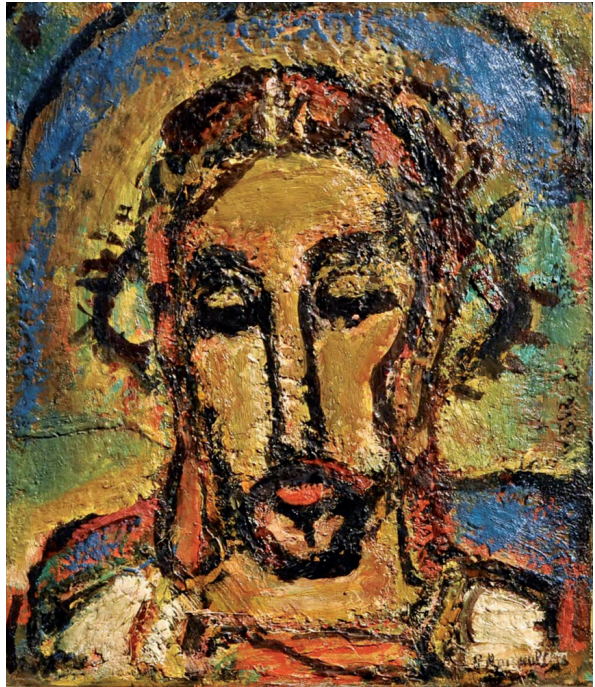


Mission&Formation

Fabrice Hadjadj – Eloy Bueno de la Fuente

# Life Is Mission

edited by  
Fabrizio Meroni



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**Life Is Mission**  
edited by Fabrizio Meroni  
Mission&Formation

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## Preface

The *Extraordinary Missionary Month, October 2019*, announced by Pope Francis was a “providential occasion”<sup>1</sup> to foster a wide theological and cultural reflection in the Church on the essence and the actual significance of the Christian *mission*. Through formation programs, study seminars, publications, and interaction with the media, the *Baptized and Sent* across the world could deepen their knowledge and understanding of *mission* not only as the very nature of the Church (cf. *Ad Gentes* 2), but also as its “origin, purpose, and life.”<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) fulfilled a special role, since they were engaged in accompanying the Christians of the particular Churches during the preparatory phase that led to the celebrations of the Extraordinary Missionary Month, culminated in the World Mission Day on Sunday, October 20, 2019. To support their missionary efforts, the PMS General Assembly held at Fraterna Domus in Sacrofano (Rome), from May 27 to June 1, 2019, provided a platform for discussion and exchange on “how to render the work of the *missio ad gentes* more effective.”<sup>3</sup>

The highlight of the proceedings was reached with the *lectio magistralis* delivered by Dr. Fabrice Hadjadj, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toulon, and Dr. Fr. Eloy Bueno de la Fuente, Professor at the Faculty of Theology of Northern Spain in Burgos.

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<sup>1</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, 1 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> 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, Milan 2019, 69.

<sup>3</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*.

From different but complementary perspectives, they provided a thorough and insightful examination of the pneumatological and soteriological dimension of *mission*, drawing attention to the theological rationale that should guide the pastoral ministry and the overall missionary endeavour of Christians.

The two lectures greatly contribute to meeting the need for a renewed understanding of what *mission* is about, which is among the main reasons underlying Pope Francis' magisterial and hortatory insistence in addressing missionary subjects.

The Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) has thus collected them into a single volume, *Life Is Mission*, within the series *Omnis Terra* – PMU CIAM Publications, in order to reach out to a wider number of baptized, both religious and lay, women and men, who can benefit from the reading of Dr. Hadjadj and Dr. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente's works as a source of inspiration for their approach to evangelization and the witness of the faith in missionary territories.<sup>4</sup>

Along the lines of *Laudato Si'*, Dr. Hadjadj maintains that *mission* is the existential form of life for the whole creation. Descending from God, the creation already contains the *mission* as the inherent dimension of the living of all beings, who belong to the ecosystem of the Trinity. That is why *Life Is Mission*, and “everything is interconnected”, as Pope Francis reiterates as a leitmotiv in his Encyclical Letter. The awareness that *Life Is Mission* and of the interconnectedness of all creatures is the theological foundation of a truly *integral ecology*, which fully embraces the metaphysical, transcendental, and spiritual dimension, while rejecting the temptations of “anthropomorphism”, on the one hand, and “biocentrism”, on the other (LS 118).

