new world required to be interpreted in Messianic terms. The “end years of the world” were approaching.

## 2.1 The Millenarian Interpretation of the ‘New World’

The notion of a new world announced by the scriptures was fairly widespread in the West at that time. It went back to the thesis of Gioacchino da Fiore and spread through spiritual Franciscanism. Therefore, this idea was not just simply the outcome of Christopher Columbus’ imagination, but was circulating widely in certain social quarters: one world was ending and a new one was starting. As Girolamo Imbruglia observes, “while the idea of having reached Asia through the West was immediately refuted, on the other hand, the millenarian belief pervaded and inflamed the entire sixteenth century.”<sup>23</sup>

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A. PROSPERI – W. REINHARD (eds.), *Il nuovo mondo nella coscienza italiana e tedesca del Cinquecento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1993, 287-308; G. DI FIORE, “Strategie di evangelizzazione nell’Oriente asiatico tra Cinquecento e Settecento”, in G. MARTINA – U. DOVERE (eds.), *Il cammino della evangelizzazione. Problemi storiografici*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2001, 97-162.

<sup>22</sup> C. COLUMBUS, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America, 1492–1493*, University of Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma City, OK 1991. See also ID., *Book of Prophecies: Reproduction of the Original Manuscript with English Translation*, Ed. CLIE, Barcelona 1991. The latter text – written after his third journey, when he had already fallen into disgrace – focuses on Columbus’ cultural premises, as it is well explained by R. RUSCONI, “Il ‘Libro de las profecias’ di Cristoforo Colombo: retroterra culturale e consapevolezza di uno scopritore”, *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, vol. 29, 1993, 269-303.

<sup>23</sup> G. IMBRUGLIA, “Il missionario gesuita nel Cinquecento e i ‘selvaggi’ americani”, in F. CUTURI (ed.), *In nome di Dio. L’impresa missionaria di fronte all’alterità*, 63.

Human history was then understood as permeated by a force capable of overturning all models. The aim of this was to urge, as in the time of Christ, a close connection between individual destiny and the salvation of humanity, between the proclamation of the Gospel and social and ecclesial regeneration.

For this reason, alongside adventurers of all kinds, we come across committed people in the newly-discovered lands who are dominated by religious and apocalyptic ideas, who dream of a new world and do their very best to make it happen. Following this logic, the new historical situation could be grasped only by profoundly rethinking the originality of the Christian message and its relationship with the world.<sup>24</sup> The geographic discoveries of the time revitalized the evangelizing drive and gave new impetus to previous models that had been forgotten during the Middle Ages when Christendom was besieged by the Islamic world: it was at this time that the notion of ‘omnes gentes’ was significantly reassessed.

In this scenario, the papacy’s silence was indeed a matter of grave concern. According to the complex relationship linking the papacy with the Iberian sovereigns, the political authorities were in charge of the evangelization, which was the ideological justification for and legal guarantee of the conquest itself. By viewing this intricate issue as a confrontation between institutional powers, there were some who lamented the absence of a worldwide evangelization framework and a pontifical ‘mission’. It was an absence that led to neglecting the pressing questions raised by Rom 10:14-15, and to leaving the Church’s mission to the discretion of sovereigns and to the privileges of the religious Orders. In fact, the most significant testimonies of commitment and zeal came from the Franciscans and the Dominicans.

Two poignant examples were the *Obediencia* and the *Instruccion*, the two writings that friar Francisco de los Angeles de Quiñones, General Minister of Franciscans, handed to twelve friars in 1523 – *the twelve Apostles* – who were about to leave for the American continent to spread the Gospel there.<sup>25</sup> According to the spiritual cur-

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<sup>24</sup> See in particular G. BAUDOT, *Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chroniclers of Mexican Civilization (1520-1569)*, University Press of Colorado, Niwot, CO 1995.

<sup>25</sup> “Transcripcion literal de la Obediencia e Instruccion a los doce Apostoles de Mejico, segun el Manuscrito Vindobonense 1600”, Congreso de Franciscanos Extremeños en el Nuevo Mundo, Monasterio de Santa Maria de Guadalupe,

rent Francisco de los Angeles belonged to, the unification of the world was imminent and awaited an ecclesial renewal that would be the outcome of the government of an angelical Pope. Quiñones' action developed within this framework and was inspired by the parable of the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16). He compared his friars to the workers of the eleventh hour (Mt 20:6), concluding his instructions as follows: "You are called by the Father of the Family to go to the vineyard".<sup>26</sup> As instruments of Providence, the friars had to follow the example of Francis, who in turn had followed the example of Christ. The twelve were like the Apostles because they were called to complete the apostolic work of bringing salvation to humanity and achieve the accomplishment of history ushering in the sovereignty of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven. Hence, their 'evangelical' choice of a mission characterized by humility, piety, and spirituality.<sup>27</sup>

This interpretation and practice of mission regarded the missionary as a 'type' of Apostle in the service of a providential design, and reflected a need for change and renewal that found its truest meaning in the religious unification of the world and in the beginning of the joyful millennium, and the end of times.

## 2.2 The Jesuits' Concept of Mission

The Jesuits' concept was different: they did not limit themselves to joining evangelical life from witness to preaching, but they pro-

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1986, 415-434 (*Obediencia*: 417-425; *Instrucción*: 427-434). See a comment in J. MESEGUER FERNÁNDEZ, "Contenido misionológico de la *Obediencia e Instrucción* de Fr. Francisco de los Ángeles a los Doce Apóstoles de Méjico", *The Americas*, vol. 11, 1955, 473-500.

<sup>26</sup> H. THOMAS, *The Conquest of Mexico*, Hutchinson, London 1993, 586.

<sup>27</sup> For this millenarian readings of the mission, see R. RICARD, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico. An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain: 1523-1572*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 1982; J. LEDDY PHELAN, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 1970. Strongly motivated on the religious level, these missionaries – think of Bernardino of Sahagun – were amazed by the existence of peoples who did not know Jesus Christ, and tied these discoveries and the evangelization of these peoples to His return. The missionary preaching was thus an opportunity to revive the life of the first Christianity and to begin the new skies and the new land that the scriptures speak about. Hence, their spiritual commitment to spiritual conquest.

posed to transform the social life of those peoples through the proclamation of the Gospel. In fact, they were set on transforming society as a whole.<sup>28</sup> By making a distinction between *infidelitas* and social life, they began research on the cultural and social reality of those peoples, adapting the missionary strategy to the different situations. This project included discarding a millenarian conception based on the imminence of a future of peace and unity, calling for the acceptance of a historical time that had not been fully shaped as yet. The goal of the mission therefore shifted away from the proclamation of the Gospel and the struggle against evil, to the adoption of a strategy aimed at making faith the criterion of an overall reorganization of social relations.

In short, the Jesuits were delineating a cultural encounter with peoples who, for history and depth of thought, could sustain the exchange. Although framed within the context of the superiority of Western culture, this missionary perspective called for the development of those peoples, while the mission and the Christian communities established in the new territories were to some extent the anticipation of the ultimate goal to be achieved. This would be the modern Jesuit mission, structured in a different way compared to previous conceptions. Far from the assumption that history was about to end and from the expectation of a new spiritual age, the Jesuits took up a historical responsibility and made themselves available for any destination or task decided by the authority.<sup>29</sup> Very conscientious about the character and history of the people they came into contact with, the Jesuits strongly focused on education, favoring the maturation of a personal path in the quest for God's will through consistent commitment. The Jesuits wanted to live historically, fully committed to the unconditional choice of God.

The spiritual root of this perspective can probably be sought in the meditations held in the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises* on

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. J.A. GAGLIANO – C.E. RONAN, *Jesuit Encounters in the New World. Jesuit Chroniclers, Geographers, Educators, and Missionaries in the Americas, 1549-1767*, Biblioteca Instituti Historici S.I., Rome 1997; N.P. CUSHNER, *Soldiers of God: The Jesuits in Colonial America: 1565-1767*, Language Communications, Buffalo, NY 2002; G. IMBRUGLIA, *The Jesuit-Missions of Paraguay and a Cultural History of Utopia (1568-1789)*, Brill, Leiden 2017.

<sup>29</sup> See J.W. O'MALLEY, *The First Jesuits*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1995.

the two captains and standards. It was a choice that enhanced the demands for modern subjectivity and free personal decision, although it was a commitment that was part of an action determined by faith.<sup>30</sup> The concrete basis for a missionary translation of this project was provided by José De Acosta in *De promulgando Evangelio apud Barbaros sive de procuranda Indorum salute*, published in 1588. His work offered an outline of differentiated understanding of those peoples,<sup>31</sup> concluding that they were very distant from those who inhabited the European world. This diversity was the reason for the failure of many missionary efforts, and he raised the question as to whether or not new methods of evangelizing were needed. De Acosta answered this question positively and argued that if the mission wanted to be successful it had to adapt the preaching to the different situations, so as to educate people properly and help them rise to ever higher levels of humanity and civilization. The methodology to be used, either gentleness or force, depended on how these peoples reacted to the Gospel. Both approaches had the same goal – salvation – and the choice to use the one or the other had to be based on criteria as objective as possible.

Since divine things cannot be taught to those who do not understand human things, De Acosta wrote that it was fundamental for these populations to learn “a ser hombres y después a ser cristianos, principio que es tan capital que de el depende todo el negocio de la salvación o de la ruina cierta de las almas”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See 136-155 of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. These numbers are applicable to the universal conquest outlined in 93 to which corresponds the radical form of commitment of 97-98. This interpretation will gradually lead to being wary of the thirst for martyrdom because it is necessary to serve the Lord without hastening one's end.

<sup>31</sup> De Acosta singled out three groups of peoples or three different ways of living. The first was represented by the Caribbean and African peoples, who had no juridical-political organization and thus no body of laws and a clear structure of authority; they were placed at the bottom of a virtual scale of humanity. The second group was represented by the Mesoamerican peoples like the Aztecs, the Incas or the Maya; they were people who had a notable juridical and scientific knowledge and remarkable institutions, but they did not have an equally developed philosophy and writing. Finally, the third group was represented by the major Asian civilizations, such as the Chinese, Indian, Japanese and Vietnamese ones, with an abundant knowledge of philosophical, ethical, and religious problems.

<sup>32</sup> “To be men and then to be Christians, a principle that is so important that

The result was a new, alternative conception of the missionary and his action. To achieve this he was required to encapsulate the following different aspects: his personal choice of service to God; an ecclesial understanding of preaching committed to making the Gospel the source of salvific truth and new moral life; an anthropology of the believer intended as the one responsible for his life and social context.<sup>33</sup> This effort to achieve a synthesis was the main reason for the success of the missionary model conceived by De Acosta. Other approaches drew inspiration from it, especially with regard to the importance given to the knowledge of the indigenous populations, language and character, or to the application of a precise methodology.

In other terms, this methodology was all about ‘adaptation’. In keeping with 1 Cor 9:19-23 and the example of St. Paul, the Jesuits agreed “to make themselves all things to all men in order to save some at any cost”. Obviously, a project of this kind raised more than one question. What did ‘adaptation’ really mean to those who held religious ideas different from the Christian ones? Where did the legitimate respect for forms, rules or ‘protocol’ end, and where did content breakdown occur? In short, was it adaptation or simulation? Based on Gal 2:11-13 – a text about St. Peter’s change in behavior in Antioch after the arrival of some brothers from Judea – it was concluded that ‘adaptation’ could contain a basic and acceptable degree of ‘simulation’.<sup>34</sup> In this regard, the General Superior of the

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the whole endeavor of salvation or the certain ruin of souls depends on” (J. DE ACOSTA, *Obras. De procuranda Indorum salute* [1588]. I. *Pacificación y colonización*. II. *Educación y evangelización*, Atlas, Madrid 1954, 491).

<sup>33</sup> A. DE EGAÑA, “La visión humanística del indio americano en los primeros jesuitas peruanos (1568-1576)”, *Analecta Gregoriana*, vol. 52, 1954, 291-306. The *reducciones* also fall within this perspective. In this regard, see A. ECHANOVE, “Origen y evolución de la idea jesuitica de ‘Reducciones’ en las misiones Del Virreinato del Peru”, *Missionalia Hispánica*, vol. 12, 1955, 95-144; vol. 13, 1956, 497-540.

<sup>34</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> century knows a great social attention for norms of behavior, for the respect of the etiquette. This care of the exterior caused some formality, a concern for appearance rather than the truth of the people. See M. FIRPO, “Church Reform and Heresy in the age of Charles V: Spanish Reflections in Italy”, in T.J. DANDELET – J.A. MARINO (eds.), *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society and Religion 1500-1700*, Brill, Leiden 2006, 457-480; A. BIONDI, “La giustificazione della simulazione nel Cinquecento”, in ID. et al., *Eresia e Riforma nell’Italia del Cinquecento. Miscellanea*, vol. 1, Sansoni – The Newberry Library, Firenze – Chicago 1974, 8-68.



Jesuits, Claudio Acquaviva, gave his consent but also suggested prudence: “So temper the matter so as to agree, yes, but without prejudice to us and without turning into another form”,<sup>35</sup> he advised Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), who was one of the most prominent Jesuit missionaries and advocates of the ‘adaptation’ approach.

While this approach was liable to turn into mere external formalism, it reflected a social awareness increasingly attentive to accepting the other and his well-being. Having honed this awareness in Italy, Valignano applied it in Japan, translating it into a milestone of missionary action. This focus on the interlocutor and his culture, which was at its early stages in the era of Francis Xavier (1506-1552), became an established practice thanks to Valignano, and can today be considered as the first form of inculturation.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. Origin and Tasks of Propaganda Fide

The Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* was established by Gregory XV on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1622. This commenced with a clear spiritual and apostolic program. In the circular Letter of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1622 to the

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<sup>35</sup> Acquaviva’s letter of 24<sup>th</sup> December 1585, is featured in A. VALIGNANO, *Cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone. Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão. Importante documento circa i metodi di adattamento nella missione giapponese del secolo XVI*, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, Roma 1946, 315-324 (quotation: 322-323). This is the book that backs the concept of ‘adaptation’ more strongly, and was written by Valignano in 1581. See also A. VALIGNANO, *Apologia de la Compañia de Jesus de Japón y China* (1598), J.L. ÁLVAREZ-TALADRIZ (ed.), Osaka 1998. On this great missionary, see M. ANTONI J. ÜÇERLER, “Alessandro Valignano: Man, Missionary, and Writer”, *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 17, n. 3, 2003, 337-366; A. LUCA, *Alessandro Valignano. La missione come dialogo con i popoli e le culture*, Editrice Missionaria Italiana, Bologna 2005.

<sup>36</sup> The term inculturation was coined much later, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see chapter 3.4 of this book), but the concept is rooted in the approach of Jesuits missionaries, such as Thomas de Vio, called Gaetanus (1469-1534), and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617). In particular, Suarez referred to the notion of ‘pure nature’ of Thomas Aquinas – although largely misinterpreting it – to assert that any obstacle to a dialogue with these cultures was ungrounded. The scholastic principle *gratia supponit et perficit naturam* (grace supposes and brings nature to completion) will then become the basis of the Christian and apostolic commitment. Once any alleged contradictions between nature and *gratia* were removed, the missionaries were free to make use of all the natural realities for their apostolic commitment, culture included.

Apostolic Nuncios, its task was outlined as the “attention to the caring ways filled with charity, characteristic of the Holy Spirit, for the conversion of the infidels, sometimes by preaching, teaching, and disputing, and sometimes by admonishing, exhorting, and praying, as well as by attracting them gently through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and even through the disciplines and tears shed for them, in the light of truth, along the way of salvation.”<sup>37</sup>

The aim of this institution was to reestablish the ecclesial character of the mission, in the conviction that the spreading of faith required new methods and approaches. With the progressive decline of the Hispanic nations and the appearance of Holland, England, and France on the colonial scene, the papacy reclaimed its task of guiding missionary work. To this end, it created the necessary bodies and strove to reestablish its authority, which had been undermined by too many concessions made to monarchs and religious Orders. The establishment of *Propaganda Fide* was the end-point of several previous attempts to wrest back the guidance of evangelization throughout the world from the states.

In 1599, Clement VIII created a Commission of nine cardinals *super negotia sanctae fidei et religionis catholicae* (on the affairs of the sacred faith and the Catholic religion) with the task of tackling issues related to the missions and the conversion of the heretics. This Commission took the name of *Congregatio de Fide Propaganda*. When it was dissolved, it was replaced by a *General Secretariat of the Missions* with the task of preparing the creation of the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, which was founded in January 1622 by Gregory XV. This institution was set up canonically with the Bull *Inscrutabili divinae Providentiae* of 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1622, following the previous Bull *Divisio Provinciarum* of March 8<sup>th</sup>, which laid out an

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<sup>37</sup> *Litterae Encyclicae S.C. de Propaganda Fide 15 Ianuarii 1622 Ad Omnes Nuntios Apostolicos*, Collectanea Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide seu decreta, instructiones, rescripta pro apostolicis missionibus, vol. 1, Typographia Polyglotta S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Romae 1907, 1-2 (the text of the letter is in Italian language). The letter outlines the two ways that the mission of the Church is called to pursue: to preserve the faith, and then spread it. Therefore, “two ways of proceeding are still held in the Holy Church. A judiciary one, for which the Office of the Holy Inquisition is established, and the moral or rather apostolic one, hence the missions of the workers among peoples will indicate the way forward”.

initial organizational structure.<sup>38</sup> Its scope was very broad, namely to provide *missionibus omnibus ad praedicandum et docendum evangelium*. Concretely, this had to do with defending the faith from heretics and schismatics, and spreading the faith in the recently discovered worlds. The organization comprised of 13 regions, including the Europe in its entirety and the Mediterranean. All overseas territories were merged into two European regions, Spain and Portugal, as colonial possession either of the one or the other nation. It was Francesco Ingoli, the first Secretary of *Propaganda Fide*, who turned these territories into the most rewarding areas of apostolic action by promoting a new notion of mission.

At that time, the question around the term ‘mission’ – used mostly in the plural – and its underlying meaning was not just merely terminological. Indeed, ‘mission’ was a much deeper concept implying a broader context, clearly indicating the sending out of preachers in charge of bringing the message of evangelical hope.<sup>39</sup> However, missionary tasks, needs, and objectives varied from congregation to congregation, and consequently shaped differing approaches. Mission for Jesuits meant sending out missionaries to carry out the directions provided by the authority on the basis of the experience of itinerant preaching as explained by De Acosta. In particular, he referred to “those expeditions and pilgrimages which in all the cities support the cause of the divine Word”. Gradually this became identified with the “dissemination of the word of salvation by traveling in their midst”. This concept spread rapidly with the support of the Carmelites, among whom Juan de Jesús María, who was the author of several works on *missions* in the plural.<sup>40</sup> In the end, it became clear that *missions* indicated the conversion of non-believers and nothing else.

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<sup>38</sup> On the first steps of the Congregation, see the works of J. METZLER, “Foundation of the Congregation ‘de Propaganda Fide’ by Gregory XV”, “Orientation, programme et premières décisions”, “Francesco Ingoli, der erste Sekretär der Kongregation”, in ID. (ed.), *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, 79-111; 146-196; 197-243.

<sup>39</sup> See A. SANTOS HERNÁNDEZ, “El termino ‘misión’”, in ID., *Misionología. Problemas introductorios y ciencias auxiliares*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1961, 9-67; T. OHM, *Faites de disciples de toutes les nations*, vol. 1, Éd. Saint-Paul, Paris 1964, 33-55.

<sup>40</sup> Between 1604 and 1605, Juan de Jesús María wrote three works on the mission: *Tractatus quo asseruntur Missiones et rationes adversae refellentur; Votum seu*

*Propaganda Fide* developed a different viewpoint. At the very outset, the Congregation believed it could operate under royal patronage, but soon realized this was not feasible. Hence, the need to develop a new apostolic working method to be applied on several fronts. The Congregation, on the one hand, banked on the appointment of Apostolic Vicars<sup>41</sup> as the earliest representatives of a hierarchy that was independent from royal jurisdiction. Their appointment – starting from 1637 – marked the first real break of evangelization from the colonization process. At the same time, the Congregation emphasized a greater focus on the missionaries' cultural and religious formation. The establishment in 1627 of the Urban College *de Propaganda Fide*,<sup>42</sup> along with the commitment to developing an indigenous clergy,<sup>43</sup> were the logical fulfillment of a vision that also implied linguistic preparation besides the printing of works in indigenous languages.

By placing the proclamation of the Gospel at the center of its ecclesial view of the mission, the Congregation distanced itself from the Jesuit model, sharing nevertheless the latter's commitment to inculturation. The Congregation's missionary approach rested on two cornerstones: to assuage the political influence of the royal patronage over the missions, and to recover the spirit of the Catholic Reformation, with a particular reference to the choice of the pastor as the one who proclaims the Word of God, and represents with his life an image of solid piety, deep morality, and detachment from earthly goods.

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*consilium Missionibus quo ad nova obiecta respondentur; Instructio missionum.* This sudden prolific activity springs from the debates ongoing within the order. Some members insist on the contemplative life, while others are more open to the apostolic one. Juan de Jesús María was commissioned to address this issue in view of the Italian chapter of 1604. Other than him, another prominent Carmelite who deserves to be recalled is Fr. Thomas de Jesús, author of *Stimulus missionum* (1610) and *De procuranda salute omnium gentium* (1613).

<sup>41</sup> Recourse to the Apostolic Vicars had already been made in Europe as shown by E. SASTRE SANTOS, "El ajuste de la jurisdicción en el vicariato apostólico de Holanda (1623-1625)", *Euntes Docete*, vol. 61, n. 3, 2008, 153-178; vol. 62, n. 1, 2009, 145-182.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. M. JEZERNIK, "Il Collegio Urbano", in J. METZLER (ed.), *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, 465-482.

<sup>43</sup> The commitment in favor of the indigenous clergy consisted in the opposition to their presbyteral ordination, which was deemed unsuitable, and to limit them to play a mere auxiliary role.

### 3.1 The Congregation's Identity: Ingoli's Text-Testimony

Francesco Ingoli (1578-1649) governed the Congregation as its first Secretary from 1622 until his death, and endowed it with an internal working methodology and an external ecclesial perspective. His principal work is the *Report on the Four Parts of the World*, written in 1629, and revised in 1631.<sup>44</sup>

The *Report* is striking for its latitude and wealth of information. The Secretary could rely on a constant flow of information provided by the extensive network of Nuncios, Superior Generals of the different Orders, and the missionaries themselves, who wrote detailed reports or gave first-hand accounts during their visits to Rome. Part of Ingoli's working method was to verify the information received as testified by his voluminous and all-encompassing correspondence that formed the bulk of *memoranda* or *desiderata* sent to the Orders, providing opinions or notes on the most diverse issues. The preaching of the Gospel was the real purpose of Ingoli's activity, and therefore it was necessary for it to be free from the shackles imposed by colonial policy. For this reason, he did not curtail his action to mere supervision but insisted on developing a strategy capable of embracing new methods and subjects.

The last of the five parts of the *Report* is of particular interest.<sup>45</sup> Entitled the *Fifth Letter of the Things Done in Rome for the Propagation of the Faith*, it focuses on persons and doctrines and the importance of languages and publishing.

Among the persons he mentions, there are the Cardinals working in the Congregation and the Bishops, "whose office is properly apostolic". Moreover, he also points to missionaries, "coadjutors of Bishops in such an important work", regardless whether they are religious or "secular priests assigned to this end [the mission]". After the description of the virtues and apostolic characteristics of the missionaries, he takes a position in favor of the creation of "some

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<sup>44</sup> The *Report* had been lost, but it was recently found in the 'Fondo Santacroce' of the Rome Archives by Prof. Fabio Tosi, who edited its new publication: F. INGOLI, *Relazione delle Quattro parti del mondo*, F. TOSI (ed.), Urbaniana University Press, Roma 1999. This report is completed by a fifth chapter on the history of *Propaganda Fide*.

<sup>45</sup> The five parts are divided as follows: Europa (9-78), Asia (79-176), Africa (177-227), America (229-267), Rome (269-289).

Colleges or seminaries”, where “not a small number of secular priests, theologians by profession, from various countries and nations, can live, spiritually work, and get acquainted with the languages and doctrinal controversies, thus qualifying as missionaries and becoming parish priests and bishops in the provinces of Christendom.”<sup>46</sup>

Another area of concern for Ingoli were doctrines. The propagation of the faith entailed the establishment of contacts not only with simple but also educated persons. Therefore, it was essential to gain a thorough understanding of the people one was dealing with, whom he classified into five different types, strongly recommending their thinking be studied. As an essential part of his methodology, Ingoli encouraged missionaries to be aware of the doctrinal controversies of the time.

The third instrument he urged was the learning of languages, as it is not possible *to deal with peoples if one does not converse in their own language or in another one which they understand*.<sup>47</sup> This indication was all the more valuable if we bear in mind that many missionaries did not speak the local languages but relied on go-betweens, usually indigenous priests or catechists dependent on them, or ordinary people. It was to this end that Ingoli established four centers for the study of languages, respectively in Rome, Florence, Malta, and Jerusalem.

The fourth point he mentioned was printing, which was instrumental to “communicate the same teachings not only to listeners close at hand but also to those far away, not only for those alive but also for posterity”. To this end, the Congregation was endowed with a printing press for publications in ancient and modern languages, concerning the Scriptures, the Christian Doctrine and the Catechisms, besides grammar manuals, lexicons, and dictionaries.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> F. INGOLI, *Relazione delle Quattro parti del mondo*, 278.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>48</sup> The Urbaniana Library has many of these works, as catalogued by Giovanni Rizzi both for the catechisms and the translation of the Sacred Scriptures: G. RIZZI, *Il “corpus” dei catechismi nel fondo della Biblioteca Urbaniana di Propaganda Fide: Il Continente Africano*, Urbaniana University Press, Roma 2015; ID., *Edizioni della Bibbia nel contesto di Propaganda Fide: uno studio sulle edizioni della Bibbia presso la Biblioteca della Pontificia Università Urbaniana*, Urbaniana University Press, Roma 2006.

Ingoli's *grand missionary design* was the result of an increasing awareness of the limits that were undermining the potential of the mission, primarily due to the shortcomings of the traditional structure. Not unintentionally, the analysis in the final pages of the *Report* concerning Asia was very critical of the mission of time, with Ingoli singling out royal patronage as the major problem to be addressed. Indeed, royal patronage was triggering the rejection of the Christian religion on the part of those peoples who were supposed to be evangelized, but who wanted to retain their freedom from colonization. Getting to the heart of the matter, Ingoli requested bishops and missionaries to be financially and legally independent from royal patronage: financially because they were supported by the communities they served, legally because they were tied in various ways to Rome. Only this freedom – in addition to greater austerity and better life witness – would make it possible to act according to the real needs of the Churches, and create and increase the number of God's ministers.

The second limit were the excessive ties between bishops and some religious Orders. These ties were a source of opposition by other institutions, and discord between the different congregations. Moreover, the inadequate testimony of so many members of the religious Orders, due to the distance from Europe and the concrete circumstances of their lives, also tarnished the reputation of many bishops in the eyes of the peoples to evangelize. As for the role of the bishops in the dioceses, Ingoli envisioned for them the function of authentic pastoral leadership and supervision, bearing unwaveringly in mind the centrality of Rome as their reference point.<sup>49</sup>

This was the pastoral intention, which included the commitment to increase the number of apostolic workers, chiefly among the native priests. While targeting an easier access for them to the Sacred Orders,<sup>50</sup> he was forced to admit elsewhere that “the present times were not propitious because, with regard to human affairs, [the Congregation] was not able to act as freely as it would have wanted”.

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<sup>49</sup> “While the Bishop is not the owner of the vineyard of his diocese, because Christ Our Lord is the real Owner who constituted on earth his Vicar General, he is at least the Owner's main Procurator, particular Vicar and administrator, and it is still up to him to send the workers into the vineyard in the way and form that he deems best” (F. INGOLI, *Relazione delle Quattro Parti del Mondo*, 165).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

It should be observed that Ingoli was fully-aware all these indications pertained to the human sphere. The Secretary knew that “neither gold nor silver nor things are means proper for conversion, indeed most of the time they impede it or endanger it because the grace of the Holy Spirit cannot be bought and sold, as Simon Magus tried to do”.<sup>51</sup> Hence, the appeal for austerity and a rigorous life, towards which the Congregation was guarantor. The spiritual means were paramount: “The means of all means must not be left behind; indeed, it is the only efficient cause, I say the gift of the Holy Spirit together with the ardor of charity. [...] It is still good to invoke it from above and to seek in the same way that the Apostles did, I say with prayer and with fasting to obtain it from divine goodness in order to be able to instill it in others and spread it everywhere”.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.2 The Missionary’s Spiritual Formation: The “Monita”

The commitment to the spiritual and pastoral formation of missionaries was realized on 1st August 1627, when the Bull *Immortalis Dei Filius*<sup>53</sup> established a seminary.<sup>54</sup> Its purpose, as indicated in the founding bull, was to proclaim, spread, and defend the Catholic faith all over the world.<sup>55</sup> The commitment to prepare the clergy-men destined to the missions adequately led Ingoli not only to remind the need for such structures, but to point to the Urban College as a “model and example”<sup>56</sup> for these institutions.

Indeed, the Urban College had a strategic role in the Church’s renewed missionary commitment. Its doctrinal and spiritual formation – including possible martyrdom<sup>57</sup> – assumed an emblematic

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 287-288.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>53</sup> *Immortalis Dei Filius*, Bullarium diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum, A. Vecco et sociis editoribus, Augustae Taurinorum 1868, 574-581.

<sup>54</sup> “Collegium pontificium seu seminarium apostolicum sub invocatione sanctorum Petri et Pauli apostolorum Pastorale Urbanum nuncupandum, pro propagatione ac tuenda catholica et apostolica fide” (*Immortalis Dei Filius*, § 4).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., § 1.

<sup>56</sup> F. INGOLI, *Relazione delle Quattro Parti del Mondo*, 278.

<sup>57</sup> The commitment to the growth and propagation of the faith also entailed that the missionaries “vitae periculum et martyrium, si opus fuerit, subire omnino debeant, perpetuis futuris temporibus” (*Immortalis Dei Filius*, § 5).



value in the way of thinking about the mission and its preparation. The College, nonetheless, did not focus on a real “missionary theology,” but on the missionary’s formation.

The best testimony of this climate is the *Monita ad Missionarios*. This text represented a reference point for missionary life for several centuries and was the product of priests connected with the *Society for the Foreign Missions of Paris*, approved by the Holy See in 1664.<sup>58</sup> Belonging to a literary genre already known to the missionary world,<sup>59</sup> the *Monita’s* first two chapters are very important for the understanding of both the mentality and the prevailing apostolic spirituality of the time.

The text begins by criticizing the current situation, where the loss of apostolic fervor leads not only to disinterest in the salvation of

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<sup>58</sup> The origins of the *Foreign Missions of Paris* date back to Fr. Alessandro de Rhodes and the *Association des Bons Amis* gathered around him. On 29<sup>th</sup> July 1658, three members of this group – François Pallu, Lambert de la Motte and Ignace Cottolendi – were appointed Apostolic Vicars in Indochina and Siam, but they were not financed immediately and managed to leave only a few years later with the support of *Propaganda Fide*. Bishop Pallu arrived in Ayutthaya, the capital of Siam, in January 1664 and, in agreement with Bishop La Motte, held a Synod to study the situation and draw up a missionary work plan for the conversion of the indigenous people and the organization of the Churches. The *Monita* are the result of that Synod. Printed for the first time in 1669 in Kronenfeld by the Bohemian printer Zacharias D. Acsamitek, they were distributed widely and *Propaganda Fide* itself printed it several times. Here we are using the 1840 Latin edition: *Monita ad Missionarios Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide*, Typographia s. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Romae 1840. The French edition is also important, edited by Missions Étrangère de Paris: F. PALLU – P.L. DE LA MOTTE, *Monita ad Missionarios – Instructions aux Missionnaires de la S. Congrégation de la Propagande*, Archives des Missions Étrangères, Paris 2000. The Italian translation was edited by M. MARCOCCHI, *Colonialismo, cristianesimo e culture extraeuropee. L’Istruzione di Propaganda Fide ai Vicari apostolici dell’Asia Orientale (1659)*, Jaca Book, Milano 1981, 61-88.

<sup>59</sup> Similar texts had already existed for some time in the missionary area. By way of example, the *Instruzione generale per li Missionarij della Sacra Congregazione de Propaganda Fide*, published in 1626 (see J. METZLER, *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, 676-677) or the well-known *Instructio Vicariorum Apostolicorum ad Regna Sinarum, Tonchini et Cocincinae proficiscentium*, published in 1659 (see *Ibid.*, 696-704). Other works were published subsequently: *Regulae ac Decreta Sacrae Congregationis Propagandae Fidei ab Episcopis, Vicariis Apostolicis caeterisque Missionariis observandae*, October 3, 1707 (see *Ibid.*, 705-712).

those to whom the missionaries had been sent, but even to disregard one's own salvation. This apostolic and spiritual decadence had to be halted. To fully grasp the context and assess it evangelically, the *Monita* turns to the account of the temptations of Jesus (Mt 4:1-11). By placing the words spoken by Jesus at the center of their reflection, the *Monita ad missionarios* become Jesus' own *Monita*. Jesus' words and life help the missionary disciples to discern the temptations and strengthen the spiritual stance that can oppose them.

At the core of the first temptation lies Christ's warning about not living on bread alone, but also and above all on the Word of God (Mt 4:3-4). From Jesus' example, the *Monita* warn about the need to reject caring too much about oneself. Just as the Twelve picked heads of grain from the fields (Mk 2:23-24) to survive, missionaries too must be aware that they are bound to go hungry and thirsty, and be in rags (1 Cor 4:11). To not succumb to the temptation of pursuing a life of comfort, a missionary must be able to fully master his body. An austere life is therefore recommended to missionaries, so that they may shield themselves against the easy customs and attitudes they encounter. Living the life of a true missionary requires going by a set of indications regarding drink, food, and ablutions.<sup>60</sup> The corresponding spiritual attitude – nourishing oneself on the Word – is prayer. Staying vigilant, praying (Mk 14:35) and giving attention to the ministry of the Word (Ac 6:4) are the basic guidelines of an authentic apostolic life. The invitation is unequivocal: do everything for God's glory.<sup>61</sup> In practice, this means never swerving from the intimate and cherished presence of God.<sup>62</sup> A missionary is a man of God only if his life is entirely centered on prayer, and is familiar both with its conversational, affective, and mystical moments.

*Monita's* second warning is about not tempting God, in line with Jesus' response to the diabolical assertion that God will always save His servant, even if the latter were to decide to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, prompted by his trust in God. Therefore, the *Monita* recognize the danger of an apostolic presumption that presents itself as a falsification of the zeal for divine

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<sup>60</sup> *Monita ad Missionarios Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

glory. When this kind of vainglory, which has already turned the angel into a devil, insinuates itself, it can destroy the entire apostolic work.<sup>63</sup> Presumption, meaning conceit and arrogance, not only drives imprudent action or undermines any sense of proportion, but goes as far as to invert the correct relation between the action of God and that of man, turning the former into an instrument for the exaltation of the latter. Hence, the designation of humility as an apostolic virtue cultivated in the example of Jesus' concealment and *kenosis*. Humility brings about awareness of one's nothingness and leads to the respect for others. Even when presumption may produce certain fruits, the missionary should be reminded that the One who sows, plants, waters, and makes everything grow, is only God.<sup>64</sup>

By referring to the three temptations of sin 1 Jn 2:16, the third warning focuses on Christ's invitation to adore God alone and to move away from any worldly glory.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, Jesus chose His Apostles from among the poor, while commanding those among them to give up their possessions so that – free from all things worldly – they would seek God above all else.<sup>66</sup> Avarice or, better, the anxiety to possess, makes accumulating riches life's goal, to the point that it wrecks inner peace, taking away the focus from the work of saving souls. Therefore, a missionary should be content with his clothes and food, give what he does not need in charity and even accept poverty (Mt 19:27), which is often mysteriously fruitful. In doing so, the missionary will grow into an authentic Apostle.<sup>67</sup>

The third chapter recalls the spiritual root of any authentic apostolic action. The objective structure of this kind of life requires that a missionary should convert to Christ, the Supreme Pastor, and receive everything willingly.<sup>68</sup> Only if he is rich in Christ and His virtues can he dedicate himself to the mission, and to the souls for whom he is willing to give even his blood. In this commitment, the missionary is just God's instrument,<sup>69</sup> and consequently he must recognize that prayer and sacrifice are the foundation of any mis-

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 20.

sionary life.<sup>70</sup> These virtuous habits and the dramatic presentation of the mission as a struggle against the devil, enable the *Monita* to use the image of Eph 6:14ss to illustrate the figure of the missionary bearing the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Word and the armor of justice.

Complementary to these spiritual themes are several paragraphs on the need for apostolic workers to become acquainted with the peoples' customs and traditions, in particular their religion and beliefs, languages, moral habits, and the traits of their leaders. An entire chapter – the third – is dedicated to human activities: trade is prohibited, conversions through force and violence is condemned, while a degree of diffidence with regard to human wisdom is recommended. Considerations on the ostentation of one's dignity and appearance complete the fundamental guidelines provided by the *Monita*. Undoubtedly, these guidelines, along with other similar ones, contribute to shape the spiritual figure of the missionary.

### 3.3 Texts of Propaganda Fide on the Missionary's Person and Action

The key role of spirituality in the life of the missionary was typical of the Catholic Reformation after the Council of Trent. Great attention was devoted to the formation of the missionary, whose way of being reflected the missionary ministry and the pastoral relation with the community. Today, this kind of perspective may seem overly optimistic besides being unmindful of the dynamics of missionary mediation. While the documents successively published by *Propaganda Fide* did concede a degree of attention to certain forms of mediation (social, cultural, and in terms of communication), Ingoli remained firmly on the position that “if money and things should not really be put among the necessary means for the propagation, what is undoubtedly the means of means should not be left behind, indeed, the only efficient cause, I say the gift of the Holy Spirit together with the ardor of charity.”<sup>71</sup>

The first of these texts is *Quoniam vos ea estis diligentia*, better known as the *Instruction for the Apostolic Vicars of Indochina, Ton-*

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>71</sup> F. INGOLI, *Relazione delle Quattro Parti del Mondo*, 288.

*kin, and China* (1659).<sup>72</sup> While human dynamics take center stage in *Instruction*, grace remains nevertheless the paramount driver of human commitment. It is thus necessary to remove all that contrasts grace, which should be allowed to act through the intelligence and prudence of the missionaries. If from this perspective the relationship between grace and freedom leaves ample room for the subjectivity of the missionary, the role of grace is not entirely clear.<sup>73</sup>

The development and training of indigenous clergy, which Ingoli had already strongly recommended, fall within this perspective. The first direction leads to a second one, namely that the criterion for evangelization is the respect and the adoption of the cultural and religious customs that do not contradict the Gospel. Inspired by the work previously carried out by Jesuit missionaries such as Da Acosta and Valignano, this approach is grounded on the following explanation: “Do not attempt, in any way, to change the rites, customs, and mores of these peoples, and do not persuade them to that effect on any pretext, unless these are clearly contrary to religion and good morals. For what could be more absurd than bringing France, Spain, Italy or any other European country to China? It is not these countries but faith that you must bring, the faith that does not reject or jeopardize the rites and customs of any peoples, but rather desires to preserve and promote them, as long as these are not depraved.”<sup>74</sup> Herein lies the flagship concept of every inculturation theology,

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<sup>72</sup> According to two letters authored by the Scottish priest William Leslie († 1707), dated August 4<sup>th</sup> and November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1659, the *Instruction* is the result of a teamwork in which Lesley himself was engaged, in his capacity as Roman referent of the Apostolic Vicar Pallu, along with Mario Alberici, Ingoli's successor to the Secretariat of *Propaganda Fide*, the Cardinals of the same Congregation, and their theological referents. The *Instruction* drew inspiration from Francisco Suarez's theology, see note 36.

<sup>73</sup> This view is at the basis of the scholastic saying *facienti quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam*. However, it remains to be figured out if *facienti quod in se est* means acting already with God's grace or in the search for it, thus prompting God to respond with His goodness and concede the grace.

<sup>74</sup> Note the passionate accents with which the document claims the due dignity and respect for these Asian cultures. This is how the question of Chinese rites was born between the Jesuits, with the support of Emperor Kangxi, and the Dominicans. The 1659 document followed the Jesuits' line, but the Constitution *Ex Illa Die* (1715) and, above all, the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Quo Singulari* (1742) prohibited any practice of Chinese rites within the churches. Only on 8<sup>th</sup>

outlining the option for indigenous clergy and the positive view of indigenous religious rituals and moral customs, the Congregation's fundamental themes.<sup>75</sup>

In this context, it is possible to observe a degree of oscillation between universality and *romanitas*,<sup>76</sup> for *Propaganda Fide* is at the same time the guardian of *romanitas* and the guarantor of a path to freedom and a courageous inculturation of local realities. Similar indications were outlined in two *Memorandums* by the Secretary of the Congregation Stefano Borgia in 1787. The *Memorandums* were written to address the situation in Chinese Christendom after the suppression of the Society of Jesus and the persecutions that affected the Christian communities, at the time when some missionaries, notwithstanding the expulsion orders and ban, went underground or tried to re-enter clandestinely. However, the *Memorandums* contain general principles applicable in any missionary area.<sup>77</sup>

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December 1939, a solemn *Instruction* of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, expressly approved by Pius XII, recognized that the cult of the ancestors and the rites connected to the Confucian philosophy are not incompatible with the Christian faith. See G. MINAMIKI, *The Chinese Rites Controversy. From Its Beginning to Modern Times*, Loyola University Press, Chicago, IL 1985; J.F. CUMMINS, *A Question of Rites. Friar Domingo Navarrete and the Jesuits in China*, Scholar Press, Aldershot (UK) 1993; D.E. MUNGELLO (ed.), *The Chinese Rites Controversy. Its History and Meaning*, Steyler Verlag, Sankt Augustin – Nettetal 1994.

<sup>75</sup> Among the Jesuits who have committed themselves to further dialogue with the Chinese people in the name of faith, Matteo Ricci deserves to be mentioned. His first book written in Chinese emblematically addressed the issue of friendship as a symbol of the prophetic desire for amicable relations between different peoples and cultures (M. RICCI, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*, T. BILLINGS (ed.), Columbia University Press, New York 2009). Ricci's masterpiece is *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* [1603], Institute of Jesuit Sources, Saint Louis, MO 1985.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. G. PIZZORUSSO, *Agli antipodi di Babele. Propaganda Fide tra immagine cosmopolita e orizzonti romani*, Einaudi, Torino 2000.

<sup>77</sup> Stefano Borgia (1731-1804) was the Secretary of *Propaganda Fide* from 1770 to 1789. He then became Prefect of the Congregation from 1802 to 1804. The two *Memorandums* are titled: *Memoria sopra la necessità che l'ultima persecuzione di Cina ne dimostra di stabilire Vescovi Nazionali e sul dovere da farsi ai missionari esiliati di non rientrare per ora in quelle terre*, J. METZLER (ed.), *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, voll. III/2, 716-722; *Seconda memoria sopra i luoghi nei quali converrebbe fissar Vescovi nazionali in Cina con nuove osservazioni sopra il medesimo tema*, Ibid., 723-726. They can also be compared with other relevant documents in L. BONAVITA, *Appendice Documenta-*

The serious setback, plus the difficulty in mastering the Chinese language and understanding the customs of that world, led Borgia to support the development of a Chinese clergy and hierarchy.<sup>78</sup> The mission in China was substantially hampered by inadequate scientific and theological preparation, although Borgia distinguished between “lack of science and doctrine” and “impossibility”. Quoting Innocence III, he concluded: “Even though eminent science is desirable in a shepherd, one has to tolerate a mere skill, since the lack of science is supplanted by the perfection of charity.”<sup>79</sup>

Borgia focused above all on the pastoral quality of the priestly ministry. Citing St. Augustine, he observed: “A foreigner will never be a good pastor for the flock in China because he does not have the aptitude for guiding and feeding it freely. Moreover, for the very reason that he is a foreigner, it is difficult for the people to have the confidence in him that must exist between a son and a father. The divine saying on which the right idea of a pastor is based, ‘I know my sheep and they know me’, cannot come about if the natural things, customs, and ways of the people to be led to Christ are not known, and if this same people do not have the esteem and affection due to a pastor. Without all of this, the Europeans in China will be pastors in name, tied to the flock but not loved by the flock.”<sup>80</sup>

In Borgia’s view, it was not only the efficacy of pastoral life to be at stake, but the very nature of the Church. “We should provide the Chinese with native bishops, and then we will get an idea of the Church best suited to that empire. The Gospel ministers at the start

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ria, in EAD., *Il cardinale Stefano Borgia. Un erudito del Settecento tra cultura e religione*, Edicampus, Roma 2014, 71-104. Besides Bonavita’s work, information on Borgia’s work and life can be found in J. METZLER, *Ein Mann mit neuen Ideen: Sekretärs und Präfekt Stefano Borgia, Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, vol. II, 119-152.

<sup>78</sup> Borgia recalled the example of Japan, where a similar situation caused the destruction of the Christian community, thus backing the idea to adhere to the Chinese laws, even if they are unjust, for the sake of Chinese Christians who would have been otherwise accused of connivance.

<sup>79</sup> *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, vol. III/2, 720; L. BONAVITA, *Il cardinale Stefano Borgia. Un erudito del Settecento tra cultura e religione*, 94.

<sup>80</sup> *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, vol. III/2, 719; L. BONAVITA, *Il cardinale Stefano Borgia. Un erudito del Settecento tra cultura e religione*, 93.

of the mission necessarily had to be non-native, but once it had been made public and a church had come into being, it was crucial to pass the care to shepherds – shepherds not merely by name but real pastors. It is therefore advisable to elect local bishops, who are welcomed and know the local language and customs. It must be said that the Chinese are not expressly demanding for native bishops. The answer is that the Church is not Chinese, nor must it belong to the Chinese, but she is Catholic and must belong to the Catholic Church”<sup>81</sup>

The question regarding the use of the Chinese language in the Eucharistic liturgy should also be set against this background. While perfectly aware of the complexity of the issue, Borgia was nevertheless in favor of the use of Chinese. After mentioning that a copy of the Chinese Missal had been deposited in the Urbaniana library, he commented: “What reward can a priest get from the lesson of a Mass in a language he does not understand and has no bearing whatsoever with his own? What fruit for the instruction of the people? [...] Let anyone attempt reading a prayer that is not written in Latin characters but in the Chinese and then ingeniously tell what spiritual motion he has felt in his heart”<sup>82</sup>

To complete the overview of the principal missionary documents published by *Propaganda Fide*, one should recall *Super Missionibus Apostolicis*, the schema drafted for the First Vatican Council by a commission chaired by Cardinal Alessandro Barnabò, the Prefect of Propaganda Fide.<sup>83</sup> The work, while specifically addressing the

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<sup>81</sup> *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, vol. III/2, 726; L. BONAVIDA, *Il cardinale Stefano Borgia. Un erudito del Settecento tra cultura e religione*, 102.

<sup>82</sup> *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum: 1622-1972*, vol. III/2, 721; L. BONAVIDA, *Il cardinale Stefano Borgia. Un erudito del Settecento tra cultura e religione*, 95.

<sup>83</sup> The subject of the missions is overlooked by many texts concerning the First Vatican Council. For preliminary information, see J. METZLER, *La Santa Sede e le missioni. La politica missionaria della Chiesa nei secoli XIX e XX*, Ed. Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 1992; J. BECKMANN, *The First Vatican Council and the Missions*, in H. JEDIN – J. DOLAN, *History of the Church. VIII: The Church in the Age of Liberalism*, Burns & Oates, London 1981, 199-207; K. SCHATZ, “Die Missionen auf dem I. Vatikanum”, *Theologie und Philosophie* LXIII, 1988, 342-369; J. MOREAU, *L'Épiscopat français et les missions à l'heure du Ier Concile du Vatican: Missions de l'Église*, Paris 1962, 8-13.



problems faced by missionaries of the Latin rite in the near east, was subsequently applied also to missions among pagans. The third draft, which is to be considered the definitive one, was distributed on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1870, but it was not debated and was forgotten since most of the Fathers had by that time left Rome due to the events related to the war with the Italian army for the unification of the country.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, *Super Missionibus Apostolicis* deserves to be mentioned in this venue as a testimony of the mindset and approach of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The document<sup>85</sup> consists of three chapters and several *adnotationes* that take into account the *postulata*, which are the requests received by the Fathers before or during the Council. The first chapter is dedicated to those who are called to guide the missions, and entrusts them with the task of introducing the *perfecta ecclesiasticae hierarchiae forma* (regarding the form of the ecclesiastical hierarchy), as the only way to have fully-fledged Churches. The second chapter addresses the missionaries, stressing the importance of their moral, spiritual and scientific formation. In addition, this raises the question of method, indicating the acceptance of local usages and customs as the paradigm for evangelization. Barring morality, missionaries should submit to local usages and institutions. Finally, the third chapter recalls the duty to support the missions. Necessary to this end are prayers, offerings, and responsiveness to missionary vocations. Moreover, complementary to the schema were several final annotations addressing various issues relevant to the mission.

The missionary reception of the First Vatican Council was lukewarm and disinterested. This is because it only acknowledged the result of Bishop Daniele Comboni's work in giving new impetus to

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<sup>84</sup> Giovanni Mansi collected the documentation concerning the *Discussio schematis Constitutionis "Super Missionibus Apostolicis"*, featuring the debate within the commission and the opinions of the Fathers even after the closing of the Council. In the volume 52, the *Discussio* includes a *Monitum* (col. 45), the first schema *Super Missionibus Apostolicis* entitled *Cum dominicum* (coll. 45-61), *adnotationes e observationes* of the Fathers (coll. 61-151), the second schema *de Apostolicis Missionibus* (coll. 152-154), and further observations on this second schema (coll. 154-156).

<sup>85</sup> The library of the Pontifical Urbaniana University has a *Schema Constitutionis super missionibus apostolicis patrum examini propositum*, Rome 1870 – classified *sub secreto pontificio*.

missionary activity in Africa,<sup>86</sup> and the outcome of the meetings held by the apostolic vicars of China regarding missionary relations with the local French protectorate.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, the debate taking place at this time would have positive and lasting repercussions on the Church's mission.

The conscience of the ecclesiality of the missions had strengthened awareness of the common missionary commitment. Documents dealing with the mission were met with difficulties and opposition at the Council. But the one issue that did emerge forcefully was the dominant affirmation of a centralized and Roman mindset, based on the view of the Church as a united reality, a *corpus Christianum*. A strong Roman and curial presence thereby emerged in the commission in charge of the mission, alongside the recommendation of a stronger reliance on *Nuncios*, the creation of pastoral and economic diocesan Councils; and the request for the establishment of a "missionary directory" under the guidance of *Propaganda Fide*. But undermining this ongoing process was the conflict pitting the Congregation and the missionary Orders against, and the Apostolic Vicars who were seeking autonomy from the Congregation.

In this regard, Cardinal Barnabò had already clarified his collegial view. When asked about the legitimacy of the missionary scheme, which some sustained depended on the Pope, he answered: "The care of evangelizing the world has been entrusted to the entire episcopate. The episcopate is a body and thus must have a head, who is the Roman Pontiff. Therefore, the episcopate as a whole can rightfully get involved in the missions: [...] The Bishops, united to the Pope, can take care of the missions as well as of the ruling of the universal Church".<sup>88</sup> Barnabò's words pointed to a number of programmatic orientations that would be implemented only much later, reasserting in the process the Congregation's role and tasks more by claiming them than clarifying them.

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. P. CHIOCCHETTA, "Il 'Postulatum pro Nigris Africae Centralis' al Concilio Vaticano I e i suoi precedenti storici ed ideologici", *Euntes Docete* vol. 13, 1969, 408-447.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. I. TING PONG LEE, *De Jure missionario in Concilio Vaticano. Commentario pro Religiosis et Missionariis*, Typographia poliglotta *Cor Mariae*, Roma 1946, 107-137.

<sup>88</sup> G. MANSI, *Discussio schematis Constitutionis "Super Missionibus Apostolicis"* (coll. 49), 1029.

#### 4. Towards an Assessment

The French missionary Joseph Gabet writes in 1848 that Christianity is not a tree to be transplanted, but a seed to be sowed.<sup>89</sup> In other words, even if the mission is aimed at constituting a local Church with its hierarchy and liturgy, it is something that cannot be achieved every time. Royal patronages and protectorates, congregationalism and centralism, westernism and the difficulties of missionary life were the principal reasons behind the failure of certain missions.

There were, however, also questions that concerned the mission proper. Out of the approximately 700 bishops summoned for the Vatican I Council, only 41 came from India and the Far East, and 9 from Africa, but none of them were native to those lands. Moreover, the participation in the Council of the Apostolic Vicars was questioned, accused as they were of excessive dependence on the Pope and of being unaware of the Church's problems. These were telltale indications of the Western nature the missions of the era: they were an expression of the western church's duty towards the world. In this light, the findings of Yves Congar in his study on the ecclesiology of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century are most certainly worth mentioning.<sup>90</sup> The Church's apologetic stance accentuated its institutional and hierarchical elements to an extent that the Church turned into a "visible, institutionally unequal and hierarchical, independent society, receiving from God its own order in terms of spiritual purposes but also in terms of visible, external means. In brief, 'a perfect society'".<sup>91</sup>

We need to ask ourselves if the missions shaped by this stance had jaded, or if it was the wealth of their traditions that took them beyond. The focus on the development of a local clergy was certainly the premise for a different recognition of the local Church and ecclesiology itself. There was an initial understanding of a Church that "along the lines of the mysteries of salvation went back to her sacramental nature, deriving from its close relation with the Incarna-

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. J. GABET, *Coup d'œil sur l'état des missions de Chine*, Valmonde, Paris 1999.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Y. CONGAR, *L'ecclésiologie de la révolution française au Concile du Vatican, sous le signe de l'affirmation de l'autorité*, in M. NÉDONCELLE (ed.), *L'ecclésiologie du XIX siècle*, Cerf, Paris 1960, 77-114; ID., *L'Église de S. Augustin à l'époque moderne*, Cerf, Paris 1970, 413-477.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

tion”.<sup>92</sup> As a continuation of Christ’s universal saving mission, the Church developed its analogy with the Incarnation and clarified its responsibility with regard to salvation in terms of an active faith.

The ecclesiological background that matured in the Congregation’s missionary area must be traced back to this current. The author who developed his ecclesiology in a missionary key was Giovanni Perrone (1794-1875).<sup>93</sup> His approach should be placed within a hierarchical framework that linked missions to the *missio canonica*. However, the interpretation of the apostolate as “the permanence on earth and continuation of the presence of the God made man, Jesus Christ, who in the person of his envoys, continues to live, act, and bring benefit”,<sup>94</sup> led him to conclude that “the Catholic apostolate is a continuation of the same apostolate of God the Savior, sent by the Father for the sanctification of the world”. The Church herself, “properly speaking, is none other than a universal and perpetual apostolate; therefore, she was enriched by her divine Founder with those qualities needed for such a noble end to lead men to salvation: the qualities of his Spirit, that is, the Spirit of charity, humility, meekness, patience, and sacrifice”.<sup>95</sup>




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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>93</sup> G. PERRONE, *L'apostolato cattolico e il proselitismo protestante ovvero l'opera di Dio e l'opera dell'uomo*, Rossi, Genova 1862.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2

# Mission at Work: Problems, Choices, and Prospects

While the end of the Second World War is not a date that bears a direct significance for the theology of mission, it marks nevertheless the beginning of a series of changes that profoundly influenced the life of the Church and its mission. Starting from that date, African and Asian countries achieved political independence within a few years, which came with the need to better define their identity. The Church dealt with this process well aware it had to undertake a dialogue with cultures in which the religious mentality was of paramount importance. Hence its attention to the national religions in Asia and to the traditional ones in Africa. In addition to these socio-cultural factors, the Church had to take into account the decline and fall of European colonialism, the rise of the United States and Russia on the international scene, the ‘success’ of the Maoist revolution in China and the founding of the United Nations.

These developments ushered in new and different conceptions of personal life, social structures, and international relations: they brought about a profound change in the way people thought of their future. A new world was advancing, presenting itself as an intertwining of science and technology, rationality and freedom, philosophy of progress and economic centrality, subjectivity and revolutionary dreams. A new world was emerging, and the mission had to be placed in this new context, along with the ecclesial and theological awareness sustaining it.

The Church was not totally unprepared for this.<sup>1</sup> In 1919, with the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, Benedict XV had already rec-

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<sup>1</sup> See J. SCHMIDLIN, *Einführung in die Missionswissenschaft*, Verlag der Aschendorffschen Buchhandlung, Münster 1917; the pastoral letter of the Cardinal of Burgos J. BENLLOCH Y VIVO, *Las misiones extranjeras. Invitación pontificia a Burgos*, Polo-Lain-Calvos, Burgos 1920; R. LANGE, *Le problème théologique des*

commended a new, different ecclesial awareness, free from the bonds of European nationalism and committed to giving an ‘indigenous’ face to the Churches of these countries. The earliest outcome of this renewed policy was the solemn consecration of six Chinese bishops (1926) in Saint Peter’s Church. While holding a great symbolic meaning, the event did not bring about the substantial changes in the Church’s approach demanded by the new circumstances.

Therefore, the need to rethink the mission – something the Church was already cognizant of – became of great urgency. The most poignant exhortation came from Cardinal Emmanuel Célestin Suhard (1874-1949). Concerned about the evangelization of the masses, he founded in 1941 the Seminary of the *Mission of France*<sup>2</sup> with the task of re-Christianizing those milieus that had disconnected with the Church. Soon after, the well-known book by Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel on France as a mission territory was published in 1943.<sup>3</sup> Again Suhard – in 1944 – created the *Mission de Paris* with several priests who started working in factories as worker-priests. On Lent 1947, Suhard wrote *Growth or Decline: The Church Today*,<sup>4</sup> setting down in May 1949 the statutes of the *Mission of France*, which were approved *ad experimentum* for three years.

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*missions*, Xaveriana, Louvain 1924; P. MANNA, *Operarii autem pauci. Riflessioni sulla vocazione alle Missioni Estere*, Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, Milano 1909; ID., *Osservazioni sul metodo moderno di evangelizzazione*, a text written in 1929 that remained unpublished until 1977, when Giuseppe Buono included it in his thesis on missiology titled *A Voice for the Church: Introduction, Text, Notes to the Unpublished by Fr. Paolo Manna*, Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome 1977. Buono also edited a wider edition of this Fr. Manna’s work, which was published by Editrice Missionaria Italiana, Bologna 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. FAUPIN, *La Mission de France. Histoire et institution*, Casterman, Tournai 1960.

<sup>3</sup> The work of H. GODIN – Y. DANIEL, *La France pays de mission?*, Éd de l’Abeille, Lyon 1943, is the second part of the book of M.J. WARD, *France Pagan? The Mission of Abbé Godin*, Sheed and Ward, London 1949. The same question was dealt with by other works published subsequently in different countries: A.C. COMIN, *España ¿pais de misión?*, Nova Terra, Barcelona 1966; R. BLEISTEIN, “Deutschland-Missionsland? Reflexionen zur religiösen Situation”, *Stimmen der Zeit*, vol. 123, 1998, 399-412; C.G. BROWN, *The Death of Christian Britain*, Routledge, London 2001; T. BELLO, “L’Italia terra di missione”, *Via Verità e Vita*, vol. 38, n. 124, 1998, 21-28.

<sup>4</sup> E.C. SUHARD, *Growth or Decline: The Church Today* [1947], Fides Publishers, Anjou 1949.

## 1. Towards a Rebirth of Mission Theology

The process of rethinking the Church's mission, in the aftermath of the Second World War, developed along two main paths: the rediscovery of the notion of *missio Dei*, as the basis of every theology of mission, and the enhancement of the socio-historical dimension without which the mission would be purely conceptual and generic. The transition from 'mission' to 'young Churches' took place around this time, laying the groundwork for the debate on mission during the Second Vatican Council.<sup>5</sup>

Although the primacy of the western Churches continued unchallenged in many areas until the Synods *Evangelization in the Modern World* (1974) and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), the increasing importance of the Churches of the South was a most remarkable novelty. The autonomy and independence of African and Asian peoples, their search for a cultural and Christian identity, had a strong influence on the theology of the mission which, until then, had been mainly an expression of the European Churches.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.1 *Missio Dei*: The Rediscovery of the Theological Basis of the Mission

The Catholic world had never ceased to refer to the divine role in mission. However, the development of a new Catholic theology of mission was influenced by the emphasis placed on the role of the Divine Persons in the debate on mission that had taken place among Protestants in the thirties. According to Karl Barth, only God saves, only God justifies, only God can accomplish what is to be done, and He does it through Jesus.<sup>7</sup> The Church's approach must be consis-

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. COLZANI, *La missionarietà della Chiesa. Saggio storico sull'epoca moderna fino al Vaticano II*, Dehoniane, Bologna 1975.

<sup>6</sup> For an examination of the theological approaches to the mission developed in non-European countries see B. CHENU, *Théologies chrétiennes des tiers mondes: théologies latino-américaine, noire-américaine, noire sud-africaine, africaine, asiatique*, Bayard-Centurion, Paris 1987; V. FABELLA – R.S. SUGIRTHARAJAH, *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 2000.

<sup>7</sup> As explained by the contemporary theologian John Drury, Barth's theology of the mission is a critical reflection on the communicative activity of the Church. His attention is focused on the question: "What does the theology have to say to the mission?" His answer is simple: "Jesus is the Lord". As a service to the Church,

tent with this formulation: it is not about saving or Christianizing the world, but proclaiming the Gospel and giving witness to its salvation. The mission, in itself and for itself, is and remains *actio Dei*. Barth shifted the focal point of the mission from its results to its truth, entrusting theology with the task of critically verifying the premises of this communication of faith to the peoples.<sup>8</sup>

In particular, the *missio Dei* would be endorsed at the 1952 International Missionary Conference in Willingen. Since *missio Dei* requires the obedient service of its witnesses, it was stated at Willingen that the communion with Christ cannot be lived without taking part in His mission for the world, as “the one through whom the Church gets her existence is also the one through whom her world mission gets life.”<sup>9</sup>

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theology and mission are both forms of ecclesial obedience to the Lord, but with their specific task. Both are established in obedience to the divine will and, through this will, they go back to the true reality of God, thus joining the Trinitarian missions that the Son and the Spirit have received from the Father. This is the *missio Dei*. Jesus Christ is the center of Barth’s theology. The understanding of the Church and her mission springs from the truth that Jesus Christ is the Lord. This statement represents the content of the missionary message of the Church and determines the relationship of mutual integration between theology and mission, two forms of the single ecclesial obedience. Barth, nevertheless, identifies the particular work of the mission as an activity to be carried out on foreign soil (J. DRURY, “Karl Barth’s Theology of Mission for Today”, *Studies in Missional Theology*, vol. 2, 2002, [www.drurywriting.com/john/Mission%20%20Barth.htm](http://www.drurywriting.com/john/Mission%20%20Barth.htm)).

<sup>8</sup> The primacy of God that Barth placed at the center of his mission theology was confirmed by Karl Hartenstein’s doctoral thesis, presented in Tübingen (K. HARTENSTEIN, *Die Mission als theologisches Problem. Beiträge zum grundsätzlichen Verständnis der Mission*, Furche Verlag, Berlin 1933). Barth’s position as the basis for a real missiology was developed subsequently by Hendrik Krämer (H. KRÄMER, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, Publications for the International Missionary Council by the Edinburgh House Press, London 1937).

<sup>9</sup> N. GOODALL (ed.), *Mission under the Cross. Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen in Germany, 1952*, Edinburgh House Press, London 1953, 189-190. See also INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL, *The Missionary Obligation of the Church. Willingen, Germany July 5-17, 1952*, Edinburgh House Press, London 1962. As for the critical question on who introduced the theme of the *missio Dei* to the Willingen conference, see W. GÜNTHER, “The History and Significance of World Mission Conferences in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”, *International Review of Mission*, vol. 92, n. 4, 2003, 521-537.



Assessment on this conclusion is not uniform. Georg Friedrich Vicedom saw the confirmation of the Lutheran perspective exalting faith more than works, divine action more than human action. On the other hand, Wolfgang Günther regarded the *missio Dei* as a safe-haven category open to many interpretations, and Helmut Rosin, subsequently, as a Trojan horse “through which the American view was introduced between the well decorated walls of the ecumenical theology of mission”.<sup>10</sup>

The *missio Dei* inspired Paulo Suess and Theo Sundermeier in developing a theology of mission without limits. Their *missio Dei* symbolizes unconditional and absolute divine love, which was unknown and unavailable in some respect, and never controllable. God appears as a missionary God, and Jesus Christ is revealed as the way of His mission, the way traveled by this love.<sup>11</sup> In the Catholic domain, *Redemptoris Missio*, the Encyclical Letter issued by John Paul II, acknowledges the complexity of the scenario in which the mission is called to take place (cf. RM 32) and determines some parameters (cf. RM 37). The term “Areopagus” introduces areas into the missionary horizon that are very different from one another: from communication to scientific research, from international relations to peace, from development to human rights, from health to the protection of creation. Everything falls within the mission, because “a universal mission implies a universal perspective” (RM 37). Human life as a whole must be able to encounter the “spiritual patrimony” (RM 38) which the Church is invited to offer to humanity.