Missionary conversion leading to salvation and the openness to others are part of our nature, Dr. Hadjadj explains. From the very first moment of our birth, all members of mankind have been *sent* out and, therefore, are in a state of *mission*, non-Christians included. Yet, here the question arises whether the latter can attain salvation. An answer to this is provided in the essay *Salvation in Christ*,

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<sup>4</sup> *Life Is Mission* features the lectures of Dr. Hadjadj and Dr. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente's in the original language, respectively French and Spanish, as well as their translation into English. PMU curated the translations, which were approved by the authors and the Urbaniana University Press.



*the Church, and Other Religions in Light of Vatican II*, which has been republished in this volume because of its correlation with Dr. Hadjadj's work.<sup>5</sup>

The answer is yes, non-Christians can be saved through the human experience of conjugal love (monogamous and indissoluble) between woman and man, where God has instilled the *mission* to generate life. This is the ordinary way for the salvation of those who have not received the Baptism (without having refused it) and live conjugal love authentically, although the manifestation of their union is not Christian in its historical ecclesial form.

Given the ontological dimension of *mission*, Dr. Hadjadj also reminds us that every baptized member of the Church is “on *mission* on this Earth”, and is called to “pastoral engagement or commitment in the world” (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 27), interacting in listening, at the service to the other, and proclamation.

*Mission* is not an optional choice, but the “engine and horizon of the faith”,<sup>6</sup> the very reason for our lives as Christians, even if it may entail that “life is distress”: a critique at the Marxist-consumeristic materialism that has made its way beyond Western societies.

Missionary conversion is intertwined with ecological conversion, but our engagement in the safeguarding of the environment should be conducted “in the name of the Lord” as the source of all living things, not “in the name of Nature” and against “man”. Christians should not fall into the ideological temptation of “ecologism”: out of *love* for the Creator and his creation, *mission* requires their ecological conversion to address the “human excesses”, as well as the destructive course that nature itself can take, and which both can undermine the eco-system of the Trinity.

The theological place where missionary conversion and ecological conversion meet, Dr. Hadjadj concludes, is the Mass during the Eucharist, where “the fruit of the Earth and work of human hands” can “integrate the life of the Trinity”, and “all that has been created

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<sup>5</sup> An earlier version of this essay, titled “Christ’s Salvation, Church and Other Religions in Light of Vatican II”, was published in F. MERONI (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church*, Aracne Editrice, Canterano (Rome) 2017, 197-225.

<sup>6</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*, 3 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/).

finds its greatest exaltation” (LS 236). From a missiological and an ecclesiological perspective, the centrality of the Eucharist, and more broadly of the liturgy, is also emphasized by Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente. “The liturgy – he says – cannot be separated from the life of the missionary Church”, which the Eucharist makes “not simply a human association”, but a community of the saved, a true family of God, composed of sons and daughters in the only Son.

By stipulating that “the Church acts as [...] a sacrament”, Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente invites today’s *mission* to rediscover its own *sacramental logic*, based on the event of Jesus Christ, on his Incarnation and Passover. *Mission* is the historical and sacramental participation in the missions that God the Father has assigned to the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world. Therefore, the Church is an eschatological design of all creation, the “universal sacrament of salvation” (*Lumen Gentium* 48, cf. 1, 9; AG 1; *Gaudium et Spes* 45), namely the place and the time of the reconciliation with God within history. Limiting *mission* to proclaiming and witnessing Christian values deprives the Word of God and his Kingdom of the concrete historical-eschatological reality of the Incarnation, and of the saving and transforming effectiveness of the missionary work of the Church founded on the Paschal mystery.

Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente defines Jesus’ death and resurrection as “the essential missionary event [...] the source of the Christian mission and the fragrance that all missionaries should emanate”. The Cross, the historical and risen life of Jesus, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, establish the Church in a “permanent state of mission” and all are baptized as “missionary disciples”, called to evangelize and bring the Gospel “to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8). The beginning of evangelization, narrated by Luke in the *Acts of the Apostles*, is the main source of “inspiration”<sup>7</sup> for Christians of all times, to quote Pope Francis, since it provides the pattern for the execution of the mission “at a theological, pastoral and organizational level”, as Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente observes. This is the *missio ad gentes*, the original form of mission adopted by the Church, which must always be adapted to changing historical circumstances.