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<sup>10</sup> G.F. VICEDOM, *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission* [1958], Concordia, Saint Louis, MO 1965; W. GÜNTHER, “Gott selbst treibt Mission: Das Modell der ‘Missio Dei’”, in K. SCHÄFER (ed.), *Plädoyer für Mission: Beiträge zum Verständnis von Mission heute*, Evangelisches Missionswerk im Deutschland, Hamburg 1998, 56; H. ROSIN, *Missio Dei. An Examination of the Origin, Contents and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion*, Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, Leiden 1972, 16. See also the recent debate on the *missio Dei*: T. ENGELSVIKEN, “Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology”, *International Review of Mission*, vol. 92, n. 4, 2003, 481-497.

<sup>11</sup> See P. SUESS, “Missio Dei and the Project of Jesus: The Poor and the ‘Other’ as Mediators of the Kingdom of God and Protagonists of the Churches”, *International Review of Mission*, vol. 92, n. 4, 2003, 550-559; T. SUNDERMEIER, “*Missio Dei* Today: On the Identity of Christian Mission”, *International Review of Mission*, vol. 92, n. 4, 2003, 560-578.

## 1.2 Sociological Openness: the *Milieu*, the Place for a *Colloquium Salutis*

The social dimension has found its theological endorsement through a theology of progress, a political theology, and a theology of liberation. The first to devote attention to social issues in mission theology was a group of Dominicans who came together at the *Parole et Mission* review. The main personalities of this group were Yves Congar, Antonin-Marie Henry and Nicolás Dunas. Focusing principally on socio-anthropological aspects and on the environment, which they held to be the people's existential spaces, they solicited the Church to take these issues into due account while extending its missionary responsibility towards anyone in need of conversion, including those who lacked faith within themselves. The choice between the mission *ad intra* and *ad extra* should fall on the mission without boundaries. The mission, they insisted, must be carried out in any sector of human life that needs to be revitalized.

To clarify the relationship between Church and mission, Congar acknowledged the value of the universal Church in relation with the particular ones,<sup>12</sup> indicating in the Word and in the Sacraments the criteria and the modalities for the particularization of the universal Church. Despite the author's silence on the Holy Spirit,<sup>13</sup> this relationship between universal dynamics and particular realizations directs the path of the baptized towards a full maturity of faith, possible only in a Catholic Church that is really open to universal horizons.

The situation of those who are distant from the Church must be set in this context. For them, the encounter with the God of Jesus Christ takes place "through choices that are made with regard to a

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<sup>12</sup> Y. CONGAR, "Théologie de l'Église particulière", in *Mission sans frontières. Rapports du Colloque organisé par l'Équipe de "Parole et Mission" les 26, 27 et 28 février 1959*, Cerf, Paris 1960, 15-61.

<sup>13</sup> Only at a later stage, Congar developed an ecclesiology rooted in the mission of the Son and enriched by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. See: Y. CONGAR, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, Helicon Press, Baltimore, MD 1964; ID., *This Church that I love*, Dimension Books, Denville, NJ 1969; ID., *I believe in the Holy Spirit*. I: *The Experience of the Spirit*. II: *Lord and Giver of Life*. III: *The River of Life. Flows in the East and in the West*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1983 / Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 1997.

truth [...] that is still hidden and which is not presented *in itself*, but in other ways and with other names”.<sup>14</sup> In analyzing the evangelical figures of the centurion, the Syrophenician woman, and the man blind from birth, Congar observes that they express a faith lacking adequate preparation and arising from a human terrain still far from the personal adherence to Christ. Hence, the surprising conclusion: “There is a faith before faith and grace before grace”.<sup>15</sup> Concretely, in these situations, we are before “pre-formations of faith and, at the same time, pre-formations of love and charity”.<sup>16</sup>

Distinguishing between “what is necessary for salvation through the intrinsic nature of things, and what is necessary through a positive institution of God”, Congar views love as objectively decisive for salvation: “None can be saved if he does not *really* have in his heart love of God and love of self, for other people and the world, in conformity with God’s love”.<sup>17</sup> Congar argues that at the root of salvation there is a God’s manifestation which is not explicitly ecclesial: “It is the area, we might say, of God’s incognito. We really encounter Him, it is really with Him that we start the dialogue but we do not call Him God, we do not know that it is He”.<sup>18</sup> The instrument of the encounter with God ‘in incognito’ is love: “But there is one thing that is privileged to be a paradoxical sign of God, in relation to which men are able to manifest their deepest commitment – our Neighbor. The sacrament of our Neighbor!”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> As regards the man blind from birth, Congar emphasizes that the blind holds a kind of faith on the basis of a “profound attitude which he took on regarding the ‘sign’ and the One still hidden that signified his approach to this sign” (Y. CONGAR, *The Wide World My Parish: Salvation and its Problems*, Helicon Press, Baltimore, MD 1961; Italian edition: “Fuori della Chiesa non c’è salvezza? II. Salvezza dei non evangelizzati”, in ID., *La mia parrocchia vasto mondo. Verità e dimensioni della salvezza*, Paoline, Roma 1963, 153-213, quotation 168).

<sup>15</sup> Y. CONGAR, “Fuori della Chiesa non c’è salvezza? II. Salvezza dei non evangelizzati”, 160.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 188. On the same page, Congar elaborated on this concept further: “It is necessary to talk about the ‘mystery of one’s neighbor’, and this is the precise meaning attributed to the word ‘mystery’ in the language of the Fathers: a reality that has a meaning beyond itself, along the line of the ultimate reality towards which the whole history of salvation is directed”.

Antonin-Marie Henry's starting point is the reality of a society in which the rise of indifference has provoked confusion between the areas of faith and lack of belief.<sup>20</sup> Their geographical distinction is no longer meaningful. After distinguishing the two levels – the supernatural that animates human history and the social that acts in this history – Henry clarifies that, corresponding to the action of divine grace, is the conversion of the person who opens his heart to God. For this reason, he believes these two moments should be understood in a unitary and dynamic way: God's grace and the human response to it find their meeting point in belonging to the Church. On this basis, Henry developed three paths underpinning three different ways of living the relationship with and belonging to the Church. The first is a catechumenal Church gathered around the proclamation of the Word and the first responses to faith; a baptismal Church founded on the sacramental rebirth to the life of children of *Abbà*; an Eucharistic Church, which represents its maturity and fullness.

For Henry it is quite obvious that baptized persons and believers within the Church also need conversion and mission. Responsible for this reality, both inside and outside of itself, is the Church, which is “a society of converted persons but also a society of conversion. One can never cease to turn away from the devil and bring oneself towards God.”<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The Mission: Heart of the Magisterial Teaching

A defining event for the mission was the Second Vatican Council. Missiological themes at the Council did not receive as much attention as other topics, namely the Word of God and revelation, liturgy and the people of God, religious freedom and ecumenism. Nevertheless, the theme of mission, being so closely linked to the life of the Church, emerged frequently in many documents.

As for the foundation of the Conciliar conception of mission,<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See A.M. HENRY, *A Mission Theology* [1959], Fides Publishing, Notre Dame, IN 1962 (French edition, *Esquisse d'une théologie de la mission*, Cerf, Paris 1979); ID., “Mission d'hier, mission de demain”, in J. SCHÜTTE, *Vatican II. L'activité missionnaire de l'Église*, Cerf, Paris 1967, 411-440.

<sup>21</sup> A.M. HENRY, *A Mission Theology*, 176 (French edition).

<sup>22</sup> The main works examining the Conciliar conception of the mission should be distinguished into three groups. In the first group, there are the texts published

it was outlined by Joseph Ratzinger in *Lumen Gentium*,<sup>23</sup> with the Decree *Ad Gentes* merely being its extension. The announced universality, far from being reduced to a concept, is fully expressed in the message of Christ about the active presence of God in the history of the world. A presence which makes Him the Father of every human person.

The link between the active historical presence of God and the Church's task leads Ratzinger to conclude that "we call Church the path of the Gospel to the peoples. From that rejection of the message, which meant that He did not have a homeland and forced Him to set out, the mission (which in this way profoundly coincides with the Church) was born; the Church arose as the new form of mission".<sup>24</sup> It is not by chance that he considers the two Decrees – *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* – as "the ones that present the most profound ideas regarding the concept of mission".<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Ratzinger's reflections do not touch on for *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution* issued by Paul VI at the end of the Council, which dedicates to the Church's mission the

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immediately after the Council, among them J. SCHÜTTE (ed.), *Mission nach dem Konzil*, M. Grünewald, Mainz 1967; S. BRECHTER, "Decretum de activitate missionali ecclesiae. Die Entstehungsgeschichte des Missionsdekrets", in H. VORGRIMMER (ed.), *Lexikon Für Theologie und Kirche. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Konstitutionen, Dekrete, und Erklärungen. Lateinisch und Deutsch Kommentare*, vol. 3, Herder, Freiburg 1968, 10-21. The Conciliar interpretation of Giuseppe Alberigo and the 'Bologna School' belongs to the second group, along with the debate that followed the publication of the doctoral work of L. RÜTTI, *Zur Theologie der Mission. Kritische Analysen und neue Orientierungen*, Kaiser-Grünewald, Mainz-München 1972. The third group consists of the texts published a few decades after the Council, among them the most meditated is P. HÜNERMANN, "Theologischer Kommentar zum Dekret über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche *Ad Gentes*", in P. HÜNERMANN – B.J. HILBERATH (eds.), *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Herder, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2004-2006, 221-336.

<sup>23</sup> "The central text of the Council regarding the essence, the task and the way of the mission [...] is found in Nos. 13-17 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (J. RATZINGER, *Das neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*, Patmos Verlag, Düsseldorf 2004; Italian translation: "Dichiarazioni del Concilio sulla missione fuori del decreto sull'attività missionaria della Chiesa, in J. RATZINGER, *Il Nuovo Popolo di Dio. Questioni ecclesiologiche*, Queriniana, Brescia 1971, 405-434; quotation: 406).

<sup>24</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Das neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*, 403 (Italian edition).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

entire fourth chapter of its first part, entitled *The Role of the Church in the Modern World* (GS 40-45).<sup>26</sup>

## 2.1 The Decree *Ad Gentes*: Doctrinal Principles (2-9)

The commentaries published immediately after the Council were in keeping with Ratzinger's line. The Decree on missions, presented by Johannes Schütte during the conciliar assembly at the end of the debates, deserves to be mentioned. Schütte argued that a theological foundation of the mission must include four points: its Trinitarian origin, its ecclesial value, a clear notion of the mission and, lastly, the affirmation of its need.<sup>27</sup> He coherently presented the mission as "the very essence of the Church, her vital growth; not only numerical growth but the inner expansion of the Mystical Body. Like a living body, the Church – not to perish – has to grow and manifest her vital energy".<sup>28</sup> *Ad Gentes* 2 is the highest expression of this view: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit, that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father". This is a "lapidary text for its form of thesis",<sup>29</sup> according to Suso Brechter, who considered the Trinitarian character of this passage as a retrieval of the patristic distinction between 'economy' and 'theology', capable of going back from the economy of the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the intimate life of the Trinity. He referred to this first chapter of *Ad Gentes* as "a brief presentation of the theological theory of the mission".<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This was intentional, as Ratzinger might not have concurred with the structure of the document or with that specific section that, with GS 45, provides a Christocentric interpretation of the Pastoral Constitution. See J. RATZINGER, "Ester Hauptteil: Kommentar zum I. Kapitel der pastoralen Konstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute", in H. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Lexikon Für Theologie und Kirche. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Konstitutionen, Dekrete, und Erklärungen. Lateinisch und Deutsch Kommentare*, 313-354.

<sup>27</sup> J. SCHÜTTE, "Relatio (7 October 1965)", in *Acta Synodalia sacrosancti Concilii oecumenici Vaticani II > 4, Periodus Quarta, Pars III: Congregationes Generales CXXXVIII-CXLV*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 1977, 701-702.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 700.

<sup>29</sup> S. BRECHTER, "Decretum de activitate missionali ecclesiae. Die Entstehungsgeschichte des Missionsdekrets", 10-21; quotation: 24.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

The importance of *Ad Gentes* 2-4 was not underestimated. The Trinitarian history of God's active presence in human history is presented on the backdrop of the religious search of a humanity seeking God "by the attempts [...] if perchance it may contact Him or find Him, though He be not far from anyone of us" (AG 3). On this ground, the conciliar text mentions the Father's *amor fontalis* from which everything flows, the dialogic structure of the Son's *kénosis*, and God's dwelling in the world through the Holy Spirit. From that emerges a missionary understanding of the persons themselves: God the Father is a missionary God and, through the Son and the Spirit, He instills "into the hearts of the faithful the same mission spirit which impelled Christ Himself". A brief remark recalls that "doubtless, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified" (AG 4).

Here the concept is extended beyond *Dei Verbum* 3, and has been further developed by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 56-58. Presenting the presence of the Spirit as the "covenant with Noah", *Catechism* regards it as "the principle of the divine economy towards the 'nations.' [...] The covenant with Noah remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel".

Built around the Church, the text of *Ad Gentes* 5-7 is not a simple reawakening of the theme of catholicity, but maintains its original link with Christology. The Council links the Church and her saving mission to the mystery of Christ; the Church is therefore a "sacrament of salvation for the whole world", which is founded on that relationship with Christ guaranteed by its apostolicity and catholicity. Linked to Christ and animated by His Spirit and grace, the mission makes the Church "fully present to all men or nations, so that [...] there may lie open before them a firm and free road to full participation in the mystery of Christ".

Illuminated by the Gospel of Christ and guided by His Spirit, the Church "must walk in the same path on which Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which death he came forth a victor by his resurrection". The humanity of Jesus – who lived, died, and rose again for all humanity – is at the basis of a universal and objective structure of salvation: the Church. It is through the Church that the renewal of creation and the sanctification of humanity can be achieved. This is what *Gaudium et Spes* 22 teaches: "We ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal mystery". The death and

resurrection of Jesus the Lord makes His Church the universal sacrament of salvation for all human beings, baptized and unbaptized. This is the Church's mission in human history.

To be more precise, *Ad Gentes* 6 teaches us that this mission “is one and the same, everywhere and in every condition, even though it may be carried out differently according to circumstances”. Any differences in the exercise of this *munus* (gift and function), “are not due to the inner nature of the mission itself, but rather to the circumstances in which this mission is exercised”.<sup>31</sup>

Despite its firm indications about the missionary nature of the Church, the Decree shows a considerable uncertainty when, having to clarify these indications, it just provides a general explanation, whereby “missions’ is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ”. Other general statements concern the missionary activity, which is “mostly exercised in certain territories recognized by the Holy See”, where the Church “has not yet taken root”. Illuminating, however, is the observation that in the missionary activity “various stages sometimes are found side by side: first, that of the beginning or planting, then that of newness or youth. When these have passed, the Church’s missionary activity does not cease, but there lies upon the particular Churches already set up the duty of continuing this activity and of preaching the Gospel to those still outside”. Nevertheless, facing radical changes in “the groups among which the Church dwells”, and the rise of “an entirely new set of circumstances”, the modalities of the Church’s action are not clearly outlined, as the Decree aforementioned shows: “the Church must deliberate whether these conditions might again call for her missionary activity”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This aspect is addressed again in *Redemptoris Missio* 31 and clarified in 33. The different circumstances in which the mission takes place have territorial, social, and cultural roots, are pointed out in 37.

<sup>32</sup> Many of these statements were influenced by the schools of Münster and Leuven, as well as by the theory of the three selves – self-governing, self-propagating, and self-sufficiency – formulated by the Anglican Henry Venn and spread throughout in the Catholic world.



Even so, the need for missionary activity is one of the major points of the conciliar teaching, as reiterated in *Ad Gentes* 7, and the Council addressed this question directly. On the basis of God's universal saving design and its realization in Jesus, outside of whom there is no salvation, the Second Vatican Council taught that "all must be converted to Him, made known by the Church's preaching, and all must be incorporated into Him by baptism". The Council was well aware of the power of this statement, and clarified it with two observations. First, by reaffirming the Church's traditional doctrine whereby "those men cannot be saved, who though aware that God, through Jesus Christ founded the Church as something necessary, still do not wish to enter into it, or to persevere in it". Then, by mentioning the possibility that "God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to find that faith without which it is impossible to please Him".<sup>33</sup>

This statement addressed the case of non-Christians, envisaging a path of salvation for them. The issue had been tackled prior to the issuance of *Ad Gentes*, as well as *Nostra Aetate* (October, 1965), in a Seminar on *Christian Revelation and Non-Christian Religions* held in Mumbai, India, in conjunction with the 38<sup>th</sup> *International Eucharistic Congress* (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> November 1964).<sup>34</sup> The proceedings focused on the Council's work on non-Christian religions, although the Council had not yet produced its conclusive documents. The final declaration of the Seminar – drafted by a small group of participants, while the majority was at the airport to greet Paul VI – approved the concept of *Heilswege* (paths of salvation) for non-Christians, as coined in Karl Rahner's theology.<sup>35</sup> This move prompted opposed

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<sup>33</sup> These concepts were completed subsequently both by *Lumen Gentium* 16, which teaches that "those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God", and by *Gaudium et Spes* 22, which in turn reiterates forcefully that "we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with Christ's Paschal mystery".

<sup>34</sup> The texts of the Seminar can be found in J. NEUNER (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, Burns and Oates, London 1967, but they had already been published in *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies*, vol. 4, July-October 1965, 161-348: "Christian Revelation and Non-Christian Religions. Theological Seminar Held on the Occasion of Bombay Eucharistic Congress in India".

<sup>35</sup> Rahner devoted his attention on the person's religious status, and on the ultimate intentionality of human religiosity understood in the light of the supernat-

reactions, and several commentaries expressed their dissent.<sup>36</sup> The Council did not adopt the Mumbai conclusions, but that episode raised awareness of the urgency to finalize the doctrine of the Church on relations with other religions, including the theme of salvation.

The case of non-Christians came with knots that needed to be untied. However, given the heritage of faith involved, the Church faced the task with courage. It must be kept in mind that it is not the task of the magisterium to resolve theological discussions, but to pre-

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ural existential. Interpreting every person's path in the light of the universal saving will, and on the basis of the economy of grace, Rahner considered the conscience's openness to the totality of one's existence – including the religious fact – as openness to that God who offers Himself to man as the ultimate purpose of His life. From this perspective, human research, if open to the completeness and the ultimate truth of life, walks together with the gifts of grace. The person arrives at himself only if he abandons himself to the mystery of a grace which is present and working in him: by accepting himself completely, in all his truth, the person encounters Christ, the fulfiller and guarantor of his anonymous movement towards God, caused by grace. This encounter includes a pre-ordination to Christ, the absolute Savior. In this light, Rahner spoke about “anonymous Christians” to indicate people who live this path, and he concludes by indicating the non-Christian religions as *Heilswege*, as paths of salvation (K. RAHNER, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, Longman & Todd, London 1966, 115-134; ID., “Anonymous Christians”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, Longman & Todd, London 1969, 390-398; ID., “Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 12, Longman & Todd, London 1974, 161-178; ID., “Observations on the Problem of the Anonymous Christian”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14, Longman & Todd, London 1976, 280-298; ID., “Anonymous Christianity and the Explicit Faith”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16, Longman & Todd, London 1979, 52-59; ID., “Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17, Longman & Todd, London 1981, 39-50; ID., “The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16, Crossroad, New York 1983, 199-224). Inspired by Rahner's theology, Raimon Panikkar regarded every created existence as ‘cristofania’, a manifestation of Christ (R. PANIKKAR, “Relation of Christians to their Non-Christian Surrounding”, *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies*, vol. 4, 1965, 303-348; quotation: 310).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, J. DANÉLOU, “À propos de l'évangélisation et du salut des non-chrétiens. Des communiqués inquiétants”, *Le Christ au monde*, vol. 10, 1965, 131-138; F. LEGRAND, “La mission a-t-elle pour but d'apporter le salut? À propos du Colloque théologique de Bombay”, *Le Christ au monde*, vol. 10, 1965, 235-246; D. COLOMBO, “Dopo il Colloquio di Bombay. Religioni non cristiane e attività missionaria”, *Le missioni cattoliche*, 1965, 457-461; L. ELDERS, “Die Taufe der Weltreligionen”, *Theologie und Glaube*, vol. 55, 1965, 124-131.

serve the faith unchanged. For this reason, the choice of the verbs used in *Lumen Gentium* 14-16 should be taken into due account while describing the different relationship that Catholics, non-Catholic Christians, and non-Christians have with the Church in which one saves oneself. *Lumen Gentium* 14 observes that Catholics are fully incorporated into the Church (*plene incorporantur*), and *Lumen Gentium* 15 recalls that the Church knows that it is united with non-Catholic Christians as well (*novit plures ob rationes [esse] coniunctam*). *Lumen Gentium* 16 points out that those who have not yet received the Gospel are ordained to the people of God in manifold forms (*ad populum Dei diversis rationibus ordinantur*). In this way, we are introduced into the different forms of relationship of the Catholic communities with non-Catholics and non-Christians. The use of these different links – *incorporatio, coniunctio, ordinatio* – will be clarified through the Scriptures, Tradition, and theology.

## 2.2 The Magisterial Development of the Teaching about Mission after the Second Vatican Council

The most important result of the Council's work was to bring the mission back to the center of ecclesial life and, consequently, to clarify the need for the missionary engagement of the whole People of God. In this regard, *Ad Gentes* 2 states that the Church is missionary by her very nature, and *Redemptoris Missio* 32 talks about a "return" or "repatriation" of the missions into the Church's mission. However, this enhancement of the missionary character of the Church still had to develop a major interest in the mission's eschatological character, along the lines of the wonderful formulation of *Ad Gentes* 9: "And so the time for missionary activity extends between the first coming of the Lord and the second, in which latter the Church will be gathered from the four winds like a harvest into the Kingdom of God. For the Gospel must be preached to all nations before the Lord shall come (cf. Mk 13:10)". The Protestant Johannes Dürr defined it as "the road from the Church to the Church",<sup>37</sup> while the Catholic world – once it abandoned a rigid interpretation of the formulation

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<sup>37</sup> J. DÜRR, *Sendende und werdende Kirche in der Missionstheologie Gustav Warneck's*, Basler Missionsbuch, Basel 1947, 34.

*extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – remained firmly anchored to the Church as the *universal sacrament of salvation*.

### 2.2.1 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

Paul VI<sup>38</sup> would profoundly renew the theology of the mission and base his theology of evangelization on a new reading of the mission in the light of Christ. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 7, Montini regarded Christ as “the very first and the greatest Evangelizer”. The evangelization is a complete synthesis of “the meaning, the content, and the modes of evangelization”. In a similar Christological evangelization, the Kingdom of God is “so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes ‘the rest’ which is ‘given in addition’. Only the Kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative” (EN 8).

Starting from the observation that “the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time” (EN 20), the Pope asks us to grasp the evangelization of the Kingdom not in partial or fragmentary forms, but “in all its richness, complexity, and dynamism” (EN 17). The announcement of the Kingdom includes an “unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man’s concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development, a message especially energetic today about liberation” (EN 29; cf. EN 30).

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<sup>38</sup> The teaching of Paul VI – spread amid a difficult season – today enjoys considerable interest, but it is not adequately studied. For the understanding of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, it is essential a knowledge of the *Synod* that preceded it and of the related polemics: D. GRASSO, *De evangelizatione mundi huius temporis. Pars altera: Themata quaedam theologica cum experientis connexa clarificantur*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Civitate Vaticana 1974. For the comments on the Apostolic Exhortation see: “Evangelii Nuntiandi. Kommentäre und Perspektiven”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, vol. 32, 1976, 241-341; E. TESTA et al., *L’annuncio del vangelo oggi. Commento all’Esortazione apostolica di Paolo VI “Evangelii Nuntiandi”*, Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome 1977; B. MCGREGOR, “Commentary on *Evangelii Nuntiandi*”, *Doctrine and Life*, March-April 1997, 53-97.

These themes will be resumed and completed in the following papal documents. St. John Paul II, in his address to the delegates of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in the San Carlos Seminary of Manila on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1995, stated: "The *Magna Charta* of evangelization remains the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI, with the complement of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* which I wrote in 1990 in order to defend and promote the concept of 'missionary evangelization' or mission *ad gentes*."<sup>39</sup> Pope Francis reaffirmed a similar judgment, pointing to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* as "the greatest pastoral document that has ever been written to this day."<sup>40</sup>

### 2.2.2 *Redemptoris Missio*

Written twenty-five years after the end of the Second Vatican Council, the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* is the result of both the theology of the first three chapters of the Decree *Ad Gentes* and the strong Christological option of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Its theological peculiarity depends both on the characteristic theological awareness of St. John Paul II, and on the problems raised in the 1970s and 1980s. The message of the Encyclical is simple: it affirms the Christocentric character of the revelation of God; it points out that the presence of the Kingdom and the work of the Holy Spirit are the key elements, and places strong emphasis on the uniqueness and universality of salvation. It is up to theology to clarify the meaning, dynamics, and modalities of these statements, as these themes cannot be taken for granted in contemporary pluralistic society in which religions intersect and challenge each other.

In the language of tradition, the universal salvific will of God is connected to both the person of Jesus, unique and universal Mediator, and to His Church, even if not in the same way. The belonging

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<sup>39</sup> *Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1995, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_15011995\\_federation-of-asian-bishop-conferences.pdf/](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_15011995_federation-of-asian-bishop-conferences.pdf/).

<sup>40</sup> *Address of Pope Francis to Participants in the Pilgrimage from the Diocese of Brescia*, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130622\\_pellegrinaggio-diocesi-brescia.html/](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130622_pellegrinaggio-diocesi-brescia.html/).

to His Church, necessary for salvation, can also be realized in the different forms of relationship outlined in the *Lumen Gentium* 16. The document recalls that God is not “far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Savior wills that all men be saved”. Also, “the salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of His sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. It enables each person to attain salvation through his or her free cooperation” (RM 10).

This is a way of thinking about the uniqueness and universality of Christian revelation in a pluralistic context, where pluralism itself must be understood in the light of the mystery of Christ from which salvation comes. According to *Lumen Gentium* 16, Divine Providence does not deny its help to those who have not yet come to a full knowledge of God, but seek it sincerely and, in this line, adds that all that is good and true in them is already a preparation for the encounter with Him. The religious journey of believers, who do not know Christ but seek God with sincerity, has a relationship with the Lord and His Church. From this ensues an invitation not to consider the belonging to the Church on the basis of theological principles, but from the point of view of those who approach it. The attention given to the anthropological path of the believers must take into account their spiritual situation and personal journey, as much as the socio-cultural condition they are part of and in which they live.

This opens up a research pathway – still largely unexplored – on the relationship between the Lord Jesus and the non-Christian religions. In this regard, the indication of *Redemptoris Missio* 5 is important: after having recalled Christ’s unique and universal mediation, John Paul II observes that “although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to His”. This possibility does not eliminate the fact that the only full communion with the Father is that lived by the Son and sustained by His Spirit, but recalls how the necessity of grace does not eliminate human research nor cooperation. *Dominus Iesus* 14 delves deeper into this concept by recalling *Lumen Gentium* 62, which uses Mary’s term as “media-

trix”, inviting at the same time to interpret it in such a way not to remove or add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ, the only Mediator. On this basis, Ilaria Morali concluded hastily that the hypothetical position of *Redemptoris Missio* 5 is unworkable.<sup>41</sup>

In summation, it would seem more correct to acknowledge the existence of a single history of salvation and its coincidence with the globality of human history. There is one humanity and one human history: without hesitation, Gustavo Gutierrez argues that there are not two histories, one profane and the other sacred, but there is only one human becoming, assumed by Christ and, from Him, brought to its fulfillment. The history of salvation is the very content of human history.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly lines, *Redemptoris Missio* 28-29 presents the Holy Spirit at work in every time and every place.<sup>43</sup>

While this theological approach is a recent one, it can avail itself of the starting points of the patristic and scholastic orientations. Jacques Dupuis recalled Justin’s theses on the Revelation of the Word and the presence of the *Semina Verbi* (the seeds of the Word) in human history,<sup>44</sup> Irenaeus’ historical-saving theology,<sup>45</sup> and the plurality of the covenants: with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and with Jesus.<sup>46</sup> It is possible to believe that this four-pronged covenant is the

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<sup>41</sup> I. MORALI, “Salvation, Religions and Dialogue in the Roman Magisterium”, in K.J. BECKER – I. MORALI (eds.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions. A Comprehensive Study (with the collaboration of M. Borrmans and G. D’Costa)*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 2010, 136-137.

<sup>42</sup> See G. GUTIERREZ, *Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 1973.

<sup>43</sup> *Ad Gentes* 4 also recalled that the Spirit “was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified”, that is before the Pentecost and Christ’s coming.

<sup>44</sup> J. DUPUIS, “The Cosmic Christ in the Early Fathers”, *The Indian Journal of Theology*, vol. 15, 1966, 106-120; later republished in ID., *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Irenaeus’ text *Adversus Haereses* IV, 6, 5-6, is of great interest: “For this purpose did the Father reveal the Son, that through His instrumentality He might be manifested to all. [...] The Father therefore has revealed Himself to all, by making His Word visible to all. [...] For by means of the creation itself, the Word reveals God the Creator; and by means of the world [does He declare] the Lord the Maker of the world; and by means of the formation [of man] the Artificer who formed him; and by the Son that Father who begat the Son: and these things do indeed address all men in the same manner, but all do not in the same way believe them”.

<sup>46</sup> See chapter 8 in J. DUPUIS, “History of Covenants: One and Many”, in ID., *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Orbis Books, New York –

result of a reflection on the ‘many times’ and the ‘different ways’ in which Heb 1:1-4 frames God’s Revelation.<sup>47</sup> On his part, Congar<sup>48</sup> affirms that the just of all times, even before the Incarnation, dates back to the regime of the new covenant and Christian grace. Peter of Poitiers distinguished between *caput* (head) and *principium* (beginning),<sup>49</sup> formulating a Christology made explicit in the *gratia capitis* lived in the Church, but open to the world that Christ illuminated and animated by His presence and action. St. Thomas Aquinas, who presented the synagogue as the bride of Christ, commented on Christ’s grace in human history and explained that *gratia capitis operata est a constitutione mundi, ex quo homines membra ejus esse coeperunt* (the grace of the Head was already at work in the creation of the world, with which men began to be His members).<sup>50</sup> In a successful synthesis, Aloysius Pieris spoke about the correlation between cosmic religions and meta-cosmic soteriologies.<sup>51</sup>

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Maryknoll 1997. Dupuis’ perspective is universalistic. For him the covenant of God with humanity does not begin with Abraham but with Adam, and has in Gen 3:15 his first realization, confirmed after the great flood (Ibid., 216-217). In a context of interreligious dialogue, it will be necessary to distinguish between Abrahamic and Abrahamitic: the first term considers Abraham, along with his descendants, as the progenitor of the Jewish people and their faith, while the second indicates those religious currents that consider Abraham as part of their sacred history and as a reference for the spiritual development of humanity.

<sup>47</sup> The concept of the plurality of covenants is now part of the theological language. It was used by the Interdenominational Theological Center in the document titled *Christianity and the World Religions*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1996, and had its first magisterial mention in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 56-58.

<sup>48</sup> Y. CONGAR, “Ecclesia ab Abel”, in M. REDING (ed.), *Abhandlungen über Theologie und Kirche. Festschrift für Karl Adam*, Patmos Verlag, Düsseldorf 1952, 79-108.

<sup>49</sup> The distinction between *caput* and *principium* arises from the need to explain the distribution of Christ’s grace to all humanity even before the Incarnation. Does not the *caput* need a body and members? How can the ones who do not know Christ yet be his? This distinction lies in the concentration in Christ of all the spiritual gifts necessary for humanity, but in their communication, the role of Christ *caput* of the Church, that renews humanity, is different from his function as *principium* of divine grace based on his presence and action in the creation depending on him. This is the theme of “Ecclesia ab Abel”.

<sup>50</sup> This and other quotations from Thomas Aquinas are in Y. CONGAR, “Ecclesia ab Abel”, 92.

<sup>51</sup> See A. PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 1988, 71-73.