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<sup>7</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*.

The author brings out the Trinitarian roots of the *missio ad gentes* and its intrinsic connection to salvation (cf. AG 7). In addition, he examines the current challenges to evangelization the Church is being faced with, in light of the writings of St. Paul and of the official documents addressing the modern missionary engagement: Benedict XV's *Maximum Illud*, the magisterium of the Second Vatican Council (*Ad Gentes, Dei Verbum, Sacrosanctum Concilium, Gaudium et Spes, Lumen Gentium*), Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, and Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Three main issues are identified as crucial to the future of the *mission*. Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente singles out the need to outline proper approaches to bring evangelization forth in “new missionary situations and landscapes”, such as the social movements and the media; uphold the *missio ad gentes* “as criteria for the missionary of the entire Church”; ensure “the participation and co-responsibility of all”, strengthening the role of the lay *Baptized and Sent* in the missionary outreach. His reference to the need for the “charism of the Pontifical Missionary Societies” in this new evolving scenario, is of further stimulus for the PMS to serve God's Church in fostering the missionary formation of the faithful, the evangelizing efforts of the particular Churches, and the *missio ad gentes* in the world.<sup>8</sup>

Vatican City  
November 30, 2019  
*100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Maximum Illud*

FR. FABRIZIO MERONI  
*PMU Secretary General*  
*Director of CLAM and Fides*

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<sup>8</sup> The publication of this volume was coordinated by Mr. Emiliano Stornelli, Chairman of the Religion & Security Council.



# Life Is Mission\*

❖ FABRICE HADJADJ

There is nothing more everyday than the apostolate. My stepmother is proof of this, for she feels that she was given a mission to which she is constantly giving witness. She cannot help but converse about her last trip to the supermarket, of her time at the hairdresser, or of how she met someone in the street. Her words – as she speaks of the special offer on leeks; her hairdresser and their nephew's sickness; the construction work on Jean Jaurès Street – become a sort of revelation to be shared with everyone, almost as if it were for the sake of their salvation.

I have spoken of my stepmother, but I could also speak of my children. Their grandmother is only the beginning of that momentum that is embodied in them. My three-year-old son, Pierre, points to something with his finger and cries out to me, "The sheep! The sheep!" Yes, there are certainly sheep in the field, but he feels that he must proclaim this to me, that he must show them to me, that he must command me by the sound of his voice to come and see for myself; just as Jesus had once said, "Come and see" (Jn 1:39).

What about those young teenagers who begin their conversations with, "You will never guess what just happened to me"? And, what about those handy do-it-yourself friends of ours who give tours of their homes to show off all the hard work they have accomplished? What about those chatterboxes that go around commenting on the latest gossip regarding Jean-Pierre and Jennifer's tumultuous love life? To this, today, we must add the incessant buzz of the exchange of information technologically, where a growing number of people take and publish selfies on social media. These platforms permit us to show the world we are in Rome; for example, with the President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Archbishop Giovanni Dal Toso, who may not be a celebrity *per se*, but who is still a great man in himself.

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\* A longer version of this essay, in French, is published in *Nova et Vetera*, n. 3, Sept. 2019.

We can, therefore, be secure in our affirmation: regardless of the importance of the subject or the type of witness, missionary readiness is universal. The apostolic spirit, the drive towards *kerygma* – that is to ‘proclaim from the rooftops’ what has happened elsewhere, or what was whispered in silence – is something that belongs to the essence of being human. To echo what prejudicially some say about women not being able to keep a secret, perhaps – with my tongue in my cheek – this is firstly and foremostly a trait belonging to the feminine sex; after all, Providence chose women to be the first witnesses of the Resurrection.

## 1. The Missionary Impulse of Humanity

Even though it may be unnecessary or pointless; even if the person already knows what is about to be said, and does not need to hear the proclamation of salvation again, we cannot hold ourselves back. The passage from the Gospel according to Luke – “when the Apostles returned, they explained to him what they had done” (9:10) – is most intriguing because it inverts the characteristic mark of missions. In effect, when we speak of mission, we underline the ‘going out’, not the ‘coming back’. Yet, in this passage, it is the Apostles’ return that is spoken of. In missions, we also tend to insist on the proclamation to non-Christians, i.e. to those who need conversion. Yet, here, the Apostles direct their message to God, who – we can safely say – definitely did not have the need for conversion, but their mission is completed at that moment. At this precise moment, and in this situation, it may appear perfectly unnecessary, perhaps even ridiculous; and yet they continue. The Apostles are unable to stop the flow of words gushing forth from their hearts. They *told of the wonders of the Lord* to the Lord Himself, who did not need to learn from them what had happened, and for whom these things were nothing extraordinary.