### 3. *Missio Ecclesiae* and the Kingdom of God: A Complex Theological Debate

A significant feature of contemporary theology is the rediscovery of eschatology,<sup>52</sup> and mission theology is not an exception.<sup>53</sup> It is not just a matter of accepting that missiology has a content organization including a view of the end of time, but to recognize that this discipline has shifted from the centrality of ecclesiology to the centrality of the Kingdom. The Church itself and its historic ministry are “effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom” (RM 20). If *Ad Gentes* still moves along the lines of a missionary Church, the Christocentric choice of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* involves the centrality of the Gospel of the Kingdom, as explained by *Redemptoris Missio*: “The Kingdom of God is meant for all mankind, and all people are called to become members of it” (RM 17, cf. RM 12-20).<sup>54</sup>

It is after the Second World War that the mission starts to focus predominantly on eschatology. According to Ludwig Wiedenmann,<sup>55</sup> this shift is the basis of a radical change, of the beginning a new era of the mission. After examining the eschatological conceptions of Paul Althaus, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Oscar Cullmann, he concludes that an eschatological conception of the

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. G. COLZANI, *Escatologia e teologia della storia*, in G. CANOBBIO – P. CODA (eds.), *La teologia del XX secolo. Un bilancio. II: Prospettive sistematiche*, Città Nuova, Roma 2003, 483-560.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Th. SUNDERMEIER, “Theology of Mission”, in K. MÜLLER, Th. SUNDERMEIER, S.B. BEVANS, R.H. BLIESE, *Dictionary of Mission. Theology, History, Perspectives*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 1998, 429-451. In particular, see I. Theological Models of Mission, 429-437, and II. Renewed Reflections on Mission Theology, 437-444. On mission theology and eschatology see also H. BÜRKLE, “Mission. VII: Systematisch-Theologisch”, in G. KRAUSE – G. MÜLLER (eds.), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 23, 1994; W. De Gruyter, Berlin – New York 1994, 59-68; H. BÜRKLE, “Mission. IV: Systematisch-Theologisch”, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 7, 1998, 292-293.

<sup>54</sup> The *Kingdom-centered* vision of *Redemptoris Missio* 17 presents some serious limitations. For instance, it seems to propose a theocentric view of the Kingdom, with the risk of bypassing silently the figure of Christ. Moreover, the text tends to privilege the creation over redemption, marginalizing or underestimating the Church. The lack of more precise indications leads one to think that this is a warning to be taken into account rather than a clear enunciation.

<sup>55</sup> L. WIEDENMANN, *Mission und Eschatologie. Eine Analyse der neueren deutschen evangelischen Missionstheologie*, Bonifacius-Druckerei, Paderborn 1965.

mission is a real turning point in the understanding of it. Since there are great differences among the authors in thinking about the *eschaton*, it is still necessary to understand it in a Christological way, in its relationship with history: the *eschaton* is a paradoxical presence that opens history beyond itself. As Christian Schutz later wrote, “the eschaton could be well defined as the mystery of time. [...] Time never has to come to terms with anything until we find ourselves before its mystery, to appear hidden in it”.<sup>56</sup>

One of the earliest authors to undertake this path was Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk.<sup>57</sup> In his reconstruction of the history of missionary thought, the author came to the conclusion that the Church had absorbed the mission and destroyed its premises: the world was reduced to a mere territory where the Church works and the Kingdom was relegated to the eschatology of the end of time. Hoekendijk called this kind of theology *Church-ism, ecclesial-centrism*. This theological approach had erased the missionary character of the Church by externalizing it: the mission is outside the confines of the Church, it is in non-Christian territories. The mission has nothing to do with Christian communities: it concerns those who are not part of it. Hoekendijk thus sought to separate the mission from this illegitimate point of reference, encouraging a rethinking of the mission to be centered again on the Kingdom, which in turn becomes the Gospel, the Good News for humanity and the world. Interpreted in functional terms, the Church’s life and task are in the mission for the Kingdom. Its ontological structure becomes a reality when the Church proclaims the Gospel and makes it present

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<sup>56</sup> Ch. SCHUTZ, *Fondazione generale dell’escatologia*, in J. FEINER – M. LOHRER (eds.), *Mysterium salutis*, Italian edition, vol. 11: *Il tempo intermedio e il compimento della storia della salvezza*, Queriniana, Brescia 1978, 179.

<sup>57</sup> J.Ch. HOEKENDIJK, “The Church in Missionary Thinking”, *International Review of Missions*, vol. 41, n. 3, 1952, 324-336. Hoekendijk’s thesis (*Kerk en Volk in de Duitse Zendingwetenschap*, Niemeijer, Utrecht 1948), presented at the University of Utrecht, was at the center of controversies and harsh confrontations, and was translated into German much later, with the addition of an appendix (*Kirche und Volk in der Deutschen Missionswissenschaft*, Ch. Kaiser, München 1967). His best known work is *The Church Inside Out* [1964], SCM Press, London 1966, a collection of studies and lectures written between 1948 and 1963. A study on Hoekendijk that deserves a special mention is G. COFFELE, *Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk: da una Teologia della Missione ad una Teologia Missionaria*, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome 1976.

in the history of humanity. This and nothing else is the apostolate – the apostolic life. His identification of the Gospel of the Kingdom with the *shalom*<sup>58</sup> was an attempt to find a more precise point of contact with the history of humanity: a humanity that suffered during World War II and constantly underwent conflicts and violence.

In the Catholic area, similar themes were taken up and examined further by a group of theologians. In the light of the Council's retrieval of dialogue with the modern world, they considered *Gaudium et Spes* the missionary text par excellence, to which they added a small group of documents: *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Nostra Aetate*, and *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The leading author of the group was Ludwig Rütli.<sup>59</sup> His thesis was presented in Münster and was accepted with no changes. After its publication in 1972, however, Rütli's work was met with much criticism.<sup>60</sup> Along the lines of Hoekendijk and Johann Baptist Metz, Ludwig Rütli analyzed the eschatology of Barth, Cullmann, and Jürgen Moltmann. With Moltmann, he maintained that the mission is a historical representation of the divine action. The latter, for believers, entails the expectation of a certain future in hope and the commitment to the direction mapped out by that hope. On this basis, in the third part of his work, Rütli deals with the problems of the mission.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The theology of Hoekendijk is also referred to as the *theology of the shalom*, for the importance that this concept holds in his writings. Shalom, however, must be understood in all its biblical breadth.

<sup>59</sup> L. RÜTLI, *Zur Theologie der Mission. Kritische Analysen und neue Orientierungen*.

<sup>60</sup> Among the negative reactions to Rütli's work, worth to be mentioned are J. DÖRMANN, "Theologie der Mission? Kritik zu 'kritische Analysen'", *Theologie und Glaube*, vol. 63, 1973, 342-361; H. WALDENFELS, "Eine Theologie der Mission?", *Priester und Mission*, vol. 4, 1973, 201-217; D. WIEDERKEHR, "Selbstbezogene und Weltbezogene Mission: Zu L. Rütli, Zur Theologie der Mission", *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft*, vol. 30, 1974, 81-94. Congar is also critical of Rütli in the article "Zur Theologie der Mission", *Theologische Revue*, vol. 69, 1973, 354-360, published also in French: "Théologie de la Mission", *Documents Episcopat – Bulletin du secrétariat de la conférence épiscopale française*, vol. 18, October 1973, 1-6. Rütli replied to the critiques of J. Dörmann and H. Waldenfels in "Ein Beitrag zur missionstheologischen Diskussion in einiger Sache. Zu den Rezensionen von J. Dörmann und H. Waldenfels", *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft*, vol. 30, 1974, 205-306.

<sup>61</sup> See L. RÜTLI, *Welt als Horizont der Sendung*, in ID., *Zur Theologie der Mission. Kritische Analysen und neue Orientierungen*, 136-232. A synthesis of the abo-

The author distanced himself from the Conciliar conception of mission, centered on the missionary and ecclesial problems, which he considered the result of a pietistic-individual view rooted in the contrast between nature and grace. That does not enable the Church mission to hold a dialogue with the world, constraining it within the bounds of *ecclesial-centrism*. In his opinion, the mission needs new motivations and a new praxis in the contemporary scenario. Therefore, the focal point of the mission cannot be creation, with its view of a humanity in God's image, nor the Incarnation, which implies the placing of humanity into God's life. The mission should then revolve around an eschatology – intended as a synthesis of Christology and historical anthropology – that welcomes and lives the new creation bursting into human history, while solving the drama of sin.<sup>62</sup> Salvation itself – the heart of the mission – should be understood in eschatological and messianic terms. As such, it is the offering of an ir-repressible and efficacious hope in renewal of the world.

However, the eschatological perspective remains decisive. To have a more adequate theology of the mission, Rütli believes, it is not enough to present all-time beliefs in modern terms, for instance dialogue, development, liberation, humanization, solidarity, fraternity, and more. Instead, a change in mentality is required; a transformation of the dominant theological schemes, a new foundation of the mission. In addition, it is not sufficient to ground it on doctrinal themes such as the great mandate, catholicity, and the apostolic ministry entrusted to the episcopal body and to Christians.

According to Rütli, this kind of view would still be intra-ecclesial, while it would be necessary to return working on the formal and basic structures of faith: revelation, the *traditio fidei* (the transmis-

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ve mentioned book is in ID., “Spiegazione della funzione politica della comunità cristiana alla luce della teologia politica”, *Concilium*, vol. 4, 1973, 669-683.

<sup>62</sup> Rütli's approach is shared by G. EVERS, *Mission – Nicht Christliche Religionen – Weltliche Welt*, Aschendorff, Münster 1974. Horst Burkle does not follow the same line of thought, however his view is also eschatological. To explain the recapitulation of all things in Christ, he resumes the vision of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Bürkle interpreted the Church's mission as an act that anticipates and, while announcing the Word of Jesus, leads to the final completion in Christ. He explained the participation that takes place in Christ with the notion of “representation”, which dissolves the anticipation in the representatives' participation. See H. BÜRKLE, “Mission. VII: Systematisch-Theologisch”, 59-68 and 288-295.

sion of faith), and the life witness, rethinking them in terms of a new understanding of the mission, based on the historic presence of the Kingdom that renews our life horizon. Hence, his proposal for a theoretico-practical rethinking of the mission aimed at linking together the gift of the Kingdom with the historical processes of the times in which we live. The mission must offer hope and lead to the abundance of life, the latter being the very reason for Christ's coming (cf. Jn 10:10). This correlation between the Gospel and history – this evangelization encompassing life and human events – is detached both from a juridico-institutional view of the mission as *plantatio ecclesiae*, and from a verbal-sacramental missionary praxis of a ritual kind with no influence on life.

#### 4. The Council's Reception: A New Starting Point

The Council and its reception are the starting point for a renewed theology of the mission, but it should be observed that the conciliar documents fulfilled this need only partially. The traditional relationship between the Gospel and non-Christian peoples was reexamined around the 'Church's mission' intended as an entity with a universal task, addressing the whole world, and as a duty binding all Christians. Therefore, according to Peter Hünemann, the Council provided an ecclesial stability to the mission and a universal missionary task to the Church.<sup>63</sup> However, he also pointed out that the initial statement of *Ad Gentes*, outlining a pilgrim Church "by her very nature" (AG 2) missionary, was not pursued further in the development of the document.

Getting to the heart of the theological debate, Hünemann said that the Trinitarian foundation of the divine design does not seem connected to the theme of the Kingdom, which is absent from *Ad Gentes* 2-4, and that the same Christological foundation of the mission in the *kenosis* does not appear to have been developed as much as it would require. Even Jesus' poverty, indicated as a model for the Church, lacks any reference to the poor and their ecclesial subjectivity.<sup>64</sup> A coherent analysis of the historical conditions – *Ad*

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. P. HÜNEMANN, "Theologischer Kommentar zum Dekret über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche *Ad Gentes*".

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 324.

*Gentes 6* – is also lacking, as is an analysis of what is linked to the missionary nature of the Church, primarily the ecclesial structures, their shortcomings, and their correspondence to current sociocultural conditions. The result is a mission affirmed in principle, but strongly concentrated on the institutional aspect. The Decree for Hünemann, by supposing the immutability of the ecclesial structures, demonstrated a lack of interest in the history and problems of humanity.<sup>65</sup>

Hünemann's observations are also shared by Massimo Faggioli, another keen observer of the Council's proceedings.<sup>66</sup> Faggioli reconstructed the history and the reasons behind the different phases of the Council's reception. In his opinion, the current phase – which often refers to Benedict XVI's address to the Roman Curia, using it erroneously as a flag to disqualify other approaches<sup>67</sup> – hinges around the opposition between the defense of the literalness of theological tradition and the attention to present-day problems. The danger is to forget that the Council belongs to everyone and requires everyone's contribution. For this reason, Faggioli evaluates positively the path Pope Francis has traced for the Church. By bringing the Council's major insights to today's problems, he has shifted the focus from the confrontation between two hermeneutics to the commitment – rooted in the Council – in favor of a real ecclesial renewal.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>66</sup> See M. FAGGIOLI, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*, Paulist Press, Mahwah 2012; M. FAGGIOLI – G. TURBANTI (eds.), *Il concilio inedito. Fonti del Vaticano II*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2001; M. FAGGIOLI, "Che ne è del Concilio Vaticano II?", *Rassegna di Teologia*, vol. 50, n. 1, 2009, 107-122; ID., "Lecture e commentari di 'Ad Gentes.' 50 anni di studi", *Ad Gentes*, vol. 16, n. 1, 2012, 71-76.

<sup>67</sup> In a speech addressed to the Roman Curia, Benedict XVI talked about two hermeneutics of the Council: the "hermeneutic of reform" and the "hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture". He asked for a "renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church, which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remains the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God" (*Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering them His Christmas Greetings*, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2005, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html)). On this matter, see also "A Council to be Rediscovered", in J. RATZINGER – V. MESSORI, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA 1987, 27-54.

## 5. Theology of Evangelization

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 4, Paul VI describes the evangelization as a twofold fidelity to “a message whose servants we are and to the people to whom we must transmit it living and intact”. From this ensues the fundamental areas of any theology of mission: Jesus’ Gospel, namely the Kingdom of God, is its content; the act of evangelization (reception and communication) is its vehicle; persons and peoples (every person and every people) are its receivers and collectively its subjects. Content, methods, and recipients should be considered jointly, in a mutual relationship. More important is the reciprocity that evangelization establishes between communication and reception, sending and sharing. There is but one process and not two: the communication is also the reception, the sending is also the sharing. Relying on the image of breathing, Dana L. Robert says that the Church gathers in worship, and inhales the Holy Spirit, which gives us strength; then we exhale a life full of praise, faith, and charity for the glory of that God who loves all creation.<sup>68</sup>

Paul VI explained the same concept with a simpler and more traditional terminology: “Evangelization will also always contain – as the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy” (EN 27). In *Deus caritas est* 1, with a theological language heedful of the anthropological pathway, Benedict XVI specified that “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”. This encounter begins with the singular relationship between two subjects, who welcome each other in their dignity and in their diversity. The content of the encounter is a message that – in its truth – gives to life a new horizon (the Church) in terms of meaning, depth, and beauty. In the end, the encounter has a style of com-

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. D.L. ROBERT, “Plenary I: Mission in long perspective”, in K. KIM – A. ANDERSON (eds.), *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow*, Regnum Books International, Edinburgh 2011, 64. In turn, the conference refers to the work of R.K. ORCHARD, *Mission in a Time of Testing: Thought and Practice in Contemporary Missions*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA 1964, 195-198.

munication, which makes use of every means possible, while going back in any moment to the primary mode of communication: the testimony. The latter, once shared, creates deep relationships among all those who accept it. These are the three components of each theology of the mission: the relationship established between the holder of a message and the recipient, the content of this message and, lastly, the way in which, once communicated, the message transforms the life of both actors in their own history.

### 5.1 Christian Faith and Cultures in the Church's Mission

In the modern era, the missionary commitment that led Christianity to assume the concrete face of a world religion, was almost always considered as an 'expansion'. We find this pattern especially in Kenneth Scott Latourette,<sup>69</sup> who regarded the mission as directed to human history, enhancing to this end the role of the Church in its institutional aspects. It is Christianity, intended as the historical form assumed by Western modernity over the centuries, that expands to the whole world to make it a participant in its way of being. Expansion is not here a mere account of facts, but a way of thinking about history and understanding the Gospel.<sup>70</sup>

In this regard, it is necessary to recall Kwame Bediako's thesis whereby not only the expansion of the Western Church is at stake, but also the identity of the African Churches.<sup>71</sup> Bediako delved into the intellectual and spiritual forces that shaped the missionary enterprise. His reflection is focused on Africa, but it can easily be applied to a wider context. He identified ethnocentrism as the major trait of the Western mission, arguing that it prevented a correct understanding of the African religious world and cultural heritage, as well as of the very nature of the Gospel. The encounter between the missionary vision of the West and the emerging theological con-

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<sup>69</sup> K.S. LATOURETTE, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Harper & Brothers, New York – London 1937-1945.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. A.F. WALLS, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity Reconsidered. Assessing Christian Progress and Decline*, in ID., *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, Orbis Books – T&T Clark, New York – Edinburgh 2002, 3-26.

<sup>71</sup> K. BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity. The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, Regnum Books International, Edinburgh 1992.



sciousness of the African Churches had been poor and often inadequate, and as a result both the theological consciousness and the identity of African Churches ended up being misunderstood.

The relationship between faith and culture has always been at the core of evangelization. Back in 1975, during a conference on the significance of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Congar observed the diversity and the correlation between faith and culture.<sup>72</sup> As a human answer to the saving work of God, faith is always rooted in the specificities of human history and, only in this way, can it radiate across society. Faith is Catholic only by establishing itself in the specific dynamics of peoples: ‘particular’ is opposed to ‘general’, not to ‘Catholic’. The particular achievements of the Catholic faith are *pars pro toto, totum in parte*.<sup>73</sup> The link between Catholic and particular is the sign of the Christian vitality and, today, the communion in difference is the new figure of faith. It should be recognized that the Catholic-Western culture is no longer dominant today, and also that the most important and vital contribution to the future of the Church comes from the Christian communities of the South of humanity.

In the ambit of the reflection on the modern dynamics of Christian faith, a significant place belongs to the studies of Andrew F. Walls. Walls reconstructed the history of the Christian missionary movement, abandoning any centralized vision of the mission and stressing the fact that every place reached by the Gospel became a departure point for a new, original missionary dynamism. This is the theory of *World Christianity*. The appropriation of faith – tied to a corresponding commitment to convey it – makes Christianity a religion of migration and irradiation. Walls concluded that Christianity, which is no longer Western, is moving towards a broad enhancement of the cultures and religions of the South of the world.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See Y. CONGAR, “Christianisme comme foi et comme culture”, in *Evangelizzazione e Culture. Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia. Roma 5-12 ottobre 1975*, Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome 1975, 83-103.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. See also H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Das Ganze im Fragment. Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie*, Benziger, Einsiedeln 1963 (English translation: *Man in History*, Sheed & Ward, London 1967).

<sup>74</sup> See A. F. WALLS, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History. Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Orbis Books – T&T Clark, New York – Edinburgh 1996; *Id.*, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History. Studies in the Transmission*

Without having to assess in depth Walls' theory and the change in the center of gravity of the Christian world, it should nevertheless be recognized that this author offered a meaningful picture of the dynamics of evangelization and the relationship between Christian faith and cultures. The weight carried by cultural differences in transmitting the Gospel led Walls to work out several guiding principles for communicating faith with a view to strengthening the community of believers. First, the *indigenizing principle* – based on the Incarnation – is the ability to make people feel at home in the Church. Second, the *pilgrim principle* is the ability to irradiate faith elsewhere, in contact with other groups and peoples. This principle is radically rooted in the universal salvation of the Risen Lord, and highlights the tension to the Catholic fullness that animates every Church, pushing it to a continuous journey towards every human sphere.<sup>75</sup> He completed his work with the *translation principle*, which enables all peoples to have access to the basic texts of the Christian faith and spirituality.<sup>76</sup>

This approach has the merit of presenting the missionary activity and the life of Christian communities in a dynamic way. Based on a constant balance, Christians must pay due attention to the context in which they live, in a continuing tension between the present, when Christianity has to be inculturated, and the salvific universality for which it must strive ceaselessly. In this perspective, the mission appears to be polycentric, linked to the missionary commitment of all communities and Christians. Walls uses an incisive expression, “mission from the margins”, meaning a mission that does not go from the center to the periphery, but from the periphery to similarly marginalized territories. It is what Walls calls “Ephesian moment”, that is the manifestation of the singular power of the Risen Lord in the communities that live on him: “He [the Father of glory] puts all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the Church,

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*and Appropriation of Faith*, Orbis Books – T&T Clark, New York – Edinburgh 2002. A work published in his honor is W.R. BURROWS, M.R. GORNIK, J.A. MCLEAN (eds.), *Understanding World Christianity. The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 2011. This volume also contains the most accurate Walls' bibliography: 257-277.

<sup>75</sup> A.F. WALLS, *The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture*, in ID., *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, vol. 1, 3-15.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-42.

which is His body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way” (Eph 1:22-23). The vivacity and power of the Spirit,<sup>77</sup> the true protagonist of every mission, must be added to the love of the Father and to the vital presence of the Risen One: He is the source of the drive to press on, not only geographically but also beyond the frontiers of race and religion, for a truly universal mission.

The Western mission is behind us, and before us there is the evangelical mission of Jesus. Accepting the Gospel in faith is a global commitment and an ongoing journey. It is easy to enter this path: the Western culture has exalted the individual and placed its center of gravity in personal freedom. If we compare life to a journey, then the Christian model is Abraham who begins a journey in faith of which he does not know the outcome, running through the trust of the divine Word that guides him.<sup>78</sup> Abraham is certainly different from Ulysses, who makes an equally complex journey only to return home in the same condition as before.<sup>79</sup> Faith involves an act of abandonment in God’s hands and the mission must bear witness to it. There is no mission without faith, nor faith without love. Altogether they form that style of simplicity, trust, acceptance, and mutual support that make the evangelical novelty visible.

## 5.2 The Content of Evangelization

Human history is not a *vacuum*, an insubstantial time or just a standby, but the place where the Gospel reveals the profound and ultimate meaning of what exists. The Gospel is the Good News, which is that human life, and human history, is in the hands of a saving God, who shares everything, except sin, with us.

*Redemptoris Missio* 18 offers a crystal clear picture of this theme: “Christ not only proclaimed the Kingdom but, in Him, the King-

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<sup>77</sup> On the Spirit, a masterful presentation is in J.B. ANDERSON, *A Vatican II Pneumatology of the Pascal Mystery. The Historical-Doctrinal Genesis of “Ad Gentes”*, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome 1988.

<sup>78</sup> On Abraham, see S. KIERKEGAARD, *Fear and Trembling* [1843], Three Continents Press, Washington DC 1984.

<sup>79</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas compares Western philosophy to Ulysses’ journey, which is “only a return to his native island – a complaisance in Oneself, a misunderstanding of the Other” (E. LÉVINAS, “La signification et le sens”, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 69, n. 2, 1964, 125-156; quotation: 140).

dom itself became present and was fulfilled. [...] The Kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but is, before all else, *a person* with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God". Once the Kingdom's bond with Christ is clarified, it will no longer be possible to separate the Kingdom from the Church that lives in Christ. On this basis, "the Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom" (RM 20).

The theme of the Kingdom became fundamental starting from the 1960s thanks to a series of works that once again focused on it.<sup>80</sup> In general, the Kingdom indicates God's sovereignty which gradually expanded from the kingship over Israel to the lordship of the whole world, until it took on an overtly apocalyptic character. The pre-eminence of the eschatological perspective was discussed by Heinz Schürmann, who put the theological themes of the Revelation of God's fatherly love alongside the eschatological ones. The conclusion of these discussions was to establish the Kingdom as the center of Jesus' preaching, along with the ethical appeals to renewal and salvation that highlighted its historical and existential meaning. This message is linked both to the merciful and generous holiness of the Father's love, and to the self-awareness that Jesus has of Himself as that Son in whom human history reaches its definitive point. Jesus' eschatological self-awareness is not the expression and function of a general eschatological-apocalyptic awareness of the times, but rather the manifestation of God's Revelation – absolute Lord and benevolent Father – which Jesus offers as the foundation and content of His message.

In the light of the Paschal mystery, the manifestation of divine love is intertwined with the work of the Holy Spirit in which the love of the Father, revealed as the Word in the flesh of the Son, continues to stand outside of Himself, to appear in human history

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *God's Rule and Kingdom* [1959], Palm Publishers, Montreal 1963; G. LUNDSTRÖM, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh 1963; N. PERRIN, *Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, S.C.M. Press, London 1963. H. VORGRIMLER, *Understanding Karl Rahner: An Introduction to his Life and Thought*, Crossroad, New York 1986. In addition to these texts, see the contribution of H. SCHÜRMAN, *Das hermeneutische Hauptproblem der Verkündigung Jesus*, in H. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Gott in Welt. Festgabe für K. Rahner*, vol. 1, Herder, Freiburg 1964, 579-607.

through His Church. The revelation of the Father's love, in the form of flesh and human history, belongs to Trinitarian life. But the keeping of the divine love in a universal openness lies with the Spirit. Universal openness makes divine love capable of characterizing the history of the disciples of Jesus as addressed to that humanity the Father has always loved: in this encounter between the Church and humanity, the divine love at work in all of humanity recognizes its origin and meaning. For this reason, *Redemptoris Missio* 25 recalls that the Holy Spirit "is the source of the drive to press on, not only geographically but also beyond the frontiers of race and religion, for a truly universal mission".

The mission reveals both the acceptance of Jesus in us, and the sharing of His way of meeting others by going back to that divine image which is the ultimate structure of the mystery of people's lives and the root of their dignity, joy, and fullness of life. This theocentric character highlights both the difference between the action of God and ours, illuminating all our fragility and the liberating and personalizing character of this transcendent dynamic going beyond us. A detachment from this source makes it difficult to understand and live befittingly the cultural, social, religious and political dimensions of our life. The attitude of the Father, who places Himself in the hands of His children's freedom, is the joyous and distressing path that believers must accept in the face of the freedom of others. This is the only way to arrive at the ultimate truth of the person as a free, joyful, and generous gift of oneself. In this regard, two aspects deserve our attention: the relationship between the Kingdom and the Church, and that between the Kingdom, the Church, and humanity.

### 5.2.1 The Kingdom and the Church

The relationship between the Kingdom and the Church passes through that journey of faith manifested in the personal encounter with Christ, and in the reception of His grace and His Spirit. The relationship with Christ is thus the expression of a personal journey of witness, and of an ecclesial service in faith and charity that make the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church.

Rooted in Christ, the Church lives in that Kingdom which is one with the Lord Jesus: "One may not separate the Kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since

she is ordered toward the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign, and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both. Christ endowed the Church, His body and spouse, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in her, enlivens her with His gifts and charisms, sanctifies, guides and constantly renews her. The result is a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role; hence the Church's special connection with the Kingdom of God and Christ, which she has 'the mission of announcing and inaugurating among all peoples'" (RM 18).

Already present and at work in history, the Kingdom is not fully realized yet for it is current and, at the same time, future. So there is a dialectic between 'now' and 'not yet' that will find its conclusion in the great hope presented in Rev 21:3-7: God's communion with humanity. In this life, the Church "like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the cross and death of the Lord until he comes" (LG 8). The Kingdom will be fully realized only in that eternal life in which the love of God will have all transformed, thus fulfilling the hope we bear in our hearts: "The former things have passed. [...] I make all things new" (2 Cor 5:17; Rev 21:4-5).

### 5.2.2 The Kingdom, the Church, and the History of Humanity

Belonging to the Kingdom, the Church accompanies the path of faith of her children and supports them in the witness they offer with their personal and social life. In this journey, believers come into contact with people who recognize themselves in their own religious faith, with others who do not share the Christian faith and, also, with non-believers. While this may create problems of identity or cohabitation, the believer in Christ cannot forget that if God has loved the world, this too must be his path. As Gen 12:2-3 teaches us about Abraham, our father in faith, every believer is a blessing to all. This consoling truth should be well borne in mind today at a time in history when Christian faith in the older Christian countries is experiencing a loss of centrality and authority, and coming to terms with the revival of missionary enthusiasm in other world's major religions.

Samuel Huntington<sup>81</sup> considers this world of ours a multipolar reality, made up of different civilizations, rooted principally in a religious vision of life and history. He joins the Slavic-Orthodox and the Latin-American milieus to the Western world, rooted in Christianity. He then mentions the Islamic, the Indian-Buddhist, the Sino-Japanese and, finally, the African-Bantu worlds. Added to these socio-cultural-religious groups is national pride, which leads in many countries to the great awakening of these religions. Against this backdrop, it is possible to understand Huntington's conclusion whereby our world is heading towards a series of clashes between these different groups and massive movements of peoples. And the border areas between these groups will be those most exposed to such conflicts. Globalization will be the globalization of conflicts of civilization.

Unlike Huntington, Philip Jenkins considers Christianity a unitary fact. However, he clearly distinguishes between different types of Christianity and refuses to consider the Christian world as the result of Romano-German expansionism.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Jenkins argues that the growing importance of southern Christianity should be recognized. This is why he outlined the face of the future Christianity on the basis of those great countries – almost all in the southern hemisphere – that could soon become the largest Christian countries in the world. They practice a different way of reading the Bible, less critical and simpler but more immediate and direct, and that allows a more authentic understanding of the Scriptures and their stories, which speak to these peoples with the power they seem to have lost among the peoples of the North. From this ensues a less educated Christianity, less critical than the Western one, but capable of greater vitality and commitment.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> S.P. HUNTINGTON, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, n. 3, 1993, 22-49; ID., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1996; J.P. BARKER (ed.), *The Clash of Civilizations Twenty Years On*, E-International Relations Edited Collections, Bristol 2013.

<sup>82</sup> PH. JENKINS, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford 2002; ID., *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford 2006; ID., *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford 2007.

<sup>83</sup> The views of Huntington and Jenkins are thoughtful and motivated, but they are not certainties and remain opinions on which one can agree or not. Jenk-

The fundamental point of the theological debate deals with the relation between the Paschal mystery and the life of all humanity; without this relation, we cannot think correctly about the universal saving value of Resurrection. The Council recognized the existence of this relation, but it did so in a discreet way, speaking about “a manner known only to God” (GS 22), “ways known to himself [God]” (AG 7), and concludes with the presentation of the Church as the “universal sacrament of salvation” (LM 1:48; GS 45).

On this matter, Ignacio Ellacuría rightly observed: “Faith does not judge the scientific legitimacy of sociological analysis, but it judges directly the real situation made known to analysis which allows a certain critical distance from the analysis itself. Consequently, theological reflection has no direct dependence on a given sociological theory because sociological data are not premises in view of a deduction but problematic needs”.<sup>84</sup> Hence, the attention given to the concrete historical situations in their reality and in their connections. Distinguishing between *loci theologici* and *depositum fidei*, namely between theological places and theological sources, Ellacuría points to the poor as a ‘theological locus’, but indicates the Word of God and the faith of the Church as the criterion of truth – the ‘source’ –, which offers the criteria for interpreting the historical data.<sup>85</sup> In a similar framework, the Kingdom’s presence introduces a new way of understanding history that does not disregard the horizon of divine love, nor the energy that divine love has placed in it. The task of theology stems from this awareness: it is necessary “to rethink critically how many theological formulations and Christian practices are de-

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ins argues that we are facing change, and transformation, not only a crisis. This might be true: there is still dynamism and courage in this Christianity, even if it is marked by a great deal of fear and uncertainty. The result of this new Christianity is the rise of believers and communities interested in the evangelical and Pentecostal aspects of the text, and attracted by a strong community sensitivity and a lively sense of mission. This way of understanding Christianity reopens the debate on the future of Christianity in the future of the world.

<sup>84</sup> I. ELLACURÍA, *Tesis sobre posibilidad, necesidad y sentido de una teología latinoamericana*, in A. VARGAS-MACHUCA (ed.), *Teología y mundo contemporáneo. Homenaje a K. Rahner en su 70 cumpleaños*, Cristiandad, Madrid 1975, 325-350.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. I. ELLACURÍA, “Los pobres, lugar teológico en América Latina”, *Misión Abierta*, vol. 1, n. 4-5, 1981, 225-240; republished in ID., *Conversión de la Iglesia al Reino de Dios. Para anunciarlo y realizarlo en la historia*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1984, 153-178.



pendent unconsciously on economic structures” and, concurrently, “to re-propose in a positive way how faith and Christian praxis should be conceived of” in the current historical moment.<sup>86</sup>

Particular attention is therefore required for Southern theologies, which have identified in the poor the ‘theological *locus*’ where God manifests Himself and acts. The poor are the poor *tout court*, not ‘our’ poor or those who turn to us with a spirit seeking to oblige us to help them out. Influenced by Xavier Zubiri<sup>87</sup> to adopt a historical intelligence of reality, Ellacuría learns to look at philosophy as a way to engage reality and to commit oneself to the demands of reality. Of course, the reception of Zubiri’s thinking by Ellacuría is a theological reception; the choice of the poor is the choice of Jesus and it is motivated by the fact that the Father has revealed Himself in this way. “The Father – writes Ellacuría – manifests Himself not only as a revealing illumination, but also as a call to conversion. The two aspects are closely connected: without conversion to the poor, as the place where God reveals Himself and calls, it is impossible to approach the living reality of God and His clarifying light adequately.”<sup>88</sup> This is how the vision of the Church as a historical sacrament of liberation arose.<sup>89</sup>

### 5.3 Communication of the Gospel and Transformation of Human History

The communication of the Gospel is naturally part of the evangelizing action. However, the mission seems to have lost interest in defining ‘who’, ‘how’, and ‘what’ should communicate. The Church has become universal indeed, and is now facing the first missionary question concerning the Christian identity: do the Churches of the southern hemisphere have to recover their own traditional identity

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<sup>86</sup> ID., “Economic Theories and the Relationship between Christianity and Socialism”, *Concilium*, vol. 13, n. 5, 1977, 124-131; quotation: 130.

<sup>87</sup> See X. ZUBIRI, *Nature, History, God* [1963], Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 1980; ID., *Inteligencia sentiente: Inteligencia y realidad*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1998.

<sup>88</sup> I. ELLACURIA, *Los pobres, lugar teológico en América Latina*, 225-240.

<sup>89</sup> ID., “La Iglesia de los pobres, sacramento histórico de liberación”, *Estudios Centroamericanos*, vol. 32, 1977, 707-722; republished in I. ELLACURIA – J. SOBRINO, *Mysterium liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 1993.

to replace an identity that has long been associated with the political, economic, cultural hegemony, and religious life of the West? What must be done to address the case of the Western Churches facing the separation of people's lives from the Gospel? In both cases, communication has returned to being central.

In our time, communication is no longer just an 'instrument' to achieve something else – to inform, advertise, sell, bring to your side. On the contrary, it is the area for an original quest for life, meaning, and joy. To communicate is to relate, to be understood, to count for someone, to have friends, to walk together. Communication is not just about telling or informing, but showing and constructing our way of being and living together with others. Consequently, the human condition should be intended as a relation open to inter-subjectivity and committed to building social consensus. The philosophy and self-awareness of the subject, the social analysis of production relations, and the consumerist lifestyle have spiralled into a crisis. Consequently, the relationship with others, with those who are different from us, has turned into an essential instance in the shaping of our identity.

However true this may be, communication itself is undergoing a major crisis at the present. A certain inability to communicate is inherent to the human person: it is the sign of our indomitable originality and the gap that always exists between what we are and the image we communicate of ourselves. A degree of loneliness – which unlike isolation has a positive side to it – is the necessary price for being ourselves. Our time is faced with an institutionalization of communication – positive in itself – that has gradually replaced interpersonal communication with a series of technological procedures where virtual reality with reality are combined. Our society has developed a unidirectional and uncritical communication – from advertising to information and television – that lends itself easily to profit or manipulative goals. The recipient has no chance to influence this process, except to reject the information. Communication is today a basic instance of both personal and social life. In this light, opting to not communicate is really a kind of relationship, even if rejected.

The complex intertwining between knowledge, communication, and language also pertains to the uniqueness of religious communication and the specificity of the Christian one. Communicating the Gospel cannot be reduced to the transmission of a doctrine or a

message, but it must refer to the history of salvation and, in particular, to the communicative event of the Word made flesh. The communication of the Gospel implies the participation in the communion with the 'eternal Word' and it is made possible by the Holy Spirit who accompanies the life of the Christian community.

The Church is not a transmitting device of sorts. The Church is, first and foremost, a community of faith gathered together around the Revelation of the Father and the Gospel of His Kingdom: it is celebrating the Eucharist which, following Jesus, introduces her into the Father's love, in witness of the Kingdom and in service of the divine love that embraces all humanity. Communion in faith, fraternal life, and the mission are her principal drivers.

Bound to Christ and His Gospel, evangelization is entrusted to the Church but is addressed to all humanity, and its symbol lies in the Pentecost, where individuals from different peoples are admitted to "hear them [the Apostles] speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God" (Ac 2:11). It is easy to see that there is no proportion between the content of this mission and the means that communicate it, between the mystery of the Kingdom and human mediation. Therefore, the apostolic service to the Kingdom will always be inadequate and temporary.<sup>90</sup> As Paul observes: "We hold this treasure in earthen vessels that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us" (2 Cor 4:7).

At the basis of this apostolic communication there is not a philosophy of the conscience and the subject, but the power of the Kingdom and the Spirit. No communication of the Gospel of Jesus would be possible if God were not the first witness to Himself: the Spirit of Christ is at work in the one who communicates the Gospel and in the one who is spoken to. Even when evangelization is entrusted to the Apostles and the Christians, "the Holy Spirit remains the transcendent principal agent of the accomplishment of this work in the human spirit and in the history of the world. The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission" (*Dominum et Vivificantem* 42; RM 21). This is why an original understanding of communication pertains to faith.

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. G. COLZANI, "Necessità e povertà della dottrina", in ASSOCIAZIONE TEOLOGICA ITALIANA, *A misura di Vangelo. Fede, dottrina, Chiesa*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2003, 73-94.

Communication is understood on the basis of the gift that the Father makes of His life. In the Son, He shows the beauty of Trinitarian love as the supreme reason of the mystery of human life which, in freedom, chooses it and adheres to it; in the Spirit, he highlights a dynamic force that works through human persons and, through their testimony and service, reaches its interlocutors and acts in them. In this way, the bond of truth and freedom, corresponding to love, is welcomed, maintained and witnessed in the communication of faith, which can thus show the ultimate and definitive meaning of life.

By means of faith it is possible to access the wealth of meaning and hope hidden in the complexity and poverty of the history of humanity. For this reason, the communication of the Gospel is the offering of a gift, not the autonomous elaboration of a rational truth. In those who live this task, evangelization always involves a staying in God's presence, in an unconditional openness of personal acceptance and appropriation of the Gospel. Only those who let themselves be evangelized can become evangelizers; only those who have accepted the Gospel of Jesus, which is a once and for all occurrence, can turn their freedom into the "offering of that ultimate meaning of life and history which, in its truth, becomes an appeal to freedom for a decision".<sup>91</sup>

Attempting to clarify the content of this evangelical communication on the basis of the life of Christ, Joseph Caillot spoke of a "Gospel of communication"<sup>92</sup>, while Antoine Delzant, in enhancing the fact that it does not meet a criterion of immediate utility and usefulness, interpreted this Gospel as a symbol of a mutual recognition between Christ and Christians.<sup>93</sup> The core of this Gospel remains the gratuitous gift, the true symbol of divine love, taking into account that love includes knowledge without reducing itself to it. It reminds Christians about the passage from the old to the new man, which they accepted through baptism; to non-Christians, it offers a meaning and a way of life that, even if not fully understood, can illuminate and support their path.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>92</sup> J. CAILLOT, *L'évangile de la communication*, Cerf, Paris 1985.

<sup>93</sup> A. DELZANT, *La communication de Dieu. Par-delà utile et inutile. Essai théologique sur l'ordre symbolique*, Cerf, Paris 1981.

The words of the proclamation of the Gospel are not limited to representing reality but to transforming it. The echo of the powerful Word of Jesus, the announcement that resounds in the Church, is already active, provided that those who welcome the Gospel are free to believe. In this missionary gesture of proclamation, the *exousia* (power) is present, namely the authority of the divine love that opens human expectations beyond oneself. Thanks to its effectiveness, divine love becomes a source of hope, a principle of responsibility and the beginning of a conscious joy facing the demanding complexity of human history. By urging people to welcome and share the Kingdom, the mission gives back to believers the responsibility for their freedom and, for this reason, demands from them the service of a faith capable of discerning and upholding positions between life and death, truth and falsehood, unity and division, peace and violence. Only in this way, through human co-responsibility, the gift of divine love achieves its purpose and shines in all its fullness.

That is how the profound meaning of the Church and her mission appears. The Church is not called to establish an ecclesiological monopoly, but to give life and provide a service, for the salvation of human history and of the people, that commences and sustains the path to the Kingdom of God. Faith needs a knowledge to express its awareness, but ends only in charity, which is its summit.



## Chapter 3

# Rethinking the Church's Life and Pastoral Care

Although the mission has always existed, the process of its reconsideration started only after the Second World War. Previously, the colonial powers, the domination of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy, the world conflict from 1939 to 1945, critically impacted missionary commitment. The origins of these theses date back to the 30s, when Karl Barth offers a radical rethinking of the mission. Barth does not understand it as the task of the Churches within the expansion of the Western civilization, including religion, to peoples who are still backward, but sees the mission as a salvific work put in place by God himself. The Trinitarian life and the divine are the ultimate origin of the mission. Only God saves, only God justifies. Intended this way, the mission is above all *missio Dei*, and the Church's task is not to Christianize the world, but to proclaim the Gospel and to witness it, so that divine action can operate. Even in the service of the Church, the mission is and remains *actio Dei*.

Barth's theses remain problematic for the lack of appreciation of what is human and historical, religious and ecclesial, which are too hastily rejected as a kind of anthropologism that must be avoided. His merit, however, was not to focus on the results of the mission but on its truth. Along the lines of Barth, Hendrik Krämer elaborated a true theology of the mission that seeks to weld God's truth with that of man. Krämer concluded that the mission is preaching the Gospel to the whole world, although it must be recognized that "the Christian Church is not at the end of its missionary enterprise in the non-Christian world, but just at the beginning".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. KRÄMER, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 40. Remarkable is also the fact that the text follows this organization of the themes: "A World in Transition", "The Signs of the Time", "Where Do We Stand", Krämer's reflection moves from the concept of "biblical realism", which signifies the acceptance of what God accomplished in Christ and in the Spirit.

A particularly important event was the First General Assembly of the *World Council of Churches*, held in Amsterdam from August 22<sup>nd</sup> to September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1948, on the theme *Man's Disorder and God's Design*.<sup>2</sup> The Assembly intended to address the disastrous historical period of dictatorships and wars by recalling God's design, and offering it to humanity for a renewed future. The reports of the second and fourth group of the second section of the Assembly, dedicated to *The Church's Witness to God's Plan*,<sup>3</sup> firmly underlined the commitment to evangelization, lamented confessional division and invited Christians to consider every situation – even where there is only one Christian group – in a perspective of sharing and togetherness. In addition, the Assembly facilitated the spread of the *missio Dei* theme, which will have its full affirmation subsequently in Willingen.

The Catholic Church waited until the Second Vatican Council for a clear perception of the historical changes that were taking place and the challenges arising from them. In *Gaudium et Spes* 4, the Council recognized the Church's permanent duty of “scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel”. To clarify the task given to the Church, the *Pastoral Constitution*, required the People of God “to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs, and desires in which this people has a part along with other men of our age” (GS 11). With the help of the Holy Spirit, the people of God have to “hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth to greater advantage” (GS 44).

More recently, in *Evangelii Gaudium* 25-27, with his characteristic frankness Pope Francis advocated a Church capable of “advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion, which

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<sup>2</sup> W.A. VISSER'T HOOFT (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Amsterdam, August 22<sup>nd</sup> to September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1948*, Harper, New York 1949. See also “Prima Assemblea: Il disordine dell'uomo e il disegno di Dio. Amsterdam, 22 agosto – 4 settembre 1948”, in *Enchiridion Oecumenicum. 5: Consiglio ecumenico delle Chiese. Assemblee generali 1948-1998*, Dehoniane, Bologna 2001, 3-85.

<sup>3</sup> The five topics discussed are the plan of God, the concrete situation of the times, the task of the Church, the strategy of the mission, and the perspectives of the future.



cannot leave things as they presently are. ‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’”.

## 1. The Path to a Pastoral and Missionary Conversion of the Church

The necessity for a pastoral and missionary conversion, recalled in *Evangelii Gaudium* 25, is strongly emphasized by the magisterium of Pope Francis, who attributes to this need “a programmatic significance and important consequences”. The reason is simple. The ‘salvific mystery’ of the presence and action of God in human history cannot be separated from the Church, which is, irreducibly, a human institution. At the same time, the ultimate reference of the ecclesial journey cannot be separated from that of human history, where the love of God has descended and must be encountered. According to this conception, the continuation of the saving divine action in the human history of Jesus is entrusted to the witness of the Church, which is animated by the Spirit and the Gospel of the Kingdom, but it is also irreducibly human. This singular historical condition of the Church is expressed in a theological statement: *ecclesia semper reformanda*.<sup>4</sup>

This statement is not recent and is usually traced back to the Churches of the Reformation and to Barth’s theology. The Middle Ages too witnessed an extensive debate on *reformatio in capita et in membris* (reformation of leaders and members). This statement, it should be recalled, was also widely spread in the context of the Protestant reformation. In *Beschouwinge van Zion* (Amsterdam 1676), Jodocus van Lodenstein observed that the Church is always in need of reform: *reformanda* (to be reformed) does not correspond to *reformata* (reformed), once and for all, which implies a commitment to a continuous reform.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. CAMPI, *Ecclesia semper reformanda. Origin, Meaning and Relevance of an Ancient Adage*. This is the inaugural lecture, in Italian language, delivered on the occasion of the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation, held in Bergamo on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2017. Emidio Campi is a Swiss historian of the Church, specialized in the Reformation in Italy and Switzerland. See ID., *Protestantesimo nei secoli. Fonti e documenti*. I: *Cinquecento e Seicento*, II: *Settecento*, Claudiana, Torino 1991-1997.

Starting from the human and historical dimension of the Church, Barth reiterated the same concepts, giving them a greater diffusion. Similar statements can be found in the Catholic theology and magisterium. *Lumen Gentium* 8 would maintain that “the Church, embracing the sinners in its bosom, and being at the same time holy and constantly in need to be purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal”. Kasper synthesized this condition of the Church with a very similar formula: *ecclesia semper purificanda*.<sup>5</sup> In short, there was a revitalization of 2 Cor 4:7: “We hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us”. The manifestation of the splendor and beauty of the Church is postponed to the end of times.

The Second Vatican Council did not provide an adequate definition of the theological notion of ‘conversion’, although it referred to this theme in various documents. *Unitatis Redintegratio* used the term *renovatio* instead of *conversion* (UR 6-7). It also recalled that “every renewal of the Church is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling” (UR 6). In so far as the Church is an institution of men and women here on earth, she is always in need of continual reformation. *Unitatis Redintegratio* completed this discourse by pointing to an “interior conversion”, consisting of the desire for that unity that “is born and matures from the renewal of the mind, from self-denial and from the very free effusion of charity” (UR 7). In more traditional terms, *Ad Gentes* 7 recalled that conversion is a movement towards Christ: “All must be converted to Him, made known by the Church’s preaching, and all must be incorporated into Him by baptism and into the Church which is His body”.

*Ad Gentes* 13 – entitled “Evangelization and Conversion” – appreciates the interrelation of the two as the result of the joint action of the living God and the whole of humanity, for the salvation of which the Father has sent Jesus. The conversion is thus “a spiritual journey” made possible by “the mystery of God’s love, who called him to enter into a personal relationship with Him in Christ”. Describing this spiritual dynamic of conversion as the work of the Spirit, the text is attentive to the psychological and social dimensions of

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<sup>5</sup> W. KASPER, “Ecclesia semper purificanda”, in ID., *The Catholic Church. Nature, Reality and Mission* [2011], Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London – New York 2015, 173-174.

conversion, while in theological terms conversion is regarded as a passage “from the old man to the new one, perfected in Christ”. Moreover, as per *Ad Gentes* 14, conversion is a journey of catechumenate and Christian initiation, “a training period in the whole Christian life, and an apprenticeship duty drawn-out, during which disciples are joined to Christ their Teacher”.

Conversion is not a simple adjustment of legal or structural aspects of the Church. It is a rediscovery of Jesus, of fully being His disciples, of making Him the only normative reference of our life. Conversion is a question of faith in Jesus and in His mission, nothing else. This faith deeply determines the face of the Church and the way we are her members, as reiterated by *Lumen Gentium* 8: “The Church, although it needs human resources to carry out its mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, even by its own example, humility and self-sacrifice. [...] The Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering, seeing in the poor and afflicted the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ”. Similar statements are in *Unitatis Redintegratio* 7: “We should therefore pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others, and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity towards them”.

This pastoral and missionary conversion of the Church calls for a renewed understanding of ecclesial life and its profound change. It is true that the Church grows on the rock of the apostolic faith, guardian of the Gospel of the Kingdom in its truth and vitality. It is true that the Church's mission is to weld the transcendence and authority of revelation with the historical experience of the ecclesial faith, but this does not take place through condemnation or the construction of walls. Community faith must be kept within the revelation of Jesus, subject to the obedience we owe to this singular salvific event. Focused on Christ, revelation is not the communication of an objective doctrinal given, often lacking in religious depth.

Indeed, understood as an epiphany of eternal divine Love, revelation illuminates the meaning of human life in the very moment that it calls for its conversion. The hierarchical ministry leads the Church by drawing a path, more than by condemning errors or uncertainties. That raises the question whether the exercise of the hierarchical ministry is not presently the result of a long journey that has lessened the value of liturgical celebration and the vital witness of

faith, instead of devoting itself to the custody of the doctrinal formulation. The task of welding transcendence and the authority of revelation with the historical experience of ecclesial faith belongs to the hierarchy. Ecclesial faith is at the same time doctrinally enlightening and vitally in need of conversion. In this journey, the encounter with other religions and with human endeavor refines the questions, specifies the answers, and promotes a better path.

## 2. Discern These Times: “Man Sees the Appearance but the Lord Looks into the Heart”

To address this complex theme, the words of John Paul II in *Redemptoris Hominis* 12 can provide guidance: “The missionary attitude always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for ‘what is in man,’ for what man has himself worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which ‘blows where it wills.’ The mission is never destruction, but is instead a taking up and fresh building, even if in practice there has not always been full correspondence with this high ideal. And we are well aware that the conversion that is begun by the mission is a work of grace, in which man must fully find himself again”. This text recalls the warning in Lk 12:56-57: “You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time? Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?”<sup>6</sup> To be able to judge, one must have one’s own point of view; otherwise you end up repeating others’ thoughts.

In the New Testament, the verb *dokimázein* (to discern), refers to an attentive scrutinizing glance. Where this glance is God’s, the verb takes on a religious meaning which includes an examination, a test, to see what reception has been given to the salvation received. From this perspective, the Scriptures speak about discerning God’s will, about what pleases Him (cf. Rom 12:2; Eph 5:10; 2 Cor 5:9); at other times, they stress the need to examine ourselves (2 Cor 13:5; Gal 6:4), to see if Christ truly dwells in us. Lastly, the verb is used (Lk 12:56) to demand an understanding of history in the ways proper to the God that guides it. Presenting *dokimázein* as the ability to take

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<sup>6</sup> See also Mt 16:2-3.

the ethical decision according to the Gospel, Oscar Cullmann would conclude that discernment was the key to all New Testament ethics.<sup>7</sup> Since Christ's lordship encompasses everything that exists, His moral judgment embraces all reality. The rule is simple: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything: retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil" (1 Thess 5:19-22). What must not be overlooked is the fact that Paul, in 1 Cor 7:8-13, feels free to add some personal instructions that go beyond Christ's words. However, Jesus draws an applicative principle for the history of salvation: the love of God expressed in the love of the neighbor, the cornerstone of Christian ethics.<sup>8</sup> What is pleasing to God in the different situations is a truth to be discovered each time, but the orientation of love guards the Christian path against any form of legalism or situational ethics.

Therefore, it is necessary to start discerning our history and world from a Christian perspective. Many analyses apply a sociological or cultural-philosophical viewpoint and, although they may offer a useful and interesting contribution to the understanding of our era, they are not concerned with Christian belief. This is why Pope Francis laments "a diagnostic overload" which is not always accompanied by improved and actually applicable methods of treatment", and asks for "an evangelical discernment. It is the approach of a missionary disciple, an approach 'nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit'" (EG 50).

In a not too distant past, social life was rather stable. Today, it is in constant flux and marked by differences and contrasts. Consequently, modernity and post-modernity are interpreted as globalization, as a complex digital and cosmopolitan society or through similar categories. An analysis of these phenomena is not easy: those who emphasize their advantages, or at least their inevitability, must deal with those who claim their limits and biases. Some of the major current challenges concern the rise of metropolitan areas, social mobility, migration and, lastly, technological sociality: all these challenges impact people's lives who all have to come to terms with them.

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<sup>7</sup> See O. CULLMANN, *Christ and Time. The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* [1946], SCM Press, London 1962, 228.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-230.

## 2.1 The Metropolitan Areas

Every person has his place in time and space. There is a profound relationship between the territory and those who live in it: the inhabitants feel that world as theirs and think of it as the environment of their life. This is how countries were born: they are countries because they have inhabitants, a language, a history, a way of interpreting life. Those who are born and live in a country, feel it as part of their life. Normally, all this acts as an aid for the growth of individual life, it is its necessary and irreplaceable support. Nevertheless, it can also be a problem, a place of hardship and crisis.

Already in 1990, *Redemptoris Missio* 37 observed profound changes that included the concentration of large masses in metropolises, where new customs and lifestyles were arising alongside with new forms of culture and communication. The future of many nations is being shaped in these metropolises where the younger, more active, and restless segments of the population reside. Seen as a space in which the symbolic meanings that people project into life take shape, these metropolitan areas form the collective consciousness of human life. The question that arises is simple: what kind of humanism do we want? We cannot neglect that the complexity of the processes underway has caused restlessness, confusion, and fear, generating anger, violence, corruption, and the marginalization of entire social groups. However, it would not be correct to regard the negative aspects of the current scenario as symptoms of decadence and inhumanity.

For a long time, the city had been the place where people, ideas, and future challenges meet; the place where concern is eased in the hope of a different tomorrow and human identity takes on new forms. On the other hand, pluralism and antagonism have today engendered a kind of individualism expressed in fear, self-defense, and closure towards others. Anonymity and depersonalization dominate the metropolis: “Openness, when it becomes fragmentary, no longer enriches identity; identity, when it becomes fragmented, does not give meaning to the whole city”, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini observed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> C.M. MARTINI, *Paure e speranze di una città*, in ID., *Giustizia, etica e politica nella città*, Bompiani – Giunti, Milano – Firenze 2017. This is the speech given by

Cardinal Martini speaks of the city as a space in which the ethical traditions of a people are confronted with the challenges of a profoundly changed world. There can be an integration between these two realities, through solidarity networks that are attentive of the weak and the outcast. The life of a city, where the human identity comes into contact with what is new, must be built and rebuilt continuously, in a constant tension between the difficulties of opening up to others and the recognition of the path that is reciprocally exchanged. In this regard, the observations that Pope Francis develops in *Evangelii Gaudium* 71-75 are of enormous interest. His starting point is the belief that “God’s presence accompanies the sincere efforts of individuals and groups to find encouragement and meaning in their lives. He dwells among them, fostering solidarity, fraternity, and the desire for goodness, truth, and justice. This presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered”. In today’s cities – Pope Francis acknowledges – “the religious dimension of life is expressed by different lifestyles, daily rhythms linked to places and people. In their daily lives, people must often struggle for survival and this struggle contains within it a profound understanding of life which often includes a deep religious sense”.

These transformations affect all aspects of life. Pope Francis does not deny this, because he is familiar with the dramas of the urban co-existence of people at whose origin often lie segregation and violence, degradation and exploitation, drugs and criminality. Intertwined with these dramas, there is a cultural passage where tradition and modernity come into contact and challenge one another daily: particularities and totalities, inclusion and exclusion, personal identity and depersonalization, secular and religious languages, homogeneity and plurality, national cultures and multiculturalism. The consequences thereof are mostly suffered by the children, the sick, and the elderly. For this reason, Pope Francis reaffirms that “the unified and complete sense of human life, that the Gospel proposes, is the best remedy for the ills of our cities, even though we have to realize that a uniform and rigid program of evangelization is not suit-

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Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini at the town-hall of Milan on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2002. It was published also in *Rivista Diocesana Milanese*, vol. 93, n. 6, 2002, 865-875, and in C.M. MARTINI, *Perché il sale non perda il sapore: discorsi, interventi, lettere e omelie 2002*, Dehoniane, Bologna 2003, 453-464.

ed to this complex reality”. Hence, his invitation “to imagine innovative spaces and possibilities for prayer and communion which are more attractive and meaningful for city dwellers”.

As places that challenge human history and Christian witness, cities can be an opportunity as places of encounter and fraternal confrontation, and as centers of innovative experiences upon which to build a new future. Hence, the need to develop a spirituality that can recognize God’s presence in the different situations so as to live them with joy, gratitude, mercy, and solidarity. The commitment is to form laypersons capable of proclaiming the Word of God and respond to the questions about meaning and people’s aspirations adequately. We need to develop awareness of a particular care for the varied galaxy of suffering, from the sick to the loneliness of the peripheries, from prisoners to drug addicts, from the last ones to the migrants. There is the urgent need to rethink the processes of Christian initiation, the sacrament of reconciliation, marriage and family, and support for those who are committed to social life, as well as the pastoral formation of priests and the different workers involved in the social apostolate.

## 2.2 The Challenge of Migrations

Migrations have occurred throughout in the history of humanity, and remembering it serves to live these phenomena with greater awareness. Today’s migrations – largely from East to West and from South to North – aim to make the West the dream place of migrants’ own future. The figure of the ‘foreigner’ is always problematic for any society: its mere presence brings into question the values and traditions of a society, its lifestyle and social balance. Migrations challenges civil society, more than its economy and its politics, along with the culture that configures it as a unitary reality. When the fear of terrorism affects social freedom, acquired privileges, and religious convictions, then the refusal becomes harsh and the polemics escalate in tone.

Because of their complex causes, migrations cannot be reduced to a socio-political emergency, which can be dealt with by the implementation of ad hoc three or five-year programs. Migrations entail cultural choices that need some generations to produce meaningful and lasting results. Today, migrations find a Western world marked by an overwhelming globalization, after a difficult socio-economic



crisis which has greatly affected the popular strata and the middle class. This explains the fears and anxieties that migrations are faced with. The foreigner is generally unwanted and perceived as a factor that produces disruption of the social, civil, and religious order. To appreciate the positive cultural and religious facets of migrations, it may be useful to read an essay by Peter L. Berger on the benefits of pluralism.<sup>10</sup>

Besides being a need for modern societies, freedom is also a dynamic of faith; for faith, on the contrary, freedom is a gift of God to be developed. This is why freedom is not an enemy of faith, and the return to the past should not be invoked against it. Modernity does not prevent faith, but it wants a freely chosen faith, capable of supporting and animating the human journey. A place of freedom, the ecclesial life reveals the value of its profound mystery: that it is the encounter between human persons and divine. This prevents us from flattening our faith on purely human expectations: for faith opens us to transcendence, opens us to the mystery of a truth and a love that is the ultimate meaning of the mystery of life, and the secret of a story that opens up beyond human events.

Because of its pluralism of ethnic groups, cultures, and religions, our world asks everyone to live together, respecting each one's choices. United in diversity, we must take note of the changes that separate this era from those of the past. Christianity is no longer the religion of all, but this does not prevent the faith of those who freely choose it and do not even prevent its social testimony. For Christians it remains true that "Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes His supreme calling clear", as the Second Vatican Council pointed out (GS 22).<sup>11</sup> The Council also stated that the ultimate criterion, "the subject, and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person" (GS 25), and that the fundamental

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<sup>10</sup> See P.L. BERGER, "The Good of Religious Pluralism", *First Things*, vol. 262, April 2016, 39-42.

<sup>11</sup> In a more articulated way, the Second Vatican Council said that the Gospel "announces and proclaims the freedom of the children of God and repudiates all the bondage, which ultimately results from sin. It has a sacred reverence for the dignity of conscience and its freedom of choice, constantly advises that all human talents be employed in God's service and men's, and, finally, commends all to the charity of all" (GS 41).

purpose of human history is not the mere increase of material wealth, nor profit or control, “but rather the service of man, and indeed of the whole man with regard for the full range of his material needs and the demands of his intellectual, moral, spiritual, and religious life” (GS 64).

In this context, the Church must be committed to face the changes that have occurred. At the center of this commitment, there is a conception of Christ as “the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings” (GS 45).<sup>12</sup> The mission, and the Church that serves it, must take into account these transformations. The mission must be respectful and humble, sincere and open to all. The Christian communities have to abandon proselytism, and offer the testimony of a religious and fraternal life, marked by the offer of friendship and authentic solidarity. A path of interculturality,<sup>13</sup> available to welcome diversity and committed to enhancing the contributions of all, will probably be the pillars of a tiring but fruitful journey.

### 2.3 The Mass-Media: A Global Technology and the Personal Spaces

In a world which is growing ever ‘smaller’, it would seem to be easier to be neighbors, but it is not so. The *media* should help create spaces to meet each other, and to give a sense of unity and solidarity to social life. However, this does not always happen. The relevance gained today by the ‘social networks’ has changed the understanding of life in respect to the past. The relationship between the vital world of people and the social perceptions takes place through a communicative dynamic that compares interests and needs, profit and emancipation. In this comparison, contours and boundaries, dynamics and objectives of the life experiences are re-defined.

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<sup>12</sup> In *Gaudium et Spes* 10, Christ is “the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history”.

<sup>13</sup> Interculturality aims to lead us to the realization of the dream of a new humanity in which differences, interacting with each other, move towards a cultural openness that transforms tensions into signs and opportunities for a different and better future of unity and human solidarity.

Reality is not only in front of us, but it is increasingly caught up in the media. This dislocation of the experience of life is the novelty and the problem of a technological society like ours. These are complex issues requiring considerable skills to be analyzed thoroughly. In this context, the way in which evangelical faith understands these transformations, and the influence they exert concretely on people's lives, also need to be addressed.

If we consider technological innovations as a language, then they are valued instruments of information and communication in the multifaceted experiences of human life. To inform is to make known, to update, and to organize, while communicating is to participate, to share, to trust, and to spread. At the core of information there is the subject and its world, characterized by news, impressions, emotions, images, and signals. Communication, on the contrary, enables the encounter between two subjects called to commit and to share. In short, the media can make us feel closer, they can provide a sense of unity and mutual solidarity, but they can also leave each of us in our own independence. What separates us does not disappear, if we are not ready to listen to the others and learn from them.

This discourse can be transposed in the area of faith, where the person of Jesus is the point of communication between the Heavenly Father and humanity. As a consequence, the communication itself takes on very special characteristics. In addition, the incarnation requires a new, different balance between verbal and non-verbal communication, between what is mediated by the language and what refers to other symbolic aspects, such as the body language, song, narration, eating together, praying, as well as the mystery of the person. At the center of this communication, there is the encounter between people, and not a rational and discursive exchange. This communication facilitates the reaching of a depth which is not tied to gestures, and a shift from the suspension of the speakable to the mystery of the unspeakable. Silence can be as valid as the Word, listening valid as dialogue, the sowing as valid as the gathering of fruits. This singular dimension of the communication of faith introduces us to the mystery of God.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Many of these themes were addressed by the pontifical messages on the occasion of the various World Communications Day. See *The Communications Media: At the Service of Understanding between Peoples* (2005); *The Media: A Networks for Communication, Communion and Cooperation* (2006); *New Technolo-*

Communication needs to attribute names and meanings, and to systematize them into interconnected codes. Every situation has its own particular code. The school, the market, the Church: each one has its own code. The way in which a person should behave in these contexts depends on the latter's specific codes, and on how they enter into contact with the codes of the individuals. The largest system of meanings is the vision of the world elaborated in a given culture. Hence, major questions arise: what kind of culture is created by the media today? Who decides it? Is this the culture we want or not? These questions pertain to the correspondence of social networks to people's aspirations and the power that controls them.

The famous image of the global village, with which Marshall McLuhan indicated the participation of everyone in the events of humanity, today appears profoundly ambiguous: for participation has been replaced by computer simulation, and reality from its simulacrum.<sup>15</sup> Only by consciously dominating the instrumental character of the means of communication can people use them for their growth. Otherwise, the simulacrum will perform the operative strength of the people to the end, thus reversing the relationship between reality and appearance. This civilization of appearance is a technological and earthly re-edition of Platonism and this exaltation of the appearance is such as to acquire an operative capacity. It is able to change the order of things to its advantage.

To take our times seriously means to recognize that this world is not created by us, but by science, and to question ourselves on our ability to inhabit it. The decisive question is that the *media* do only not have an instrumental function for establishing contacts and circulating messages, or to provide entertainment; they are also important and suitable instruments for education and training, work and analysis.