This mission, which continues after the completion of the mission, does not only show us the essential character of the missionary impulse embedded in humanity, but it also demonstrates that the primary sense of mission is not a utilitarian one. It is not uncommon that utilitarianism distorts the way we think of missions. Did Christ not say, “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19)? We, therefore, think of missionary work as increasing the number of disciples, like marketing increases profits. We think about the need to multiply the number of Christians, as if we were increasing our clien-

tele and we apply the means analogous to those used in advertising. For example, at the parish council meeting, missionary urgency could be spoken of as it is done so at executive committee meetings, underling the need for incremental profit. Yet, this manner of describing the urgency of missionary activity is to reduce mission to something optional or voluntary. There is, we could assume, the presupposition that we are interested in the salvation of others only inasmuch as if it were based on quotas, or to win a game, but salvation cannot be “won” in that way. Also, what is suggested is that everything depends on will, on effort, on sacrifice, on concrete renunciation. As a consequence, it is the question of wanting, not being, that is prominent; a work obligation, and not naturally bearing fruit, like the fruitfulness of man, who – as a ‘tree with legs and speech’ – is only successful and fruitful when he reaches out and speaks.

Mission carries an aspect of utility; like, for example, the chirping or singing of birds, used by the animals to mark territory and propagate their species. But it would be a mistake to think that this utilitarian dimension is primary. Instead, we could consider it as an interior delimitation of a larger encompassing dimension of essential gratuity: the gratuity of the nightingale’s existence, for it could very well have not existed; the introduction into the world of its own form and song, even though it is late, and night has already fallen. The nightingale, which we call in French *philomèle* – ‘melody’s friend’ –, does not sing in order to preserve itself; it preserves itself to raise its song to the stars. The very same is true of mission. It is not a question of the survival of the Church, but rather the very life of humankind, in its fullest meaning, in the gratuity of the words that gather together the ‘universe’ and offer it freely to one’s neighbour.

## 1.1 Life Is Mission

Mission is therefore not something that we add to our lives, as if it were something optional, an accessory or something superfluous. It is the very movement of our life. Since the beginning of his Pontificate, Pope Francis has never ceased to repeat this, especially in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an ‘extra’ or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. *I am a mission on this Earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world* (my added emphasis). We have to regard ourselves as



sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (EG 273).

Therefore, the *ontological* dimension of mission precedes and is the foundation for its *moral* dimension, which is perfectly recapitulated in Pope Francis’ thought, and which was expressed five years later in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*: “We are tempted to relegate pastoral engagement or commitment in the world to second place, as if these were ‘distractions’ along the path to growth in holiness and interior peace. We can forget that ‘life does not have a mission, but is a mission’” (GE 27).

Here Pope Francis is citing the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri. However, it does not have the same connotation of fullness that we gladly give it, as when it is reiterated by the Pontiff. To say that life is mission is to precisely affirm the impossibility of complete solitude. Mission presupposes, in effect, the being sent out *to* someone and *for* someone; we could also add *with* someone, since mission involves accompaniment, and not an isolated individual. Consequently, to be in mission does not only signify being by oneself, with oneself and for oneself, but rather it means to be by others, with others and for others. Here, there is no competition nor alienation since this is essential of my being: I am more myself because I am by others, with others and for others, and vice-versa, I can only be by others, with others and for others inasmuch as I am by myself, with myself and for myself, in the context of genuine responsibility. And yet, the other face of both life and mission is the experience of insufficiency: something that is given to me to do, that imposes itself upon me, but not from the outside, but is imposed with an imposition without constraint – something necessary, but at the same time something that is asked of me. This means that I am not self-sufficient: alone, by myself, I am nothing. Since life does not have a mission, but is mission, to cite and as Zubiri stresses, the existential emptiness of man is radical, “not only is he nothing without possessing something and without doing something, but on his own he has not the strength to fulfil it, nor to await of becoming”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> X. ZUBIRI, *Nature, Histoire, Dieu*, traduit de l’espagnol par L. Dal Corno et P. Secretan, L’Harmattan, Paris 2009, 333-334. The translation into English from the French edition of the book was made by the author of this chapter (« Non seulement il n’est rien sans les choses et sans en faire quelque chose, mais par soi seul il n’a pas la force d’être en état de le faire, d’atteindre à l’être »).