Technological transformations have introduced such a discontinuity in our history that much of our education and morality is today practically outdated and useless. Hans Jonas appealed to give

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*gies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship* (2009); *Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization* (2012); *Social Networks: Portal of Truth and Faith. New Spaces for Evangelization* (2013); *Communications at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter* (2014).

<sup>15</sup> See J. BAUDRILLARD, *Simulacra and Simulation* [1981], University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI 1994.

centrality to the principle of responsibility for the results of our actions,<sup>16</sup> although there are also those who uphold the argument of the responsibility to contain the technique's immense possibilities, fearing its uncontrollable power. The value of our time is to understand that technology is the basic tool that enables the interaction between persons, peoples, and different worlds. The limit of technology is that it can be exploited for partisan interests, or for the growth and consolidation of one's own power and wealth. Facing the risk of a globalization of indifference, the Christian faith points to a more noble and urgent task which is to serve the cause of the rights and duties of the human person and of the peoples.

### 3. Evangelizing in Changing Contexts

Our world presents such an interweaving of universal horizons and particularisms, of truth and falsity, of love and violence, of good and evil that only an intercultural horizon and an eschatological perspective is able to address it. In this context, the kingship that the Father conferred on the Son, placing everything under Him and giving Him the task of Lord of the universe, legitimizes this plurality but places it in the context of the one Kingdom of God. This is the *theo-dramatic* approach described by Hans Urs von Balthasar, as the synthesis of our history being the result of the continuous encounter and confrontation between God and the human person on the ultimate meaning of existence.<sup>17</sup> Personal existence and human history can be fully understood only through the lens of this drama.

This perspective gives value to history and to human existence against the claim to frame everything in pre-fabricated theological or philosophical systems. Human history is marked by pain and is full of questions, and its cry arises from human history to God. The *ephapax* of Christ is not an answer given just once, in a way that to continue asking becomes unnecessary; instead, it is the answer that at any time in history confronts all the questions and confronts

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<sup>16</sup> See H. JONAS, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of Ethics for the Technological Age* [1979], University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1984.

<sup>17</sup> See H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory. I: Prolegomena. II: Dramatis Personae: Man on God. III: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ. IV: The Action; V: The Last Act*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA 1989-2003.

them with a solution. The action of God in history, in the human world and on this world, can find its explanation only historically, only in a humanity that acts in turn to welcome or to reject the divine action. The human person is not a spectator, but an actor in the history of salvation.

The ministry of the Church must be inserted in this context. Living in communion with Christ, in view of a full recapitulation of everything in Him, the Church also finds itself and lives its service in the dramatic flow of a history to be thought of as a structure in movement. The mystery of divine communion, however, transcends history and then can be partaken in the Eucharistic liturgy, welcomed in the proclaimed Word, witnessed in one's own life and communicated in social gatherings and in the commitment to the future of humanity. This ecclesial service takes place amid human history in which the love of God, communicated by Jesus and kept alive in His disciples by the Spirit and the Gospel He has left them, meets with human history itself and with the path of human freedom. This is the very face and missionary task of the Church.

### 3.1 The Foundation of Every Mission: The Saving Action of Christ

The Paschal foundation of the mission is usually placed in the Great Commission, which refers to those texts in which the Risen Christ expresses His will clearly: Mt 28:18-20 and Mk 16:15-16 to which also Jn 20:21-23 and Ac 1:8 can be added. The text of Matthew, the most important, has three clearly distinct parts: it begins with the attribution of an unlimited and universal power to Jesus (*exousia*); proceeds with the task assigned by the Risen Lord to the Apostles; and ends with a word of consolation.

The first part recognizes the Crucified Risen Lord as the participant in the unlimited power of God. This is the same power that already appeared in the authoritative teaching of Jesus (cf. Mt 7:29) and in His miracles (cf. Mt 9:8), and it is now one with His resurrected humanity. It is what the community defined with the title of *Kúrios*.

The second part is the heart of the Great Commission, namely the imperative *matheteúate ta éthne*, to “make disciples of all peoples”. “All peoples” corresponds to a Semitism (cf. Mt 25, 32) to indicate all of humanity. *Matheteúate* is a verb of mission: the disciples are sent because all must become disciples of Jesus. This mis-

sion, so intended, acquires a strong ecclesial character that is clarified by the use of the three verbal forms: going, baptizing, teaching (Mt 28:19). The second and third verb clarify the missionary commitment: baptism takes place “in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”, and is completed with the teaching already offered by Jesus. In this there is the face of a community that Jesus wants committed to living according to His Gospel, in a unity of doctrine and praxis.

The last part of the mandate is a word of guarantee and consolation that recalls the ‘being with’ of the Risen Lord, understood as a sharing of firmness that God’s active and saving presence promises to His community.

The mission is under the sign of the presence of the Risen One, who is the true guarantor of the fidelity of the community of the baptized and of the efficacy of its mission. Alongside the Great Commission – having in Matthew and Paul its most prominent witnesses –, John and the description that Luke offers of the Church of Jerusalem significantly contribute to the foundation of the mission. The text of Jn 12:20-32, which begins with the request of some Greeks “to see Jesus” is centered on the acceptance of the death by Jesus for the glory of the Father and ends with Jesus’s lift up that proclaims the end of His earthly existence: “When I am lifted up from the earth, will I draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32). This glorification – present in the verb “to draw” – does not fail to arouse questions: how can this glory be realized if the messianic reality is not yet seen? What real extension will it have to draw everyone to Him? As “the one who attracts everyone”, Jesus is at the same time the strength that saves and the goal of salvation. His raising on the cross will put an end to the power of evil and will transform His death into a life-giving power. When the Son of Man is lifted up, “everyone who believes in Him, may have eternal life”; immediately after, Jn 3:16 identifies in His love for humanity and His world the reason underlying the saving commitment of the Father. Faith makes us share the life giving event of Jesus’ *Passover*.

The cosmic and universal horizon of this salvific commitment cannot be seriously questioned, as pointed out by RM 10: “For such people salvation in Christ is accessible to the Church, it does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way that is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation”. However, John Paul II observes that “Christ’s one, universal media-

tion, far from being an obstacle on the journey towards God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to His" (GS 22).

The model of the announcement, typical of Matthew and Paul, is justified on the basis of the authority of the person who is sent out. The model of dialogue and converging towards a goal as a result of a common journey, proposed by John and Luke in Ac 1-12, and directly involves the free and merciful action of God and makes it the heart of every missionary commitment. This second model not only broadens the role of God, but it seems more suited to dialogue with present and presumably future cultural models.

### 3.2 Witnessing with Life:

#### First and Fundamental Expression of a Missionary Faith

Witness allows human speech to express its potential at the best in terms of social openness and communicative ability. Through the witness, a creative encounter is achieved between the single event and its universal meaning, between personal experience and social openness. An event that is not included in a linguistic and communicative circle, becomes an insignificant event. Witness is the major human possibility to overcome the positivism of facts, leaving room to convey what is deemed important and meaningful by everyone of us. The risk that is inherent to the encounter with the life and the choices of other people cannot be neglected.

It is in the witnessing, however that the personal dimension of one's own knowledge and one's own life opens up to the complex encounter with the other, in the conviction that the experiences of both interlocutors have much to gain in this exchange. In today's world, where information and personal knowledge are often related to a social function, and people find it difficult to open up and communicate, to recall the high form of communication which is witness is not just useful: it is necessary.

Witness is usually placed in the context of communication: for it helps people to form and discover the meaning of events or people which they do not experience directly. The acceptance of the witness of another person presumes a certain trust in the narrator.



Therefore, while witnessing helps people to form their opinion, it also qualifies a network of interpersonal relations. A particular context is the legal one: in a court, before a judge, witness takes on the value of proof in favor of one side or the other. In conclusion, it can be observed that witness is important to the extent that it becomes a personal conviction of the recipient.

In the religious area, the testimony opens up to an overall view of human existence. Enlightened by faith in God, the witness comes to question the decisive aspects of existence and its choices. From a Christian viewpoint, witnessing is linked to a divine revelation that, while illuminating the meaning of existence, requires a profession of faith and a commitment to life. The same juridical context the testimony refers to, expresses the opposition not between two interests or two ways of seeing, but that between the true God and the idols. Needless to say that he asks for a decisive choice in favor of God (cf. Is 44:6-8).

The Christian Scriptures, Lk 24:46-49, Ac 1:6-8, and Jn 16:7, 20:21-22, relate Christ's revelation to the disciples' witness and the power of the Spirit who came down over them. Their life – as Ac 2:32-33 and 13:2-3 show – is completely linked to this witnessing. In the disciples, the witness includes a clear Christological profession but, to do so, the witness must disclose God's designs before all of humanity. These two actions – to reveal Christ and to go as envoys into the world – refer back to Jesus who, not by chance, is indicated as the witness of light (cf. Jn 1:7-8), and the witness to truth (cf. Jn 18:37). The same aspects of Jesus' discipleship are referred back to Jesus. The most disconcerting dimension is surely the persecution from which they would not be spared (cf. Mt 10:16-20).

These two aspects of the Christian witness – to reveal God's work and give witness to it with life – might seem to be the basis of attitudes that shift witness outside the Church and concern those who do not believe. So, it is worthwhile to mention *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4 which reminds the Catholic faithful to consider with sincerity “to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be done or renewed in the Catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more clearly and faithfully to the teachings and institutions which have come to it from Christ through the Apostles”. In this light, *Ad Gentes* 11-12 should also be mentioned because they link the witness to the discovery and promotion of the *semina Verbi*, which is present in the cultures of peoples, and to the

charitable commitment to promote human dignity and fight against the threats of hunger, ignorance, and sickness in favor of the building of justice and peace.

Testimony is not mere knowledge, but knowledge that demands a transformation of our personality. Since the truth to which we adhere transcends our life, the testimony refers us to something that, although rooted in ourselves, is not reducible to the interpretation we give it. To witness is the living relationship between the way in which the Gospel of the Kingdom lives in each of us, and the demands of absoluteness and universality that also belong to it. An event of light and grace for us, to witness calls for a continuous conversion to that Kingdom which embraces the totality of life and human history. In a word, to witness is a personal commitment and a universal mission in a continuous and fruitful tension between them. The poverty of our faith and the contrast with the world refer to an anthropology that opens to God only at the cost of a suffering renunciation of its centrality. In this tension lies the meaning of every faith and every bright adherence to the truth. Those who have no testimony to offer have not reached a meaningful and comprehensive understanding of themselves.

The testimony involves a certain downgrading of forms of abstract knowledge, far from life. The witness challenges human existence, filling it with meanings and goals. In this way the search for and the discovery of truth passes from the level of logical certainty to that of passionate experience. Without this personal experience and these universal horizons, there can be no Christian life. The greatness and the truth of the Kingdom give value to the life of the disciple, but the testimony of his life illuminates the existential density, the enthusiastic adherence, and the luminous beauty of the Gospel's communication. The witness does not take hold of what he witnesses, does not dominate it but serves it. For this reason, a witness is always a prophet for everyone he meets, he is always a martyr willing to pay the price of what he believes. *Lumen Gentium* 35 teaches that Christ works "not only through the hierarchy, who teaches in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom he gave understanding of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life".

#### 4. Inculturation of the Gospel and Evangelization of Cultures

According to Ac 17:16-34, in Athens Paul proclaimed the Gospel with a speech specifically designed for that particular audience. His remarks have become an example of how the Jesus' Gospel, formulated within the culture and expectations of the Jewish people, must be proclaimed to other peoples. This is what goes under the name of inculturation of the Gospel.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The notion of inculturation is rooted in the approach of Jesuit missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (see chapter 1.2.2. of this book), but the term was coined in more recent times. Precisely, it refers to the sociological analyses conducted on the integration of Hispanics, who were Catholics and without technological skills, in the suburbs of New York, which was an English-speaking and Protestant metropolis. Analyzing the different forms of relationship that adults and children established with the host society, Melville Jean Herskovits defined "acculturation" – namely the relationship between two different cultures – as the way in which the Hispanic adults relate to the metropolitan world. The attitude of Hispanic children was different: for despite their social marginalization, they grew and became adults in that world which they considered theirs (M.J. HERSKOVITS, *Man and His Works: The Science and Cultural Anthropology*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1948). This terminology gradually entered into theology and replaced the previous emphasis on "adaptation" or "accommodation". In 1953, Peter Charles had already mentioned Herskovits's theses and would later use the term "inculturation" (P. CHARLES, "Missiologie et Acculturation", *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, vol. 75, 1953, 15-32). In 1962, Joseph Masson spoke of *catholicisme inculturé* (J. MASSON, "L'Église ouverte sur le monde. Aux dimensions du Concile", *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, vol. 84, 1962, 1038) and, along the same lines, the week of Leuven's missiology took place (*Repenser la mission. Rapports et compte rendu de la 35e semaine de missiologie, Louvain, 1965*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1965). Its legitimacy and diffusion, however, were the result of the combination of other events. Among them, the *Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization in the Modern World* (1974). In preparation for this Assembly, other meetings were held addressing the theme of inculturation, such as the *First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)* held in Taipei (1974), and the *32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation of the Jesuits* (1<sup>st</sup> December 1974 – 7<sup>th</sup> April 1975). At the magisterial level, the term appeared for the first time in *Ad populum Dei nuntius* 5 issued by the 1977 Synod of Bishops. It was used again in *Catechesi Tradendae* 53, and was definitively accepted by the *Relatio finalis Ecclesia sub verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi* of the Extraordinary Synod in 1985 for the *20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council*. This text termed inculturation as "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through integration into Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures" (*Ecclesia sub verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi*. II: *Argumenta particularia Synodi*. D: *Missio Ecclesiae in mundo* 4).

The Gospel's novelty can bear fruit only if it is expressed in the forms of life of the different peoples. Therefore, inculturation cannot just be a cover for faith in new cultural terms, but it always involves a transformation, a renewal, a new cultural creation, a real, personal, and community conversion to Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Our time features a cultural pluralism where we have gradually learned to recognize the value and dignity of every culture. In maturing this conviction, an important role is played by the maintenance of a final, absolute, and definitive reference. Each culture expresses, in its own way, the quest and recognition of an ultimate criterion around which everything revolves. Far from being consumed in the acknowledgement of a simple social process, culture goes beyond itself into a criterion of evaluative truth, capable of making people responsible for their path of humanization. Ultimately, we arrive at that Absolute that believers call God.

The ultimate meaning of the present and the future of human history depends on God's freedom and love. For this reason, the religious dimension – even its negation – has a central role in every cultural development. Human religiosity is the inner logic that precedes over the development of every culture.<sup>20</sup>

The inculturation of faith is never a technical and neutral enterprise. There is always the implication of a taking position on the very heart of culture to make it suitable for expressing the Gospel of Jesus. In particular, it must be able to grasp and uncover the mecha-

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<sup>19</sup> To summarize this concept, Duraiswami Simon Amalorpavadass recalled that inculturation is not Hinduisation but Christianization. See D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Inculturation is not Hinduisation but Christianization*, National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore 1976; ID., *Gospel and Culture: Evangelization, Inculturation and Hinduisation*, National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore 1978.

<sup>20</sup> In a well-known text, Pedro Arrupe presented inculturation as follows: “Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about “a new creation” (*Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, vol. XVII, fasc. II, 1978, 257). In 1985, *Slavorum Apostoli* 21 presents the inculturation as “the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church”.

nisms underlying injustice, falsehood, and oppression, opening our eyes to the disgrace of poverty and the marginalization of so many. The enhancement of human dignity and liberation are important aspects of every process of inculturation. In this context, one should not forget the wisdom of life in many cultures, which is different from the scientific-technological wisdom of the West. The stories and proverbs, the rituals of purification and the acts of reconciliation, the solidarity and the sharing of life – all these must be taken into consideration if we wish to engage in an inculturation of the Gospel in an interconnected world like ours.

An open question concerns the value of Western culture. Post-colonial literature has argued that Western epistemological standards express a vision of reality that belongs to the West but does not and cannot have a universal objectivity and value.<sup>21</sup> If the scientific-technical culture of the West has a universal value, can it really be argued that, from a cultural and spiritual point of view, the Western vision is the one that best aids the human journey? Can we continue to believe that the encounter between Christianity and the Greek culture has a universal value, unlike Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism? Why? Is it not to be acknowledged that, despite the enthusiasm for inculturation, Christianity has remained in these peoples as an unambiguous ‘bonsai’ precisely because of the lack of a proper inculturation? Has not the same missionary theology constantly fluctuated between cultural romanticism and theological vandalism?<sup>22</sup> The demands of unity and multiformity call the Churches to live universal communion and commitment as well as legitimate and enriching diversity.

Inculturation is the introduction of peoples and their cultures into the totality of the mystery of Christ. The document of the *Inter-*

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. V.H. MUDIMBE, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Africa*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN 1988; H.K. BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London – New York 1994; A. MBEMBE, *On the Postcolony*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 2001; F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Muntu in Crisis: African Authenticity and Philosophy*, Africa World Press, Trenton 2014; A. MBEMBE, *Critique of Black Reason*, Duke University Press, Durham 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. G. COLLET, “From Theological Vandalism to Theological Romanticism? Question about a Multicultural Identity of Christianity”, *Concilium*, vol. 30, n. 2, 1994, 25-37.

*national Theological Commission*, entitled *Faith and Inculturation* (1988), simply stated that “the Church is in labor”. This image of a woman in labor deepens the pain and the joy, the importance and the beauty of a ‘labor’ placed in the context of that eschatological renewal mentioned in Rom 8:18-25. Within this new creation, the Spirit is the help that our weakness requires to keep everything in the glory of God.

### **5. The Mission of the People of God: A Gift Received and Shared**

The gift of divine life that Christ achieves and the Spirit fulfils, is not only something added to our life, but is a profound transformation of our existence. We become new creatures, new people, and we are transformed into beloved children. The love of God transforms the person so as to make him, in turn, capable of loving. The heart of the Christian mission is this love; the Spirit of truth and love that dwells in us and drives us to the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Using a remarkable image, Paul observes that the love of Christ “compels us” (2 Cor 5:14). The verb *synéchō* means ‘to hold together’ or, even, ‘to occupy, to contain’; in a figurative sense, it indicates an impulse that demands an absolute dedication. It is the life and love of Christ that possess and drive us on the path of His mission: “As Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, so the Church is called to follow the same route that might communicate the fruits of salvation to men” (LG 8). The love of the divine Persons, welcomed in us, is the strength that allows us to continue the mission of Jesus. Poverty, humility, sharing the life of the lowliest and the outcasts continue to be the historical path – as practiced by Christ – the mission of the Church must pursue. Out of this path, which has the shape of the Cross, there cannot be the Church Jesus wishes, nor can there be a continuation of His mission.

The link between Trinitarian love and missionary commitment is the true secret of the mission. This is what St. Augustine wrote in *De Trinitate* VIII, 8,12: *vides Trinitatem si caritatem vides*. The Christian – Augustine argues – must love because his love becomes meaningful both for the fact that it is love, and that he loves the other in the love of Christ. Hence, he concludes: “It is with one and identical charity that we love God and neighbor; but we love God for Himself, ourselves and our neighbor for God”. This is the root of

every missionary action, which must concretize this love in precise and concrete gestures.

In the past, these gestures were above all the proclamation of the Gospel, the baptism, and the *plantatio ecclesiae*.<sup>23</sup> Today, the missionary action has broadened its scope to include the ability to accompany the life of people and institutions through cultural contribution and a lifestyle inspired by the Gospel. Care for the poor, the outcasts and the left behind, involves a social commitment and political participation aimed at achieving a humanism respectful of values and the dignity of all, as well as committed at breaking the shackles of ignorance, violence, poverty, and injustice. Furthermore, the mission must establish relations of respect and dialogue with all religious people, whatever their choice and their journey: faith in God and adherence to Him are a motive for communion and not for further opposition.

### 5.1 Preaching the Gospel by Narration

As outlined in Mk 1:32-39, the success of Capernaum – “everyone is looking for you” – is followed by a solitary morning prayer and an apostolic choice: “Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come”. This announcement and its modalities are today central themes in the debate on the theology of mission, which is developing in different forms with respect to the traditional ones.

In 1973, the journal *Concilium* addressed *The Crisis of the Religious Language*,<sup>24</sup> illustrating in eleven articles the difficulties faced by the Church’s *kerygmatic* and doctrinal language. Among the causes, *Concilium* identified the traditional theological approach based

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Mt 9:35 (teaching, proclaiming, curing) and Mt 28:19 (going, baptizing, teaching).

<sup>24</sup> J.B. METZ – J.P. JOSSUA (eds.), “The Crisis of the Religious Language”, *Concilium*, vol. 9, n. 5, 1973. In this issue of the magazine, two articles are particularly relevant: H. WEINRICH, “Narrative Theology”, 46-56; J.B. METZ, “A Dhort Apology for Narrative”, 84-96. After having affirmed the full historicity of the Christianity, Weinrich concludes: “Theology today is dominated by the unanimous and almost unquestioned view that the biblical stories, if they must be mentioned at all, they can be proved by the scientific methods of history to be true stories” (Ibid. 53).

on concepts and formulations, indicating the way forward for the future in the story and narrative theology.<sup>25</sup> Recent theology has only partially moved in this direction and the theology of mission is one of those theological branches that have shown more keenness on these themes. If salvation is history, it will be understood and presented as such. In 1977, Bernd Wacker published his book<sup>26</sup> and with it, the theological value of history was recovered: the ultimate intentionality governing the history of the world belongs to God, and man can recognize and must decide accordingly. The existence of every man has a historical dimension, including dynamics and issues going beyond his life. In addition, there is only a culture of the immediate, incapable of figure out what life experiences can teach and the new meanings and new perspectives they can express.

The recovery of history and the narrative has been much appreciated by a part of theology. Regretfully, the bibliography has so far been more extensive than the results.<sup>27</sup> The narration of one's faith always implies a certain awareness of the diversity and distance from those to whom the story is communicated. That is the reason why narrating always entails a redefinition and reinterpretation of one's own beliefs, so as to make it intelligible to others.

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<sup>25</sup> Christoph Theobald argued with bitterness that our theology “has marginalized the spiritual experience and the story” (CH. THEOBALD, “Le ripercussioni della narritività sulla teologia”, in ID., *Il cristianesimo come stile. Un modo di fare teologia nella postmodernità*, Dehoniane, Bologna 2009, I. 397-416; quotation: 399).

<sup>26</sup> B. WACKER, *Narrative Theologie?*, Kösel, München 1977.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. G.W. STROUP, *The Promise of Narrative Theology*, John Knox, Atlanta, GA 1981; M. GOLDBERG, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 1982; R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Allen & Unwim, London – Sydney 1981; B. WACKER, “Zehn Jahre ‘Narrative Theology’. Versuch einer Bilanz”, in W. SANDERS – K. WEGENAST (eds.), *Erzählen für Kinder - Erzählen von Gott*, Klett, Stuttgart 1983, 13-32; M. STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative. Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN 1985; S. HAUERWAS – G. JONES (eds.), *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR 1997; G. LOUGHLIN, *Telling God's Story. Bible, Church and Narrative Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999; J.L. RESSEGUIE, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI 2005; A. MAUZ, “Theology and Narration. Reflections on the ‘Narrative Theology’. Debate and Beyond”, in S. HEINEN – R. SOMMER (eds.), *Narratology in the Age of Cross Disciplinary Narrative Research*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2009, 261-285.



If we do not want to yield to radical alterity, the exchange between different subjects must become the space for dialogue and mutual hospitality. Narration is to help the other participate in an entrenched experience, which is understood as an important instance in one's own identity – an identity perceived as an open identity in the communication exchange. While trying to recover the hidden meaning of every culture, new aspects of faith come to light. When narrating, narrator and listener evolve together, and learn from each other.

Telling the Jesus' story is not a mere custody of the past, for communication is intended to introduce the reader or the listener to the way of thinking and Jesus' way of living. This is the lesson drawn from the proceedings of the Asian Missionary Congress on the topic *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia*, which was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2006.<sup>28</sup> In particular, the remarks by the current Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, offered a significant contribution in addressing the issue of how the Church can adequately communicate the Gospel in a way that the recipients will be in turn encouraged to spread it.<sup>29</sup>

Cardinal Tagle devoted great attention to the phenomenology of the narrative. He singled out and analyzed eight dynamics, and then applied them to the story of the Gospel:

1. Good stories are based on experience – *The Church tells the story of Jesus from its experience of Jesus.*
2. Stories reveal the personal identity, as well as the people and the events that shaped that identity – *The story of Jesus manifests the identity of the Church among the poor, cultures and religions of Asia.*
3. Stories are dynamic, open to reinterpretation and re-telling, and transformative – *The Church keeps the memory of Jesus dynamically alive.*
4. Stories provide the ground for understanding spiritual, doctrinal and ethical symbols – *Stories are the ground for understanding spiritual, doctrinal and ethical symbols.*

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<sup>28</sup> The proceedings of the Asian Missionary Congress are published in M. SATURNINO DIAS (ed.), *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2006.

<sup>29</sup> The author republished his remarks in L.A. TAGLE, *Telling the Story of Jesus: Word-Communion-Mission*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 2015.

5. Stories form community – *The Story of Jesus generates the Church.*
6. Stories when received can transform the listener – *A listening Church tells the Story of Jesus.*
7. Stories can be told in a variety of ways – *The Church tells the Story of Jesus in a multiplicity of ways.*
8. Stories can be suppressed – *The Church is the voice of suppressed stories.*

These indications are aimed at improving the practice of evangelical proclamation and, presumably, refers to the choices of the Asian episcopate, as reiterated also in *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999). The fourth chapter of this document, entitled *Jesus Savior: Proclaiming the Gift*, dedicates 19-20 to *The primacy of Proclamation*. However, it also clarifies that the “insistence on proclamation is prompted not by sectarian impulse nor the spirit of proselytism, nor any sense of superiority”; on the contrary, “proclamation which respects the rights of consciences does not violate freedom, since faith always demands a free response on the part of the individual. Respect, however, does not eliminate the need for the explicit proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness”. It follows that to bear “witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia, for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development”.

The same impulse is present in the magisterium of Pope Francis. While less focused on the analysis of the modes of communication, *Evangelii Gaudium* shows a semantic and hermeneutical commitment, which aims to rethink and redefine the announcement of the Gospel today. The figure of the missionary disciple is central in baptism, but baptismal life must be thought as a vocation, as a call addressed to all “to mature in our work as evangelizers” (EG 121). Pope Francis derives from here a conception of Christian life linked to daily life and its problems and, therefore, capable of holding a dialogue with everyone, both believers and non-believers. Traditional and innovative at the same time, it recalls classic themes, such as fraternity and solidarity, baptism and faith, acceptance and simplicity, joy and love, without any fear of encroaching into more open issues, such as the unconditional mercy that he traces back to God. His vision of evangelization begins with an invitation to not lessen “the impetus to preach the Gospel”

before realizing that “the missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity” (EG 15).

What is most surprising is the Pope’s vision of a mission embodied within human limits: “The task of evangelization operates within the limits of language and of circumstances. It constantly seeks to communicate the truth of the Gospel in a specific context, without renouncing the truth, the goodness and the light” (EG 45). Also notable is the realism with which he admits that the truth is often expressed in many opinions: “For those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine, guarded by all, and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion. But in fact, such a variety serves to bring out and develop different facets of the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel” (EG 40). In a pluralistic cultural context such as ours, “the renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning” (EG 41). Discernment (EG 43), “without detracting from the evangelical ideal, need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur” (EG 44).

## 6. An Evangelizing Church

The life and mission of the Church are today occurring within a complex shift away from a Eurocentric era, dominated by a scientific-technological culture, to a globalizing conception that has imposed an ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism. The traditional perspectives, built around secularization and debates between laicism-religiosity or science-faith,<sup>30</sup> are now inadequate to under-

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, the address of John Paul II at the V Symposium of the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (5<sup>th</sup> October 1982): “Europe was baptized by Christianity and European nations, in their diversity, have given life to the Christian existence. In their meeting, they mutually enriched themselves with values that not only became the soul of European civilization but also the heritage of all humanity. If the European culture, in the course of successive crises, tried to distance itself from faith and the Church, what was then proclaimed as a will for emancipation and autonomy, in reality it was an internal crisis to the same European conscience; this was put to the test and tempted in its profound identity, in its fundamental choices and in its historical destiny. Europe could not abandon Christianity as a traveling companion who became foreign to us, just as a man

stand this time. The path of humanity, in this secularizing pluralism, does not necessarily pass through the Christian faith. The order of the cosmos, which Thomas identified with God, has at present become an impersonal order;<sup>31</sup> the debate between humanism and transcendence must today recognize an expansion of the world that rejects God.<sup>32</sup>

The idea of a pastoral and missionary conversion, around which *Evangelii Gaudium* revolves, is certainly invaluable but one can at least doubt that this conversion has the same meanings in Europe and in Asia.<sup>33</sup> In the end, is identifying Christendom with historical Christianity of a specific time – past, present or future – a sign of positive liveliness or is it a sign of its corruption? Is an eschatological perspective, which aims directly at God, a better option? Does Christian life identify itself with the testimony given at some intellectual, religious, and ethical level or is it for everyone? Must Christianity go through an ‘incarnation’ or an ‘escarnation’ to achieve fullness?

*Agápe* and *kénosis* are the key pillars of every Christian journey: *agápe*, creative and merciful love, is its content and substance, while *kénosis*, or the humble and straightforward manifestation of one’s own faith and support for the faith of others, represents its historical and social form. The *agápe* includes a fidelity to God and to humanity, a fidelity based on knowledge and freedom to avoid prejudice, self-closing, quest for convenience; *kénosis* demands a courageous welcoming of the other, a risky journey together towards the future. Compared to the usual opposition between good and evil,

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cannot abandon his reasons for living and hoping without falling into a dramatic crisis. This is why the transformations of the European conscience, pushed to the most radical negations of the Christian heritage, remain fully comprehensible only in reference to Christianity. The crises of the European man are the crises of the Christian man. The crises of the European culture are the crises of the Christian culture” (The speech is available in Italian at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1982/october/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19821005\\_conferenze-episcopali-europa.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1982/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19821005_conferenze-episcopali-europa.html)).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. CH. TAYLOR, “The Impersonal Order”, in ID., *A Secular Age*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge – London 2007, 270-295.

<sup>32</sup> ID., “The Expanding Universe of Unbelief”, in *Ibid.*, 352-376.

<sup>33</sup> “I want to remark that, in relation to this amalgam, the Western convert (one might say ‘reconvert’) to Christianity is in a unique situation. It is hard to conceive of a new Christian in Africa or Asia thinking in these terms” (ID., “Conversions”, in *Ibid.*, 734).

right and wrong, walking together highlights increasing fragility, limitations and even mistakes. But also, more realism and sincerity.

Based on God and His grace, this commitment must be accompanied by indications that together shape the 'missionary spirituality' without which no evangelical witness is possible. The joy of the Gospel obliges us "to go from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in the need of the light of the Gospel". Hence, the invitation "to go forward and to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed". Missionary joy needs both "to accept this unruly freedom of the word", as well as to translate the intimacy with Jesus into "a common journey". Hence, the decisive conclusion: "Communion and mission are profoundly interconnected" (cf. EG 21-23).

This encounter between the divine mystery and the freedom of believers is based on grace, and not on human psychology. Also, the foundation of the mission lies in the faithful *agápe* of God and in the *kénosis* of its emptying. Starting from this, a journey of freedom and truth begins, and it is up to human freedom and Christian education to create the conditions for the free and full reception of these gifts and their fruitfulness. As Paul VI taught in Bogotá on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1968: "Charity is not enough, if it remains a simple verbal or sentimental theory and if it is not accompanied by other virtues; the first of these is justice, which is the minimum measure of charity". In this juxtaposition of love and justice, the very heart of the mission is at work, and it is a heart in which the greatness of the Kingdom is entrusted to the fragility of its witnesses. The mission cannot detach itself from the "salvific mystery" (DI 6) and the humanity of the Church which serves it. The Gospel of the Kingdom is entrusted to an *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, to a Church that must always be renewed in the Paschal Mystery of its Lord.



## Chapter 4

# ***Evangelii Gaudium*** **A Turning Point for the Church and its Mission**

When Jorge Mario Bergoglio – on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013 – became the Bishop of Rome and the Universal Pastor of the Catholic Church, the Christian community was undergoing one of the worst periods of its recent history. Pedophilia, Vatileaks, and the financial scandals had spread bitterness and bewilderment throughout the Church. The election of Pope Francis, with his imaginative and engaging language, his pastoral commitment based on direct encounter and his unique relationship with people, would have changed the whole situation in a short time. Whichever way we look at the figure of this Pope, this change remains important and there is no other way to understand it except by focusing our attention on the Pope himself.

On the day of his election, in his first appearance at the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis remarked that the relationship between the Bishop and the people would be at the core of the ecclesial journey – a journey that is close to his heart: “Now, we take up this journey: Bishop and People. This journey of the Church of Rome, which presides in charity over all the Churches. A journey of fraternity, love, and trust among us. Let us always pray for one another. Let us pray for the whole world, so that there may be a great spirit of fraternity”.<sup>1</sup> This fraternity between the Bishop and the people belongs to the ecclesial communion and is at the service of the mission to all humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> *First Greeting of the Holy Father Pope Francis*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130313\\_benedizione-urbi-et-orbi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130313_benedizione-urbi-et-orbi.html).

A few years later – in a letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Council for Latin America, dated 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016 – the Pope talked about this aspect once again: “Looking at the People of God, we should remember that we all enter the Church as lay people. The first sacrament, which seals our identity forever, and of which we should always be proud, is baptism. Through baptism and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, [the faithful] are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood.

Our first and fundamental consecration is rooted in our baptism. No one has been baptized as a priest or a bishop. They baptized us as lay people and it is an indelible sign that no one can ever erase. It does us good to remember that the Church is not an elite of priests, of consecrated men, of bishops, but that everyone forms the Holy Faithful People of God”<sup>2</sup>.

Here we have a reminder that can please or unsettle; it is the acknowledgement of a journey in progress: the transformation of the way of thinking and living the Church. At the center of all this, of Christian life, is the sacrament of baptism. This does not deny the authority nor demean the sacrament of ordained priesthood, but the latter is no longer the center of the life and comprehension of the Church. It is a shift from the ecclesiastic institution to a greater focus on the people, seen not only in their concrete capacity to cooperate, but also in their baptismal identity with their charisms, strengths, fragility, and mistakes. This ecclesiology is founded on Christian life and baptism, and operates in a context usually termed as “theology of the people”, obviously inclusive of people and pastors.

In this light, *Evangelii Gaudium* is the committed expression of this kind of approach.<sup>3</sup> The Apostolic Exhortation, issued on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013, is the key document of the Pontificate of Pope

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160319\\_pont-comm-america-latina.html/](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html/).

<sup>3</sup> H.M. YAÑEZ (ed.), *Evangelii Gaudium: il testo ci interroga. Chiavi di lettura, testimonianze e prospettive*, Gregorian & Biblical Press, Rome 2014. In particular, see the essays of H.M. YAÑEZ: “Tracce di lettura dell’*Evangelii Gaudium*”, 9-20; G. WHELAN, “*Evangelii Gaudium* come ‘teologia contestuale’: aiutare la Chiesa ad ‘alzarsi al livello dei suoi tempi’”, 23-38; J.C. SCANNONE, “L’inculturazione in *Evangelii Gaudium*: chiavi di lettura”, 159-170.



Francis, and its magisterium is of particular importance to the mission. The terminology and the content of *Evangelii Gaudium*, outlines a conception of the Church as an open door to mission. The deepest and most truthful meaning of the Church lies in the mission. The bases of this renewal were laid in the *Concluding Document* of the 5<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Aparecida (Brazil, 13<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> May 2007).<sup>4</sup> The *Aparecida Document* reasserted the will for a strong missionary commitment (AP 548) and put forward the proposal to create a permanent continental mission, bringing Latin-American Churches closer together in addressing common missionary issues (AP 551).<sup>5</sup>

*Evangelii Gaudium* is the culmination of the process that started at Aparecida, and the two documents are the bedrock of the contemporary theology of the mission.

## 1. From the 'Theology of the People' to a New Conception of the Mission

It is generally claimed that the 'Theology of the People' is a specific branch of the theology of liberation. True enough, both pay distinct attention to the poor and the lowliest. However, they are also com-

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<sup>4</sup> The title of the event was "V Conferencia General del Episcopado latinoamericano y del Caribe. *Discípulos y Misioneros de Jesucristo para que nuestros pueblos en Él tengan vida 'Yo soy el Camino, la Verdad y la Vida' (Jn 16,4)*". On the proceedings, see R.S. PELTON (ed.), *Aparecida: quo vadis?*, University of Scranton Press, Scranton 2008 (in particular, the chapter entitled *Medellin and Puebla: Dead or Alive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Catholic Church?*, 25-48); D. VALENTINI, J. COMBLIN, C. AYALA RAMÍREZ (eds.), *El proyecto de Aparecida. Valores y límites: laicos, mujeres, jóvenes*, Centro Monseñor Romero – Universidad Centroamericana, San Salvador 2008 (in particular, the chapter entitled J. COMBLIN, "El proyecto Aparecida", 171-186; P. SUESS, "Misión, el paradigma síntesis de Aparecida", 187-201).

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis was the President of the Commission that drafted the *Aparecida Document*. The text is entirely dedicated to the missionary theme, and chapters six (*The Formative Itinerary of Missionary Disciples*) and seven (*Mission of the Disciples at the Service of the Fullness of Life*) are the most relevant: VI.1 A Trinitarian Spirituality of the Encounter with Jesus Christ (240-275); VI.2 The Process of Formation of Missionary Disciples (276-285); VII.3 Our Commitment to Mission ad Gentes (373-379). The text of the *Aparecida Document* is available at [www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf/](http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf/).

mitted to implementing the Second Vatican Council into practice. Attentive to the historical presence of the Spirit and to the “signs of the times”, the Argentine Church – bishops and theologians<sup>6</sup> gathered at a national level in the *Comisión Episcopal de Pastoral* (COEPAL), and within the *Equipo de Reflexión Teológico-Pastoral* established by CELAM<sup>7</sup> – developed a theology and a pastoral starting *from* the people (*desde el pueblo*), more than *for* the people.<sup>8</sup> This approach turns the people into its paramount subject, in the conviction that the Kingdom of God – which is, in sacrament, already here with us (the Church) – operates and establishes itself through the people and their life. Consequently, it involves the respect and the enhancement of the personal subjectivity of the believer, as in the life of a People already evangelized there are not only ‘the seeds of the Word’ but also the ‘fruits of its presence.’

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<sup>6</sup> Rafael Tello, Lucio Gera, and Juan Carlos Scannone are among the main Argentinian authors promoting the ‘Theology of the People’. As regards Tello’s work, see R. TELLO, *Pueblo y Cultura popular*, Agape, Buenos Aires 2014; ID., *Fundamentos de una nueva evangelización*, Patria Grande – Agape – Fundación Saracho, Buenos Aires 2015; C.E. BIANCHI, *Pobres en este mundo, ricos en la fe (Sant 2,5): la fe de los pobres de América Latina según Rafael Tello*, Agape, Buenos Aires 2012. As regards Gera, see L. GERA, *Teología, pastoral y dependencia*, Ed. Guadalupe, Buenos Aires 1974; R.V. AZCUY, C.M. GALLI, J.C. CAAMAÑO (eds.), *Escritos Teológico-Pastorales de Lucio Gera. I: Del Preconcilio a la Conferencia de Puebla (1956-1981); II: De la Conferencia de Puebla a nuestros días (1982-2007)*, Ágape Libros-Universidad Católica Argentina, Buenos Aires 2006-2007; L. GERA, *La Teología Argentina del pueblo*, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Santiago de Chile 2015. As regards Scannone, see J.C. SCANNONE, *Teología de la liberación y doctrina social de la Iglesia*, Ed. Cristiandad – Guadalupe, Madrid – Buenos Aires 1987; ID., *Evangelización, cultura y teología*, Guadalupe, Buenos Aires 1990; I. ELLACURIA – J.C. SCANNONE (eds.), *Para una filosofía desde América Latina*, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Santafé de Bogotá 1992; M. PERINE – J.C. SCANNONE, *Irrupción del pobre y quehacer filosófico: hacia una nueva racionalidad*, Bonum, Buenos Aires 1993; J.C. SCANNONE – G. REMOLINA (eds.), *Ética y Economía: economía de mercado, neoliberalismo y ética de la gratuidad*, Bonum, Buenos Aires 1998.

<sup>7</sup> In this context, the figure of Cardinal Eduardo Francisco Pironio, CELAM President for a long time, deserves to be remembered.

<sup>8</sup> As Ellacuría wrote in 1981, “the poor of Latin America are a theological place insofar as they constitute the maximum and most scandalous, prophetic and apocalyptic presence of the Christian God and, consequently, the privileged place of Christian praxis and reflection”. See I. ELLACURIA, “Los pobres lugar teológico in América Latina”, *Misión abierta*, vol. 4-5, 1981, 225-240.

This position brings Argentine theology to conclusions that go under the name of the ‘Theology of the People’. If this ‘people’ are a theological subject to learn from, it is therefore necessary to understand it in the light of different categories. Without casting aside the social and political dimensions, the Argentine Church privileges ‘culture’ as a key to understanding. According to Fernando Boasso,<sup>9</sup> the basic concept of this approach is to be found in *Gaudium et Spes* 53: “Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture. [...] The word ‘culture’ in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities”. More than 30 years later, in 1998, John Paul II, in *Fides et Ratio* 71 told us that “all people are part of a culture, depend upon it and shape it. Human beings are both children and parents of the culture in which they are immersed”. The desire for knowledge must be seen as what distinguishes humanity in the world, and as the proof of their constant openness to the mystery of being and life.

The connection between people and culture needs however to be clarified, for the concept of people has many different interpretations. In *Fides et Ratio*, it is intended as the reality of a group having a common way of thinking rooted in a shared past history, representing a common heritage in its multiformity and open to a common future that requires everyone’s participation for the common good. The bond between people and culture is the history of that people, while the culture is its historical memory and the power of its dreams for the future. As pointed out in the *Documento de Puebla* 414,<sup>10</sup> this culture is not expressed through the reflection of the scientific and humanistic disciplines, but also in the life shared by the common people and, specifically, in popular piety, the true *espiritualidad* of a people, and in the *sabiduría*, or wisdom of people’s lives.

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<sup>9</sup> F. BOASSO, *¿Qué es la pastoral popular?*, Patria Grande, Buenos Aires 1974. See also J.C. SCANNONE, “Sabiduría, filosofía y inculturación”, *Stromata*, vol. 38, n. 3-4, 1982, 317-327.

<sup>10</sup> This document, issued on the occasion of the third CELAM General Conference, widely explained what is meant by “culture/cultures” (cf. DP 385-393), and what are the challenges and the journeys required for a proper pastoral work (cf. DP 394-443). The text is available in Spanish at [www.celam.org/documentos/Documento\\_Conclusivo\\_Puebla.pdf/](http://www.celam.org/documentos/Documento_Conclusivo_Puebla.pdf/).

In this bond between people and culture, the missionary disciple is not just imbued with the culture, he rethinks and reshapes it to fit his Christian life. He rethinks and reshapes according to two key aspects: faith, as focus of and guide to Christian life; and the communication of that faith, which is already inherent in this very life (witness and transmission of faith).

In a Church where the mission was traditionally institutionalized and centralized, a similar prospect entailed a radical reconsideration, and many Churches have put themselves in this position together with Francis and his papacy.<sup>11</sup> As a good Jesuit, Francis analyzed the relationship between the missionary disciple and the culture of the world in which he lives on the basis of discernment, with a particular attention to the inner attitudes which determines the encounter between the disciple and the Gospel, and clarify the consequent mission. For Francis, the disciple pours out the joy of the Gospel onto the cultural problems, and looks at his culture with a spirit open to conversion and transformation.

The first aspect is that joy fills the hearts of the believers and renews their lives, finalizing itself in the need to address and involve everyone. *Evangelii Gaudium* 1-10 describe the beauty of this joy arising from the Gospel, and lead to a superior level of life. The gibe about the life of some Christians being like “Lent without Easter” (EG 6) has certainly made an impact on many people’s minds, and Francis emphasized that “life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort” (EG 10). The Gospels recall insistent-ly this evangelical joy: “The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invites us to rejoice. A few examples will suffice. ‘Rejoice!’ is the angel’s greeting to Mary (Lk 1:28). Mary’s visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother’s womb (cf. Lk 1:41). In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: ‘My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour’ (Lk 1:47). When Jesus begins His ministry, John cries out: ‘For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled’ (Jn 3:29). Jesus himself ‘rejoiced in the Holy Spirit’ (Lk 10:21). His message brings us joy: ‘I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be

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<sup>11</sup> On the influence of the ‘Theology of the People’ in Pope Francis’ thought, see J.C. SCANNONE, *La teología del pueblo: raíces teológicas del papa Francisco*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2017; R. LUCIANI, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People* [2016], Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 2017.

in you, and that your joy may be complete' (Jn 15:11). Our Christian joy drinks of the wellspring of his brimming heart. He promises His disciples: 'You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy' (Jn 16:20). He then goes on to say: 'But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you' (Jn 16:22). The disciples 'rejoiced' (Jn 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christians 'ate their food with glad and generous hearts' (2:46). Wherever the disciples went, 'there was great joy' (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be 'filled with joy' (13:52). The newly baptized eunuch 'went on his way rejoicing' (8:39), while Paul's jailer 'and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God' (16:34). Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?" (EG 5).

Certainly, there is also Friedrich Nietzsche's challenge which, coming from a different view of the person and life, has a distinct conception of joy and its capacity to face the trials of life.<sup>12</sup> To entrust joy to a personal journey aimed at the affirmation of oneself, expecting it to be the universal truth, is not credible. By recalling the sweet and comforting "joy of evangelization", Francis moves this joy beyond us, focusing on the way the missionary disciple looks at reality. In doing so, he shifts the ultimate meaning of the anthropological question from a level of immediacy ('who am I?') to that of a knowledge that broadens the field of research and human inquiry ('for whom am I?').

At this point, the position of the missionary disciple takes on an extraordinary depth: one does not stop at the search for power or domination, but opens oneself towards universal comprehension, within which the missionary disciples have to find their place. This journey in the fullness of joy comes with the commitment of conversion. Francis has asked the Church "to devote the necessary effort to *advancing* along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion" (EG 25), a conversion that "will restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a commitment to the Gospel" (EG 14).

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<sup>12</sup> It is enough to recall Nietzsche's harsh observation whereby "better songs would they have to sing for me to believe in their Savior: more like saved ones would his disciples have to appear unto me!", in FR. NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Second Part. XXVI: The Priest*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001. See also ID., *The Gay Science*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

This conversion is conceived in moral terms, and in terms of positive commitment to Christian life; it includes leaving behind erroneous behavior and requires, above all, choosing the Gospel. In a word, this conversion endorses the disciple's structure of life, focused on the gift of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit, and begins by evangelically discerning the reality in which the believer is immersed. Quoting *Unitatis Redintegratio* 6, Francis stressed that “every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling [...] Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way [...] to that continual reformation of which she always has need, in so far as she is a human institution here on earth” (EG 26).

This joyful and penitent growth of the Church within the faith of one's own vocation is like the rousing of “a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress” (EG 6), and translates itself into a re-consideration of one's own life and sociality. This does not mean a simple adaptation to the social dynamics, but their discernment and “an ever-watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times. [...] We need to distinguish clearly what might be a fruit of the Kingdom from what runs counter to God's plan. This involves not only recognizing and discerning spirits, but also – and this is decisive – choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil” (EG 51). It is not difficult to acknowledge in the three verbs indicated – *recognize*, *discern* and *choose* – a reintroduction of the criteria used by the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique – *see*, *judge*, and *act* – that received their full consecration in Latin America.

These guidelines were already pointed out in 1961 in *Mater et Magistra* 217,<sup>13</sup> and again in the *Aparecida Document* 19.<sup>14</sup> It is a

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<sup>13</sup> *Mater et Magistra* 236: “There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act”.

<sup>14</sup> *Aparecida Document* 19 explains the *see*, *judge*, and *act* method. This “method entails viewing God with the eyes of faith through his revealed word and life-giving contact with the sacraments, so that in everyday life we may see the reality around us in the light of his providence, judge it according to Jesus Christ, Way, Truth and Life, and act from the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ and universal Sacrament of salvation, in spreading the kingdom of God, which is sown on this earth and fully bears fruit in Heaven. Many voices from the entire conti-

pastoral method that originates directly from the conscience of faith. For this reason, at the 28<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2013, during a meeting with the CELAM Bishops, Pope Francis recalled the difficulties encountered in *Aparecida* when the use of the method of *see, judge, and act* was leading “to opt for a way of ‘seeing’ which was completely ‘antiseptic’, detached, and unengaged, which is impossible. The way we ‘see’ is always affected by the way we direct our gaze. There is no such thing as an ‘antiseptic’ hermeneutics. The question was, rather: How are we going to look at reality in order to see it? *Aparecida* replied: With the eyes of discipleship. This is the way Nos. 20-32 are to be understood”.<sup>15</sup> Shortly afterwards, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pontiff warned once again “against a ‘diagnostic overload’ which is not always accompanied by improved and actually applicable methods of treatment. Nor would we be well served by a purely sociological analysis which would aim to embrace all of reality by employing an allegedly neutral and clinical method. What I would like to propose is something much more in the line of an *evangelical discernment*. It is the approach of a missionary disciple, an approach ‘nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit’” (EG 50).

The journey of discernment is never without difficulty. The way we *see* must be a Christian gaze, not an apparently scientific approach which in reality is antiseptic, barren, and far from the historical involvement that is characteristic of Christian faith since incarnation. This immersion in reality requires a closer, calmer, and deeper evaluation of emotions, fears, hopes, commitments, con-

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ment, offered contributions and suggestions along these lines, stating that this method has been helpful for living our calling and mission in the Church with more dedication and intensity. It has enriched theological and pastoral work and in general it has been helpful in motivating us to take on our responsibilities towards the actual situations in our continent. This method enables us to combine systematically, a faithful perspective for viewing reality; incorporating criteria from faith and reason for discerning and appraising it critically; and accordingly acting as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. Believing, joyful, and trusting adherence to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and involvement in the Church are pre-conditions for assuring the effectiveness of this method”.

<sup>15</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2013, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130728\\_gmg-celam-rio.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio.html).

flicts, and regrets. This is the moment to judge and discern experiential immediacy, for only an intelligent comprehension of reality prepares that choice, that action, which requires personal involvement, the taking of a position, the starting of an ethical discourse about what needs to be done and what must be avoided and altogether rejected. Through discernment, people set aside all superficiality and transform liberty into responsibility. Responsibility does not disregard the initial steps, will not allow procrastination or delegating others; responsibility is always a ‘getting involved now’. Clearly, there is in all this, the traces of Saint Ignatius’ Jesuit method, whose aim is detachment from earthly affairs so as to concentrate one’s own life on God. In this context, the passage from self-referential examination to choosing the Kingdom of God and its Church is of crucial importance.

The forms of faith preaching cannot be different from those indicated by Jesus. In this regard, the incarnation remains the basic indication, as it characterizes and regulates the entire life of Jesus and the Church, which lives through Him and His teachings. According to *Evangelii Gaudium* 117, “we would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous. While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural”. Pope Francis clarifies the beauty thereof, and strongly underlines the results achieved in a passage recalling John Paul II’s words in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 40: “The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, ‘remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root’” (EG 116).

The incarnation is not an abstract principle, but a determined one, and is coherent in its various aspects. The first is related to the incarnation of the Word and its fulfilment: “The principle of reality, of a word already made flesh and constantly striving to take flesh anew, is essential to evangelization” (EG 233). It is through the fidelity to this principle that the life of the Church becomes the history of salvation, capable of acts of justice and charity in which the fruitfulness of the Word appears. There is a remarkable link be-



tween evangelization and the social impact of the Gospel in the Kingdom. The love for our neighbor sets “the absolute priority of ‘going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters’<sup>16</sup> as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift” (EG 179). Included in Christ, the brother is the second incarnation of the Resurrected: “God’s word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: ‘as you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me’ (Mt 25:40)” (EG 179). The third incarnation is surprising, but represents a theme which is dear to Francis, who regards the genuine forms of popular religiosity as incarnate, since they are born of the incarnation of Christian faith in popular culture. For this reason, they entail a personal relationship, not with vague spiritual or supernatural powers, but with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the saints. These devotions are concrete, they have a face. They are capable of fostering relationships and not just forms of escapism (cf. EG 122-126). Francis knows well that popular piety has limits, but he fully understands the value of its evangelical testimony and its missionary value.

“In the same way, we can see that the different peoples among whom the Gospel has been inculturated are active collective subjects or agents of evangelization. This is because each people is the creator of their own culture and the protagonist of their own history. Culture is a dynamic reality which a people constantly recreates; each generation passes on a whole series of ways of approaching different existential situations to the next generation, which must in turn reformulate it as it confronts its own challenges. Being human means ‘being at the same time son and father of the culture to which one belongs.’ Once the Gospel has been inculturated in a people, in their process of transmitting their culture they also transmit the faith in ever new forms; hence the importance of understanding evangelization as inculturation. Each grouping of the people of God, by translating the gift of God into its own life and in accordance with its own genius, bears witness to the faith it has received and enriches it

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<sup>16</sup> *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Day of the Sick 2015*, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141203\\_giornata-malato.html/](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/papa-francesco_20141203_giornata-malato.html/).

with new and eloquent expressions. One can say that ‘a people continuously evangelizes itself’. Herein lies the importance of popular piety, a true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the people of God. This is an ongoing and developing process, of which the Holy Spirit is the principal agent” (EG 122).

Paul VI’s reprimands over the split between the Gospel and modern culture (EG 20), or Benedict XVI’s warning about the spiritual desertification of our world (EG 88).<sup>17</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that – as Pope Francis warns us – “the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness” (EG 88).

## 2. *Evangelii Gaudium*: Pastoral and Missionary Conversion

More than a mission theology, *Evangelii Gaudium* offers a missionary ecclesiology: a church is not the Church of Jesus Christ if it is not committed to the Mission of God (*Missio Dei*). By using an imaginative and captivating language, Francis repeatedly refers to the “missionary outreach” of the Church (EG 15, 17, 28, 32, 147, 262) and part of *Evangelii Gaudium* is dedicated to explaining this unusual terminology. This outreach is rooted in the “missionary mandate of Jesus” (EG 19), and is explained as the calling and the task that the Risen Christ entrusts to His Church (cf. EG 20). The contents of this image – the “missionary outreach” of the Church – are marked by a surprising spiritual dynamic: the joy of the presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. EG 21) is followed by “this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking” (EG 22).

Altogether, these indications bring a deep closeness to Christ and makes this communion the spiritual roots of every authentic mis-

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<sup>17</sup> *Homily of Pope Benedict XVI for the Opening of the Year of Faith*, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2012, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20121011\\_anno-fede.html/](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121011_anno-fede.html/).

sionary commitment. In this regard, the *Aparecida Document* 263-264 bounds spirituality to the work of the Holy Spirit and to the free initiative of the love of God, presenting it at the same time as a wisdom and an understanding of life that does not depend on a rational illumination, but on the interior action of the divine grace. This people's spirituality is described as an original historico-cultural heritage that is capable, even in a secularized world, of supporting a living confession of God and also a real transmission of faith. For Pope Francis this occurs through *primerear*, in taking the initiative, getting involved, coming closer, committing fully to people and their lives. As this requires acts, initiatives and work, the communication of the Gospel begins and lives in the communion with Christ. "In union with Jesus, we seek what He seeks and we love what He loves. In the end, what we are seeking is the glory of the Father" (EG 267).

It is here that Christian life and its mission in the world converge; and together they work bearing this target in mind. From this ensues an image of the mission such as that proclaimed by Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to set the oppressed free; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18). The traditional presentation of the missionary spirituality focused on those who, by leaving, severed links with their own family, their hometown and, even more significantly, with the 'old' person that was within them. The shift that took place initially on the Cross and the Paschal Mystery and, successively, on the mission of the historical Jesus, becomes the basis for an intimate and vital communion with Jesus. From him, an unlimited love takes shape, which is, specifically, a love for the poor and the needy. The conclusion is clear: without a deep and authentic spirituality, there is no participation in the mission of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Placing the Church and its mission in this context is not easy for the simple reason that the Church is, at the same time, the

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. VAN DEN BERG, *Constrained by Jesus' Love. An Enquiry into the Motives of the Missionary Awakening in Great Britain in the Period between 1698 and 1815*, Kok, Kampen 1956; G. COLZANI, F. GRASELLI, V. MILANI (eds.), "Lasciarsi condurre dallo Spirito. La spiritualità missionaria", *Ad Gentes*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2002, 3-187.

truth of Jesus in the world and the world itself. Therefore, the four criteria indicated by Pope Francis are essential for the convergence of more subjects towards a single objective that represents the good of all: time is greater than space, unity prevails over conflict, realities are more important than ideas, the whole is greater than the part (EG 222-237).

While space encloses apostolic action by putting it in relation with the community that is its 'environment', time develops a vital tension between the present, which is the result of the past and its shortcomings, and the future. Which in its uncertainty is the desire of fulfilment to be achieved. This tension, on the one hand, is courage and hope driving us to strive for a different future; on the other, it is about accepting the limits of the present and seeking medium- or long-term plans without becoming obsessed by the results.

The ecclesial communion does not exclude different views and contrasts from the point of view of practical observations and historical actions. In these cases, we should not be resigned to conflict, but should renew the belief that contrast and discord are present in a deeper and more authentic communion with Jesus the Lord who, being the source of reconciliation, sees everything in the love of the Father. Therefore, it is necessary to accept differences and contrasts while observing that, even if unresolved, they give sense and meaning, and can be transformed into a fresh start, into a greater communion.

With respect to truth, the value of reality lies in the fact that the ideals should not weaken and conceal awareness of what we are experiencing. At times, proclaiming incessantly the truth obscures the inability of facing the reality of people and the journey they are making; one ends up sustaining nominalism or greater visions, which are more formal than real, incapable as they are of coming to terms with reality and to making it develop. Referring to incarnation, *Evangelii Gaudium* 233 maintains that "the principle of reality, of a Word already made flesh and constantly striving to take flesh anew, is essential to evangelization".

The detachment from forms of individualism, attentive to our own needs rather than to God's plan, must nurture the awareness of the whole. This awareness must be able to recognize and value the diversity of charismas and personal abilities; it must recognize the complexity of a global history but it cannot and must not construct

a shared history by focusing on one part. The pastoral must be the result of everyone's contribution: "We can work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a larger perspective. [...] A person keeps their individualism and does not hide their identity; when people wholeheartedly enter into the life of a community they do not cancel each other, but receive new impulses to personal growth" (EG 235).

Pope Francis' incisive and pertinent language must not distract us from the problem that we are facing: the mission has its roots in spirituality (faith and baptism), and is established as a dialogue between differences and the basis of their progressive convergence towards a common goal (conversion to Jesus). Otherwise, the mission ends up concealing itself under the form of apostolic timidity, which Francis labels as "an inferiority complex" and "like hiding one's Christian identity and convictions" (EG 79). Pope Bergoglio maintains that this kind of relativism "proves even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism", as it affects the more qualifying aspects of human living, thus impoverishing the testimony of life: "Acting as if God did not exist, making decisions as if the poor did not exist, [...] working as if those who have not yet received the Gospel did not exist" (EG 80). Hence, his unconditional conclusion: let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm.

Francis' great attention to the questions of method should be acknowledged. He insists on the necessity that "a missionary hearth [...] never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness" (EG 45). The ensuing apostolic perspective is aware of the difficulties of a life where questions outnumber the answers. Such awareness, however, prompts the apostolic perspective to insist on the importance of conversion and the commitment required for the missionary hearth "to grow in its own understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit" (EG 45). This leads to Francis' vision of a Church which "goes forth" (EG 24) and whose doors are open. Hence, the importance to adopt an approach based on patience, as "it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way" (EG 46).

Bergoglio's view shows an extraordinary pastoral sensitivity, which pays more attention to the journey made by communities and people, rather than enforcing inflexible teaching. This is the mean-

ing of the Church presented as a “field hospital”,<sup>19</sup> which is complementary to her “missionary outreach”. Herein lies his need, his almost physical craving, to go forth, meet, share and communicate. The result is a method which is fed by spirituality intended as a warning against every form of spiritual worldliness and as a commitment to an evangelical life.

The relevance of such a method is certainly greater for the western Churches than for those in the south of the world. When Benedict XVI talked about “spiritual desertification”, he was thinking of the western Churches: “Recent decades have seen the advance of a spiritual ‘desertification’. If at the time of the Council it was already possible to understand from a few tragic pages of history what a life or world without God looked like, we now see it every day around us. It is an emptiness that has spread. But it is in starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us, men and women. In the desert, we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today’s world there are countless signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, with their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive. Living faith opens the heart to the grace of God which frees us from pessimism. Today, more than ever, evangelizing means witnessing to the new life, transformed by God, and thus showing the path.”<sup>20</sup>

A comparison of several sociology of religion texts that have been written in the European milieu is essential to capture the meaning and reach of Pope Francis’s proposal. Grace Davie, a British sociologist, refers to a “believing without belonging”<sup>21</sup> to describe

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<sup>19</sup> “I see clearly that the thing that the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful, the proximity, the nearness. I see the Church as a field hospital after a battle” (A. SPADARO, “Interview with Pope Francis”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html)).

<sup>20</sup> BENEDETTO XVI, *Homily of Pope Benedict XVI for the Opening of the Year of Faith*, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2012, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20121011\\_anno-fede.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121011_anno-fede.html).

<sup>21</sup> G. DAVIE, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, John Wiley & Sons, New York 1994.

the privatisation of faith, its reduction to an entirely personal journey that remains within the limits of a personal seeking of individualistic wellbeing and peace. In other words, a faith without a Church. Although some years later Davie abandoned this interpretation, she nevertheless acknowledged to faith and the Church a function that was merely social. This is the notion of “vicarious religion”, performed by “an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing”.<sup>22</sup> The Church is an institution useful to society at large for its charitable activities and educational structures, and to individuals who normally do not need and resort to it just when they are undergoing difficult life circumstances or crucial historical phases involving major changes. Once the complex emotional moment has passed, the spiritual interest in religion fades or disappears.

### 3. The Missionary Ecclesiology of Pope Francis

Pope Francis’ vision of the Church is a missionary one. His view of “missionary outreach” of the Church, the incessant reminding of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the strength of the Word as “efficacious in its way and in different forms, often surpassing our expectations and breaking boundaries” (EG 22): all these elements prompt Bergoglio to insist on a “constant divine creativity” (EG 11), on memory as “a dimension of our faith which we might call ‘Deuteronomic’” (EG 13), characterising the ecclesial faith of the community, and on “a great cloud of witnesses” making our history present and alive (EG 13).

This conception shatters any pretence of scaling down the acts of God to our way of thinking and living. On the contrary, it is necessary to elevate people to God’s remarkable plan. Hence, Francis’ frequent warning against every form of spiritual worldliness and against any excuse to seek human glory and personal wellbeing instead of the Glory of God. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he criticizes those who, behind religious appearances and an outward pouring of love for the Church, conceal narrow subjectivism in their way of

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<sup>22</sup> ID., *Religion in Modern Europe. A Memory Mutates*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, 22.

seeing and thinking.<sup>23</sup> Francis' assessment is clear (EG 94) and focuses not only on those who "feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past" but, above all, on the "pretence of taking over the space of the Church", of using the Church rather than serving it. At the heart of the question there is "an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church's prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel has a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time" (EG 95). In this regard, Pope Francis recalls the redeeming mystery rooted in the Trinity, but which "exists concretely in history as a people of pilgrims and evangelizers, transcending any institutional expression" (EG 111).

Mission theology represents an important point in the renewal effort the Church is making today – a commitment in which Pope Francis has played a key role. Commenting on Mt 28:18-20, Francis writes: "In our day Jesus' command to 'go and make disciples' echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary 'going forth'. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel" (EG 20).

Bearing this in mind, Pope Bergoglio convincingly extends the following invitation: "Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'" (EG 25). Dealing with the pastoral question, he observes that "in recent decades there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young. It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition. Growing numbers of parents do not bring their children for baptism or teach them how to pray. There is also a certain exodus towards other faith communities" (EG 70). This encourages him to face the missionary issue coherently

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<sup>23</sup> These attitudes bring about "a supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline which leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying" (EG 94).



with his characteristic pluck: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing” (EG 35).

In recalling the choices made at Aparecida on the occasion of the meeting with CELAM bishops, Pope Francis developed the theme of the continental mission by introducing a distinction – somewhat unusual in terminology – between “programmatically and paradigmatically mission”. Gathered around the programmes of a community, the *programmatic mission* concerns mission projects, choices, and action; the *paradigmatic mission* aims, instead, at rethinking the structures, transforming the ways of conceiving and living the community, strengthening the ability of dialogue with our fellow-travellers, and re-examining the pastoral options, in such a way that they can better serve the needs of the people and their journey of faith. It is not about mere functionality, but about two ways of embracing and living the Gospel: together they shape the *missionarity* of the Christian life of disciples and communities; separately, they signal the failure of every commitment.