## 1.2 Mission is Openness to Others

We can now fathom why mission as life, and not as option, has something remarkable about it. At the same time, we can now understand why we might have the tendency of protecting ourselves. Mission also means that life is distress. It is a calling out for help: for the help from someone who may offer it to me; and for the help that I can offer someone else.

By this, we denounce the absurdity of individualism as well as “excessive anthropocentrism” (*Laudato Si’* 116). By this, we can also agree ontologically, and not morally, with the words of Jesus: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it” (Mk 8:35); or elsewhere: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Mt 23:12).

These words recall the paradox of the Cross. This paradox, however, is before that of *mission* (for the Cross is inscribed into the *mission* of the Son). It contains no negation: it is not a matter of denying oneself to open oneself to another; to lower oneself before a prince in the likeness of a rug to be trampled on so as to move his heart and, in return, receive the reward of being made into a curtain. The paradox lies in the clear affirmation of being as mission: if I am on mission on this Earth, I must be – first of all – capable of listening and proclaiming. I humble myself when I understand that the words I speak are of someone Who is greater than myself and Who is sending me out; in return, I am raised up since I understand that I am a part of something much greater than myself. The moment in which I keep my life exclusively to myself and for myself, I lose it; not as a death sentence passed upon me, but because the essence of life is not in the fact of being solely by and for oneself.

If life is mission, by introspection, we can discover that nothingness, mere self-referentiality leads only to insignificance. The more I close myself within my fortress, the more I collapse within myself. The more I wish to exist without anyone else, being my own foundation, the more I lose my footing and fall into despair.

## 2. Mission and Integral Ecology

The point of our reflection, however, is to go one step further and to ask ourselves if Xavier Zubiri’s thought, which applies to the human

subject, can be extended to all living beings, or even to all essence. Using the vocabulary of metaphysics, the questions to be asked are: can the knowledge of ‘being sent’ be considered transcendental? Then, is every being on mission, not only my mother-in-law, but also the worm or blade of grass, each according to its own existence? Mission would therefore be realized at all levels of existence, with varying degrees of perfection. As such, it would allow us to consider the whole ladder of these missions dynamically, like that of Jacob in which one could be by himself, but at the same time could be by and for another; in which one could climb to Heaven while at the same time coming down to the Earth.

With regards to Pope Francis’ magisterium, we can reflect upon the unity between the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*. What is the relationship between missionary and ecological conversion? Is it an incidental relationship tied to the circumstances of our time? Or could it be an essential relationship that refers to a single and unique conversion? What is, in fact, integral ecology in relationship to the mission of the Church?

### 2.1 *Laudato Si’*: “Everything is Connected”

There are those who might view *Laudato Si’* as being just an additional environmental component to the Social Doctrine of the Church. This would be, however, quite significant in itself. Today, we are facing a unique situation, a crisis without precedence, and to which we must apply important principles, to extricate in which way the Gospel teaches us to respond. Therefore, an aspect of missionary conversion is that involving ecological conversion, for the mission taking place in our times, in our common home, which is being damaged increasingly every day, imposes circumstantially the necessity to protect the planet and its biodiversity.

Others might say that, with integral ecology, the Church has finally accepted the theoretical contributions of scientific ecology and political ecogism. Just as businesses mislead their customers with ‘green-washing’, by placing an eco-label on their un-green products and practices, so the Church must demonstrate that the Light of the world is – above all – a green light. But the Light is the Light, and it has no need for the ‘green’ as its source. The Light contains all the colours of the spectrum, and reveals the green, for the green is a reality that reflects the Lights’ glow.

To think of Divine Revelation as a part of ecologism would be to take the colour green as a criterium for all clarity. The task is rather to think of ecology as something that flows from Divine Revelation and, consequently, flows from the mission of the Church. What I am trying to explain here is that, in truth, integral ecology is dependent on an economy of mission which sees all creation as being missionary and, therefore, mission – once more – is not an option or a specialty, but is the basic state of all things. As sung in Psalm (19:4): “Their voice goes out through all the Earth, and their words to the end of the world”.

## 2.2 The Very Nature of Ecologism

The phrase “everything is connected” is repeated throughout the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* as if it were a refrain. As in a song, a refrain can impede us from remembering its verses, and here, we repeat that everything is connected, but we no longer know, in significant detail, what is connected, and how this connection exists.

The first perspective – within the Encyclical – is the one in which ecology is understood in its closest possible definition, i.e. the study of environments in which plants and animals live, the study of their interactions and the interdependencies that these living organisms have among one another and with their milieu. But, this definition is immediately expanded by the Pontiff into a vision that intends to bind not only natural beings, but also nature and culture: “Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an *integral ecology*, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” (LS 137).

The ecological question, therefore, must not be separated from the economic and social ones. Many unsuccessful political utopias are recycled in ecologism, passing from the social cause to the animal cause – in desperation –, protecting the rights of small animals since the system is unable to defend the smallest of people. But, it is impossible to separate the defence of life and the defence of human life – of a human life worthy of the dignity humanity has – which is more than mere survival.

The expression “everything is connected” opposes the purely competitive and liberal view that one encounters among ecologists,

particularly on the left-wing of the political divide, which argues that for there to be more of nature, there must be less of man. Increasingly, we hear it declared that often we hear it declared that 'man' is worse than a predator, since predators such as the grizzly bear or tiger are a part of nature and ensure equilibrium in the ecosystem, meanwhile 'man' is nature's destroyer and the cancer of evolution, and therefore an error of nature and the sin of evolution. In general, here we must note that we have someone who is full of good intentions, puts humankind on trial, while at the same time excluding himself as an exception. In order to defend life, this man-above-all-men comes to the rather contradictory conclusion that it is necessary to promote sterilization and abortion. This concern for the future generations boils down to the voluntary refusal of their own existence in this world. Such a protection of biodiversity leads to the disappearance of the only species aware of this biodiversity and which is capable of taking care of species other than its own.

The Pope stands against this disassociation that is contrary to the logic of connection that a true ecology is based upon: "Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion" (LS 120). It may be a demographical question, but nothing will be resolved by removing humankind. The answer does not lie in making humankind and his dramatic situation disappear: that would be to abolish on this Earth the capacity to ask questions and to question oneself; that would be to destroy the only living being that questions life and, without doubt, can destroy it, but his first task is to understand and to accompany that life.

To take care of a species other than our own is the proper definition of culture. The arborist watches over the fruits of his trees; the shepherd watches over his sheep. One could object that this vigilance is still a form of predation: fruits and sheep are only taken care of for their utility, in order to be finally devoured by humankind. However, speaking in this manner, we are reversing the order of things (and of appetites). Without a doubt, the shepherd raises his sheep so they may be eaten, but he also eats so as to raise them, and as raising animals is a more humane action than simply feeding on them, that action of caring for the sheep is the objective of eating them, and not the other way around. In other words, the ecological question is not first and foremost a return to nature, but that of a return to culture as an action of intelligence that welcomes and prolongs this natural order.

### 2.3 Integral Ecology: The Spiritual Dimension

In becoming integral, ecology adds a vertical dimension, which unites the material and spiritual life, to the horizontal one of interdependence. As the rose finds its fulfilment in its being cultivated and praised by humankind, so man finds in the rose that which he can praise in reference to the beauty of a woman, like to the Virgin Mary, *Rosa Mystica*.

The external and the internal are connected, as Benedict XVI spoke of in his homily for the solemn inauguration of his Petrine Ministry: “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”. Pope Francis cites this in *Laudato Si*, and comments: “The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an ‘ecological conversion’, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (LS 217).

We cannot be any clearer. Ecological conversion is part of a profound internal conversion. It is neither optional nor secondary. It is essential to the Christian experience and to a virtuous existence because, just as we cannot love a poet if we do not love and promote his poetry, so we cannot love the Creator if we do not love and protect His Creation.

### 2.4 The Theological Foundation

In recalling the Mystery of the Trinity, Pope Francis goes further to speak of the intimate life that exists in God. It is this, therefore that is the fundamental principle of the expression “everything is connected”: “The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven rela-

tionships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (LS 240).