These two ways omit the considerations that, from *Ad Gentes* 6 to *Redemptoris Missio* 31-33, had led to a clear distinction between pastoral activity, new evangelization, and *missio ad gentes*. *Redemptoris Missio* 35-37 had already addressed issues referring to the *missio ad gentes*, but with an exclusive focus on the life of the so-called “younger Churches”, which represent today the future of Christianity. What strongly emerges from *Evangelii Gaudium* is a recognition of the depth and range of mission. The Second Vatican Council had already broadened the notion of mission, founding it in the Trinitarian life (LG 2-4) and presenting the Church as missionary by nature (AG 2-4), so universal as to embrace all the righteous, “from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect” (LG 2; GS 22).

At the base of this universalism, there is the necessity to rethink the saving action of God and the same creative action in terms of relations, meetings, and committed dialogue (AG 6). This is a personalistic and not a cosmological outlook. For this reason, the Second

Vatican Council distinguished between the “missionary nature of the Church” and the “special initiatives of apostolic activity, commonly called missions” (AG 6). It was a theological uncertainty that led to the resumption of the traditional language in chapters 4-6 of *Ad Gentes*.<sup>24</sup> Guy-Marie Joseph Riobé, Bishop of Orleans and member of the Conciliar Commission *pro missionibus*, openly recognized that “the decree is lacking in clarity”, arguing for this reason that it would soon “become obsolete”.<sup>25</sup>

The distinction that *Redemptoris Missio* 32 makes between pastoral activities, new evangelization, and mission *ad gentes* is based on two reasons: “To avoid the risk of putting very different situations on the same level” and to avoid “reducing, or even eliminating, the Church’s mission and missionaries *ad gentes*”. The text continues: “To say that the whole Church is missionary does not preclude the existence of a specific mission *ad gentes*, just as saying that all Catholics must be missionaries not only does not exclude, but actually requires that there be persons who have a specific vocation to be ‘life-long missionaries *ad gentes*’”. Exactly. There is no theological

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<sup>24</sup> See Bologna’s Institute of Religious Studies, “Missio – Missiologia – Missiologicus – Missionalis – Missionarius”, in *Indices verborum et locutionum decretorum Concilii Vaticani II. 14: Decretum de activitate missionali ecclesiae*, Nova stampa, Bologna 1983, 111-114.

<sup>25</sup> “You know that for four years – throughout the work of the Conciliar Commission that dealt with the Church’s missionary activity – we were more or less paralyzed because of this problem. Is the decree on the Church’s missionary activity going to be a decree that only concerns concretely the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, or in the light of this decree, will all the missionary problems that are raised for every Christian and the Church everywhere be clarified? You know that for four years we had to navigate, and sometimes even make radical options; the decree lacks clarity on this point. We can say (and I think it is true) that regarding certain aspects, the decree on the Church’s missionary activity will soon become obsolete”. The quotation is taken from “Colloque avec des évêques. Compte rendu d’un colloque où prêtres et laïcs interrogent les évêques sur l’évangélisation”, *Parole et Mission*, vol. 10, n. 1, 1967, 283. The quotation is also found in the contribution of Antonin-Marie Henry, who was present at the symposium: “Postface. Mission d’hier, mission de demain”, in J. SCHÜTTE (ed.), *L’activité missionnaire de l’Église*, Cerf, Paris 1967, 409. In the same direction, decades later, Hermann Josef Pottmeyer regarded Vatican II as a Council of transition: H.J. POTTMEYER, *Una nuova fase della ricezione del Vaticano II*, in G. ALBERIGO – J.P. JOSSUA (eds.), *Il Vaticano II e la Chiesa*, Paideia, Brescia 1985, 4-64 (in particular 41-47).

contradiction in upholding both statements, although it should be recalled that it is the mission of the Church and of Christian life to explain the mission *ad gentes* and not vice versa. Furthermore, the broadening of the mission appears evident when *Redemptoris Missio* 37 addresses the mission from the territorial, social, and cultural viewpoints. The local Churches, Christian life in general, and the mission *ad gentes* have common perspectives, but also their own points of focus and ways of facing them. None, however, can deal with their own part without reflecting and committing themselves to a profound renewal of the Church.

The changes taking place in the Churches must be tackled. For a long time, the West has focused on secularization, on a kind of humanism impervious to transcendence and on the science-faith relationship, even if today there are those who speak of the transformation of faith rather than its demise.<sup>26</sup> Besides the profound social and cultural changes underway, Christianity in the South of the world is faced with the ecclesial dynamics typical of the second or third missionary generations.<sup>27</sup> There are changes relating to an approach to faith where the enthusiasm of conversion is waning, and there is the need to address a changing structure of belief developed around a generational transmission of Christian sacraments and ethics. After the early phase where the emphasis was on conversion, there now emerges the need for a Christian education based on prayer, sacramental liturgy and Christian ethics. It is about giving an institutionalized shape to what at the beginning was dynamic.

In this progress, communities of disciples have emerged in the spirit of the Risen Lord, who is “the transcendent and principal agent for the accomplishment of this work in the human spirit and in the history of the world. [...] Through his action the Good News takes shape in human minds and hearts and extends through history. In all of this it is the Holy Spirit who gives life” (RM 21). The “missionary outreach” of the Church is not in search of social consensus, but a Church fully gathered by the Holy Spirit on the com-

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<sup>26</sup> See PH. JENKINS, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007.

<sup>27</sup> See W. FREYTAG, *Das Problem der zweiten Generation in der jungen Kirche*, in ID., *Reden und Aufsätze*, Kaiser, München 1961, 245-257.

munion with Jesus and on the Gospel of the Kingdom. For this reason, it is a Church fully committed – in the footsteps of the Lord – to bearing witness to and communicating this life and the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Although, until not long ago it was identified nearly exclusively with the proclamation of the Gospel, the first aspect of the mission is the personal and community-wide involvement of the believers in bearing witness to Jesus Christ. In an urban, pluralist, and multi-ethnic society, the Gospel's proclamation, above all, should entail a full engagement of one's own life with the professed faith, Christian hope, and charity.

However, the *programmatic* and *paradigmatic* levels complement each other in a unity that shows the inseparability of Christian life and mission. This unity cannot be rekindled at Church level, distinguishing between missionary Churches and those that no longer exist. The missionary disciple is the living baptismal unity between ordinary Christian life and the permanent state of mission. The six series of questions included in Pope Francis' speech in Rio de Janeiro on the continental mission are intended to drive the renewal of the Church, reaching the core of the question. The commitment to a paradigmatic mission is irreconcilable with attitudes of pure reaction and with choices aimed at consolidating the institutions, neglecting the people's journey, history, and culture. In a missionary Church, the dialogue with people and society is not just a commitment, but is the natural way of expressing an evangelical and fraternal life (cf. EG 239) to proclaim and witness the Gospel. The *missio ad gentes* represents the paradigmatic dimension of the renewed understanding of the entire missionary identity of the Church. Any *programmatic* missionary attempt or effort should be designed and structured to comply with the different dimensions of the *missio ad gentes* (c. EG 15). Church's mission set against religious plurality, secular and digital world, scientific and technological reality, where cultures and people are yet untouched and transformed by the Gospel and the sacraments of Christian faith, should become the paradigmatic measure and criterion for Church life and its pastoral activity.

#### 4. The Communication of the Gospel in the Testimony of Living Faith

The witness is a tangle of philosophical and theological, biblical and dogmatic questions.<sup>28</sup> At a personal level, testimony consists of grasping the ultimate meaning of deeds, words, and human experiences. It is a creative encounter between the concreteness of experience and the rational capacity to comprehend everything within its truth, by bringing it under an organic whole. At a community level, testimony is placed in that openness and encounter with others being given only in a specific cultural and linguistic context. In this coming together, testimony cannot be confused with the exterior turmoil of a superficial life, without memory and without a plan, but must find the way to present those values and truths that are important for one's own and for other people's lives. We witness how much it has conferred cohesion and stability to the multiple experiences of one's own life; the life of those who have nothing to bear witness to or to communicate soon loses its value and significance.

The encounter and communication with others demand an active commitment to listen to oneself and affirm one's own path. Those who are not familiar with their own interiority are in a condition of exhibitionism, incapable of conferring meaning and consistency to their lives. Those who do not respect their own and others' intimacy lead a life dictated by the gross pleasure of showing off without respect for others. Certainly, this care towards one's own interiority can determine a withdrawal into oneself and create an 'intimate personal space' that shuts out any communication. However, it can also become an opportunity to better perceive and appreciate the depth and personal value of other persons. The true meaning and path of freedom lies here in the face of this ambivalence.

The returning to oneself must therefore come with a movement of openness to others and to society that expresses the will to be part of a common journey alongside one's group and, more broadly, the

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. E. CASTELLI (ed.), *Le temoignage. Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre international d'études humanistes et par l'Institut d'études philosophiques de Rome. Rome: 5-11 janvier 1972*, Aubier Montaigne, Paris 1972; ID. (ed.), *Informazione e testimonianza*, Cedam, Padova 1972; C.A. COADY, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1992; M. WAHLBERG, *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 2014.

whole of humanity. Without this opening, the common good to society as a whole would be impossible and life reduced to futile narcissism. Without interiority, external commitment can be superficial, but without exteriority, interior commitment can be incomprehensible, rootless, and lack fruitful interaction.

Testimony in this way appears to be an engaging personal journey that life concentrates on the experience of Christ. The journey started with Him and concluded in the Paschal faith of the Risen Crucified One. The *Acts of the Apostles* describe testimony as the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ac 1:8) that incorporates the communion with Jesus in the understanding of His person in the light of His resurrection, regarded as the ministry of evangelization in Jerusalem to the ends of the world (cf. Ac 1:21-22; 3:15).<sup>29</sup> Instead, the Gospel of John considers testimony as the synthesis of the revelation of Christ, the faithful witness of the light and truth.<sup>30</sup> Jesus is the event of revelation which manifests the intimate life of God. Jesus is the faithful witness of what He saw and heard and, through the Holy Spirit, continues His work through the disciples (cf. Jn 3:32-33).<sup>31</sup> The testimony appears, in this way, the confession of Jesus and His presence in human history, the revelation of God of life and love. Bearing witness means living a life which is consistent with the liveliness and quality of the truth and love that Christ witnessed as being the life of God. The truth of God is love, that is giving and service.

Preaching the Gospel in the testimony of faith means learning to communicate the Gospel of the Kingdom in many languages and many cultures. It is necessary to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus, upholding it with flexibility in the human reality and in different situations. This entails a familiarity with Jesus and His Gospel, without entrenching oneself in a formal language that is incapable of communicating with people and their lives nor betraying Christian revelation. What is always right and satisfactory for me and my

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<sup>29</sup> The text of Ac 22:15 adds Paul to the twelve Apostles.

<sup>30</sup> The Father bears Jesus witness (Jn 8:18e), and with Him, the Holy Spirit (Jn 15:26), the works of Jesus (Jn 10:25), and the Scriptures (Jn 5:39).

<sup>31</sup> TH. PREISS, *Life in Christ* [1947], SCM Press, London 1954; W. GRUNDMANN, *Zeugnis und Gestalt des Johannes-Evangeliums: eine Studie zum demerischen und gestalterischen Leistung des vierten Evangelisten*, Calwer, Stuttgart 1961; R. LATOURELLE, *Le témoignage chrétien*, Desclée – Bellarmin, Tournai – Montréal 1971.

world might not be for others and their lives. We must avoid a good message being thwarted by bad communication, or a message that is correct in terminological terms, but incapable of relating to the Gospel. Beyond formal questions, focusing communication on the needs of the person I am speaking to is decisive; where this attention represents a starting point and offers an objective possibility of life as an arrival point, there we have a message of faith safeguarded in its importance by a communication motivated by charity. This is when the communication of faith meets its fullness and authenticity.

In this context, we must place the re-reading of the testimony within the frame of the *missio ad gentes*, taking into account the decline of Eurocentrism and the consequent enhancement of cultures and indigenous religions and, with this, the demise of an expansionary conception of the mission.<sup>32</sup> Along these lines, *Ad Gentes* 11 on the Christian testimony encourages us to “let them be joined to those men by esteem and love; let them acknowledge themselves to be members of the group of men among whom they live; let them share in cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows”. These are the apostolic tasks of the *missio ad gentes*: become familiar with the people and their cultures, while developing a sincere and patient dialogue to learn, as stated in *Ad Gentes* 12, “what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth”. At the same time, the missionary disciples are called “to furnish these treasures, set them free, and bring them under the dominion of God their Savior”.

Missionaries are aware of many different social situations but, “even where they are not able to announce Christ fully”, they will have to promote among peoples “dignity and brotherly union, teaching those religious and moral truths which Christ illumined with His light; and in this way, they are gradually opening up a fuller approach to God”. In this way, not only are people aided in their journey towards God and their neighbour, but thanks to this journey, the mystery of Christ is allowed to shine.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. G. COLZANI, “Dall’espansione alla testimonianza. La missione nel Vaticano II e nel post-concilio”, *La Rivista del Clero Italiano*, vol. 88, n. 1, 2007, 7-23.

## 5. The Eucharistic Attraction: Fount of the Mission of the Church

A different Eucharistic approach to the mission is outlined in *Evangelii Gaudium* 15 and 112. A reference to this approach was already made by Benedict XVI in his homily at the inaugural Mass of the 5<sup>th</sup> CELAM in Aparecida: “The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by ‘attraction’: just as Christ draws all people to Himself by the power of His love, culminating in the sacrifice of the Cross, so the Church fulfils her mission to the extent that, in union with Christ, she accomplishes every one of her works in spiritual and practical imitation of the love of her Lord”.<sup>33</sup> This statement should be considered complementary to the active witness of life, the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, and the *programmatic* missionary action. It actually expresses a thesis that, although well-known in missiology, was not received fully.

The first theologian to introduce the notion of “attraction” was Alexandre Durand in 1942.<sup>34</sup> Developing the Christ-Church relationship in the light of incarnation, Durand was concerned about safeguarding the sovereign freedom and independence of the saving act of God, which cannot be enclosed within human limits.<sup>35</sup> He therefore acknowledged a universal divine action of grace beyond the life and works of the Church. As for the consequences on the mission, Durand identified a twofold movement: a movement of mission going from Christ to the whole world through the Apostles and the Church; a movement of attraction bringing humanity as a whole to Christ. This theory appeared clearly explained to him in Jn 12:32, a text which constituted the backbone of his thought. Other confirmations could be found in Jn 3:14-17; 10:16; 11:51-52.

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<sup>33</sup> *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2007, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20070513\\_conference-brazil.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070513_conference-brazil.html). See also *Sacramentum Caritatis* 82-84.

<sup>34</sup> A. DURAND, *Le problème théologique des missions*, Mappus, Le Puy 1942.

<sup>35</sup> “Nous ne pouvons pas traiter ex aequo ou mettre sur le même plan l’action de Dieu et celle de l’homme qui sont incommensurables entre elles. [...] En conséquence, nous ne devons pas lier de telle façon l’action divine à l’action humaine que nous fassions de celle-ci la mesure mesurant de celle-là; [...] ce serait subordonner Dieu à la créature, c’est-à-dire nier équivalement sa absolue et souveraine indépendance” (Ibid., 13).



In the aftermath of the second World War, similar theories outlining the sending out of the Church to the world and the attraction of the world to Christ were also developed in a series of articles by Louis Capéran.<sup>36</sup> The historical condition of sin had created a fracture between the universal grace of God and the revelation linked to the Jewish people and the Church of Christ. The divine revelation was universal in principle, but not so de facto.<sup>37</sup> Capéran consequently linked the mission not only to Christ's command to the Apostles, but also to the realization of the divine plan in its dual dynamics of universal grace and historical revelation. The universality of projects of this kind justified the passage from Israel to the Church of Jesus and the passage now occurring from a western and colonial Catholicity to a new and different one.<sup>38</sup>

This dynamic of attraction has its core in the text of Jn 12:31-33: "Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself". In saying this, he indicated the kind of death he was going to suffer. The hour of His Glory (Jn 12:23-32) and the hour of His judgment on the world (Jn 12:31) coincide. The emphasis is on the adverb reiterated two times in verse 31: "Now".<sup>39</sup> The elevation of Jesus recalls at the same time His death on the cross and the glorification, intended as the glorification of man from suffering, the glorification of the Servant of God (cf. Is 52:13). The attraction exercised by the Risen is the triumph of that universally victorious grace, as indicated by the addition of the final

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<sup>36</sup> L. CAPÉRAN, "La mission de l'Église et les missions dans le plan providentiel du salut", *L'Union missionnaire du Clergé de France*, vol. 21, 1945, 172-179; vol. 22, 1946, 21-28.

<sup>37</sup> Capéran referred the unity of these two dynamics to Congar's "Ecclesia ab Abel", speaking of a universal dynamism for which people aspire to Christ *sans pouvoir le nommer*, but encouraged by *l'épanouissement et l'enrichissement sans fin de leur vie de grâce*. This is a Christological-ecclesial saving work before the Church of the Resurrected (Ibid., 22, 25-26). The ensuing historical dynamic leads to the conclusion that "l'impulsion universelle donnée aux missions et l'universelle attraction du Sauveur sont deux mouvements qui vont au-devant l'un de l'autre, et le lien de rencontre c'est l'Église, visiblement et durablement plantée pour une surabondante fructification de son œuvre de salut" (Ibid., 22, 26).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>39</sup> "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out" (Jn 12:31).

statement “I will draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:31).<sup>40</sup> The attraction is the expression of a grace addressed to all and involving everything that has no other border than conscious disbelief and free rejection. The initiative of the Father, who bestows the Spirit of truth, love and goodness, is present and active in the world thanks to his Divine Incarnated Word, the Crucified and Risen Lord.

One cannot help but recall *Lumen Gentium* 11 presenting the Eucharist as “the fount and apex of the whole of Christian life”.<sup>41</sup> The Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17<sup>th</sup> April 2003) and the Apostolic Letter *Mane nobiscum Domine* (7<sup>th</sup> October 2004), both authored by John Paul II, should also be borne in mind. The first document observes that “every activity aimed at carrying out the Church’s mission, every work of pastoral planning must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination. In the Eucharist, we have Jesus, we have His redemptive sacrifice, we have His resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit” (EE 60). Through the Eu-

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<sup>40</sup> In *Evangelium Joannis Tractatus Centum Viginti Quatuor*, XXVI 2-5, Augustine’s comment on the use of the verb “draw” is worth mentioning: “No man comes to me except he whom the Father shall draw. Do not think that you are drawn against your will. The mind is drawn also by love. [...] I say it is not enough to be drawn by the will; you are drawn even by delight. What is it to be drawn by delight? Delight yourself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart. There is a pleasure of the heart to which that bread of heaven is sweet. No man can come unto me, except the Father that sent me to draw him. Noble excellence of grace! [...] Give me a man that loves, and he feels what I say. Give me one that longs, one that hungers, one that is travelling in this wilderness, and thirsting and panting after the fountain of his eternal home; give such, and he knows what I say. But if I speak to the cold and indifferent, he knows not what I say. Such were those who murmured among themselves. He whom the Father shall draw, says He, comes unto me”. The revelation of Christ is attraction, which moves what is present in our hearts.

<sup>41</sup> Similar assertions are made in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5 and in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10, although the latter deems all the liturgy to be “the fount and apex of the whole of Christian life” (LG 11). Moreover, according to *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 14, the Eucharist is “the source and wellspring of the unity of their [the priests] lives”; *Lumen Gentium* 26 speaks of the Eucharist “by which the Church continually lives and grows”; *Ad Gentes* 39 presents the Eucharist as the reality “which perfects the Church”, as the force behind its complete fulfillment, while for *Unitatis Redintegratio* 15 the Eucharist is a “source of the Church’s life and pledge of future glory”.

charist, “the Church is firmly built up and it becomes clear what she truly is: one, holy, Catholic and apostolic; the people, temple and family of God; the body and bride of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit; the universal sacrament of salvation and a hierarchically structured communion” (EE 60). It should be observed that this encyclical letter includes also other statements of missiological interest.<sup>42</sup>

In the communion between Christ and the Church, which is proper to the Eucharist, the second document sees “an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization”. The letter reiterates that “the dismissal at the end of each Mass is *a charge* given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spreading of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values (MND 24), while “the Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also – in some sense – *its plan*. For the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian, through whose testimony it is meant to spread throughout society and culture” (MND 25).<sup>43</sup> The missionary interest is clear and explicit.<sup>44</sup>

For the theology of today, the Eucharist is a celebration that has no sense in itself, but is grounded on establishing a relationship between the redeeming mystery of Easter, on the one hand, and the life of the Church and of all humanity, on the other hand. In short, the Eucharist is to be considered in relation to Christ, who established it, and the Church, which experiences it. The Eucharist is

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<sup>42</sup> In particular, the second and third chapters, respectively titled *The Eucharist Builds the Church* (21-25) and *The Apostolicity of the Eucharist and of the Church* (26-33). The verb *building* and the idea of *apostolicity* are basic terms of the missionary language.

<sup>43</sup> “For this to happen – *Mane nobiscum Domine* 25 points out – each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise”. The primary intention is certainly the personal and communal appropriation of the Eucharist, but “this mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian” together with “the values which the Eucharist expresses [...] inspires [...] and evokes”, start a discussion that requires an ecclesiology and a Eucharistic anthropology capable of discernment, full of love, as well as a merciful and forgiving activity. It can even be said that the document did not have the “courage” to deduce all the possible consequences.

<sup>44</sup> It is no coincidence that the fourth part of the letter (24-28) is titled *The Eucharist, Principle and Plan of “Mission”*.

about thanking the Father, it is as a sacrificial act of worship in memory of Jesus Christ's life and person. While the latter signifies the grace that makes the discipleship possible and starts the testimony of the Kingdom, the Eucharist is the creative act of the Resurrection and its Spirit, the mission the result thereof has a clear priority over the subjects who have to experience it. Using a language that is no longer familiar, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 21 speaks of "a causal influence of the 'Eucharist' present at the Church's very origins": one can legitimately suppose that this "causal influence" continues in the Church of today, and allows a further extension of a pragmatic and instrumental vision of the mission, where it appears to be "the way" by which the Church is available to the Resurrected and His Spirit. The mission of the Church does not substitute Christ who is now distant, but witnesses the presence and the redeeming action of the Resurrected Jesus who, through the Spirit that operates in the Church and the whole world, brings everybody and everything to communion with the Father.

*Mane nobiscum Domine* recalls two decisive eucharistic attitudes – the giving of grace<sup>45</sup> and solidarity<sup>46</sup> – although they do not express the whole of the Christian personality. However, *Mane nobiscum Domine* 28, by recalling John's account of the washing of the feet (cf. Jn 13:1-20) and the Pauline themes of the worthy or unworthy celebration (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-22.27-34),<sup>47</sup> refers to the difficul-

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<sup>45</sup> *Mane nobiscum Domine* 26: "In Jesus, in His sacrifice, in His unconditional 'yes' to the will of the Father, is contained the 'yes', the 'thank you' and the 'amen' of all humanity. The Church is called to remind men and women of this great truth. This is especially urgent in the context of our secularized culture, characterized as it is by a forgetfulness of God and a vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency".

<sup>46</sup> According to *Mane nobiscum Domine* 27, "the Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a *promotor of communion, peace and solidarity* in every situation". Along these lines, the Eucharist can be described "as a *great school of peace*, forming men and women who, at various levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion". *Mane nobiscum Domine* 28 also underlines "the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a *practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society*. In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically affirming the criterion of service".

<sup>47</sup> The synoptic tradition highlights that the Eucharist was established in the context of a betrayal (Mk 14:17-25), and Paul – choosing legal terms such as "of-

ties of accepting the Eucharist that go well beyond the warning of leading a coherent life. The Eucharist is the first offer and realization of this universal redeeming strength. Its ecclesial comprehension is the basis of the Church as the universal sacrament of redemption.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* 262, Pope Francis recalls the drawing power of the Christian prayer shaped upon the Eucharist: “Jesus is ‘the first and greatest evangelizer.’ In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with Him, and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God Himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that ‘He has loved us first’ (1 Jn 4:19) and that He alone ‘gives the growth’ (1 Cor 3:7). Nor should we see the newness of this mission as entailing a kind of displacement or forgetfulness of the living history which surrounds us and carries us forward. Memory is a dimension of our faith which we might call ‘Deuteronomic,’ not unlike the memory of Israel itself. Jesus leaves us the Eucharist as the Church’s daily remembrance of, and deeper sharing in, the event of His Passover (cf. Lk 22:19). The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore” (EG 12-13).

In the Eucharistic memorial we are drawn by attraction into the active dynamics of God’s love and taken to the outmost peripheries of our world. Nobody and nothing can be excluded from this ecstatic movement of love. By attraction we are not allowed shut ourselves out, we are commanded to go out and reach everyone for the sake of

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fender”, “examine”, “condemn”, “judge” – compares *the Lord’s supper* and *his own supper* (1 Cor 11:20-21), and then arrived at pointing out that it was a joining together in the name of the Lord. Paul uses the verb *sunérkomai* (vv. 17.18.20), which in ancient times was the technical verb to designate the gathering of people in assembly. From this ensues that *his own supper* is a gathering of small groups, on the basis of their own interests. Actually, it is at the root of *skísmata* (v. 18) and *airéseis* (v. 19), and shows contempt for the *ekklesia tou Theou* (v. 22). The ultimate meaning of the legal language does not end in this opposition, but refers back to the centrality of the alliance. Even if the term is used just one more time (v. 25), the whole discourse is like a form of sacred law aimed at passing on what Paul received, that is, the new alliance in the Paschal mystery of Lord Jesus. Regarding similar behaviors in the early Church, see Jas 2:2-4; Mt 5:23-24.

Jesus' Gospel. We share and are moved by Christ's reconciling love (cf. 2 Cor 5:14-21) according to the way Jesus has loved us starting from the poor, the last, and the outcast (cf. EG 259-283). By reaching out to the lowliest, we include everyone. Starting from the most distant peripheries, our missionary love includes all. The positive exclusion of Jesus Christ, the free and conscious rejection of God by disbelief and grievous injustice against human beings, created in God's image and likeness, represent the outermost boundary of the *missio ad gentes*.

In a Church that is still largely western in its institutions, the theme of universality must be resumed, rethought, and completed. It is a work that needs to be done both in the light of the Eucharist, which animates and fills the life of the Church together with the Gospel and the work of the Spirit, and also on the basis of the probing presence of the poor and the lowliest. The poor and outcast are a measure of the universality of the Gospel, but the latter's global scope does not fully terminate with them. The Eucharist is the sacramental reference to the profound relation that the Paschal mystery places between Christ and humanity, as recalled in *Gaudium et Spes* 22, when addressing men and women of good will in whose hearts grace is at work: "Since Christ died for all men and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal mystery". The assertion is picked up once again using a more controlled language in *Ad Gentes* 7, a text aimed at recalling the legitimacy of a universal missionary action.<sup>48</sup>

The Church had already reconsidered the classical statement *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*<sup>49</sup> and, in reasserting the necessary presence

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<sup>48</sup> *Ad Gentes* 7: "Therefore though God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to find that faith without which it is impossible to please Him, yet a necessity lies upon the Church, and at the same time a sacred duty, to preach the Gospel. And hence missionary activity today as always retains its power and necessity".

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Y. CONGAR, "Hors de l'Église pas du salut", in ID., *Sainte Église. Études et approches ecclésiologiques*, Cerf, Paris 1964, 417-432; J. RATZINGER, "Kein Heil ausserhalb der Kirche?", in ID., *Das neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*, 299-361; F.A. SULLIVAN, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, Paulist Press, New York 1992; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

of the Church for salvation (LG 14), stated that “Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God (LG 16)” – defining a notion of the Church as a “universal sacrament of salvation” (LG 48).<sup>50</sup> At the same time, the Church had resumed the early theme of an *Ecclesia ab Adam*, comprehensive of all the righteous “from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect” (LG 2).<sup>51</sup> It is a debate where much is at stake: the figure of the Church as set out in the Second Vatican Council and the irreducible excellence of God’s redeeming plan compared to every human realization aimed at serving him.<sup>52</sup>

These statements are forcefully reasserted in *Redemptoris Missio* 20, where the Church is “effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom”. Delving into this theme, John Paul II indicated the form of this service in the foundation of communities and in the journey of faith, but also in the enhancement of those evangelical values that reveal the Kingdom and facilitate its welcome. Based on these values, John Paul II recognized that an “inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live ‘Gospel values’ and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where He wills”. At the same time, John Paul II observed that “this temporal dimension of the Kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the Kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fullness”.

The key issue lies in broadening the outlook from the personal dimension – relating to individuals who do not know or, for various reasons, cannot embrace the Christian faith – to the socio-cultural and religious one. To this end, *Redemptoris Missio* 5 includes two important theological aspects we cannot expand further in this venue.

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(Nos. 846-848), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2000; B. SESBOÛÉ, *Hors de l'Église pas de salut. Histoire d'une formule et problèmes d'interprétation*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 2004; W. KASPER, “II Outlines of Catholic Ecclesiology. 2.5 No Salvation Outside the Church”, in ID., *Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London – New York 2015.

<sup>50</sup> See also *Lumen Gentium* 52; *Ad Gentes* 1, 5, 7; *Inter Mirifica* 3; *Gaudium et Spes* 22.

<sup>51</sup> On this theme, see Y. CONGAR, “Ecclesia ab Abel”, 79-108.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Gribomont talked about “imperfect realizations”. See J. GRIBOMONT, “Du sacrement de l'Église et de ses réalisations imparfaites”, *Irenikon*, vol. 22, 1949, 345-367.

After having affirmed that Christ is the only universal mediator between God and humanity, the encyclical letter concludes that “no one therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit”. However, it also acknowledges that “although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his” (RM 5).<sup>53</sup> The affirmation is only hypothetical, and a hypothesis does not become truth if one does not commit itself to it.

The second indication concerns the fact that, even in similar situations, the Church must maintain its clear-cut role of mediation. The encyclical letter shows that also in these cases “salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation” (RM 10). Needless to say this attitude to peoples’ spiritual, social, and material situation includes their religious life as well. There is a complex theological reality regarding the universal mediation of Christ and His Church, the relationship between the Christian community founded by Jesus and the other religions, and, above all, the relationship between the divine presence with which His grace accompanies human history and the movement of the human spirit. Through liberty and knowledge, the human spirit finds and heads towards the absolute, that believers call God.

Through the unique and universal mediation of Jesus Christ and His Church for the salvation of all, Christians and non-Christians

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<sup>53</sup> The text of *Redemptoris Missio* 5 is also recalled in *Dominus Iesus* 14, which invites the current theology “to explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation”. From this perspective, theology has “a vast field of work” ahead, following the Vatican II which taught that “the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a participation in this one source” (LG 62). Subsequently, *Dominus Iesus* also request theology to delve “more deeply [into] the content of this participated mediation”, as long as it does not contradict the value of the Christological mediation. Therefore, “those solutions that propose a salvific action of God beyond the unique mediation of Christ would be contrary to Christian and Catholic faith”.



are differently ordained and theologically related to God and His Kingdom. All these diversified links to the Paschal mystery are sacramentally articulated by the Eucharistic movement of the missionary attraction in the Holy Spirit, as mentioned by Benedict XVI and Francis.





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## Church's Mission

History, Theology and the Way Forward

*Church's Mission: History, Theology and the Way Forward*, featured within the series Omnis Terra – PMU CIAM Publications, is one of the latest works by Prof. Fr. Gianni Colzani, Emeritus Professor at the Pontifical Urbaniana University. At a time when all Christians, baptized and sent, are urged to strengthen their missionary identity, awareness, and skills for the sake of their engagement in the world, Fr. Colzani here shares his reflections on the Church's mission and witnessing of faith, as a tool for missionary formation and pastoral guidance.

By enabling a thorough understanding of how mission represents not only the very nature of the Church (cf. *Ad Gentes* 2), but also its origin, purpose, and life, *Church's Mission: History, Theology and the Way Forward* is a precious contribution to the discussion encouraged by Pope Francis on "how to render the work of the *missio ad gentes* more effective" for the sake of the young Churches in missionary territories, as well as of those Churches of more ancient tradition in need of renewed evangelization.

**Fr. Gianni Colzani** is a Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Milan and taught Systematic Theology in Milanese seminaries, at P.I.M.E., at the Catholic University of Milan, and the Theological Faculty of Florence. Currently, he is Emeritus Professor of Mission Theology at the Faculty of Missiology of the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome. Fr. Colzani is the author of numerous books on missiology, theological anthropology, eschatology, and Mariology. Among them, the collection of essays *Pensare la missione. Scritti editi e inediti* [Thinking on Mission. Published and Unpublished Studies], UUP 2012, which features a wide bibliography of his works.

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