Ecology, therefore, has a theological foundation. This is because Creation is the work of the One God in Three Persons and, as such, spreads solidarity and communion throughout the world. The indelible intertwining of the most diverse lives on Earth bears the signature of the Trinity. The fact that bumblebees are the loving servants of orchids; that wolves are the friends of trees because they eat rabbits which would otherwise devour all of their young shoots; that I can tell my wife ‘I love you’ thanks to the air that is regenerated by the forests, the sun and the soil; that the pig has been used in *spaghetti alla carbonara*, which has been prepared for us, implies, in essence, that we can speak of the entire history of the Universe – this cooperation between all things, even from the butterfly fluttering its wings in Brazil that does not provoke a tornado in Texas – as having its source in the mutual involution of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

## 2.5 God’s Creation and the Eco-system of the Trinity

To avoid any serious misunderstanding, it must be clearly stated that Christianity is not a cosmic religion. Pagan religion and Stoic theology wanted to see the cosmos as the ultimate reference, the model of renewal and of circular harmony, which modern science has definitely interrupted. With the Big Bang Theory, modern science has demonstrated the arrow of time in nature, with a tendency towards irreversibility and entropy. Through palaeontology, science has demonstrated that nature, which produces biodiversity, is also capable of destroying that biodiversity; for example, the dinosaurs that became extinct without the interference of humankind.

The cosmos – with its absolute zero, its tsunamis and its Spanish flu – cannot provide us with the ultimate rule of how to distinguish



what is good. It is for this reason that Pope Francis warns us of the temptation to substitute a “misguided anthropomorphism” with a blinded “biocentrism” (LS 118). Creation is good. It reminds us of the Creator and, therefore, we can see the signs of the Eternal Good distributed throughout Creation; but it is also a wounded Creation, struck down by a disorder that finds its cause in the Angels’ sin, even well before the sin of humankind. This is why ecosystems are at times unbalanced; they can ultimately end with their own extinction. Nature – with a capital N – or Gaia, as she is personified as the beginning and end of all life, will always be an ambiguous allegory. It is not only an image of a Universal Mother who keeps us in her bosom, but it is an image that confuses us in its immanence, which lacks the transcendence and order of the Father. Her bosom is also a tomb; she is both mother and stepmother; this Earth comes to an end by burying everything it contains, until finally consuming itself. The only life cycle to be continuously fertile, the only ecosystem that is always capable of producing an infinite diversity now and always, is that of the Trinity. And since man is the image of the Triune God, he is given the capacity to watch over this diversity of life, even if it is only through the memory of the Tyrannosaurus Rex’ existence. As Pope Francis states in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (EG 215). Nature, with a capital letter N, does not mourn this extinction; she does not care, and remains indifferent to it. All these affections are part of the human equation; not only are they human, but through humankind, nature becomes aware of itself; we know that bio-diversity is necessary not only for our own utility, but for nature itself, because it reveals God’s splendour.

### **3. The Universal Mission: Creatures “in the Service of One Another”**

Even if the cosmos is not God, it is of divine origin. It is – in principle – the free overflowing of life that is communion. The struggle for life is secondary to symbiosis, and this is why, more fundamentally than competition and carnage, there is mutual help and cooperation.

Recently, biology has been inspired anew by two major discoveries: the intestinal microbiota and the underground mycorrhizae. We

already know that we have a hundredfold more bacteria in our bodies than cells. Bacteria constitute an interior garden – a sort of tiny Garden of Eden – inside our stomachs, and play a role not only in our digestive systems, but also in our immunological and neurological ones as well.

Researchers have established a correlation between imbalances in intestinal flora and bipolar or even schizophrenic disorders. This means that our mental health depends on these microbes. Similarly, we have discovered that plants are able to colonize emerging land through the aid of mycorrhizae: microscopic fungi that attach themselves to their roots. Plants furnish the fungi with the energy they take directly from the sun, and the fungi – in return – help the plants in absorbing the necessary nutrients from the soil, in adapting to the milieu and even communicating between one another.

The underground mycorrhizal network has been named, by analogy, the Wood Wide Web. It allows trees to transmit nutrition and information. For example, when a deer grazes upon the leaves of a tree, that same tree sends a signal through the fungal channel attached to its roots and, after two hours, another tree a few meters away starts to secrete a substance that is bitter and toxic to the herbivore.

Today, we consider only 1% of all micro-organisms as being pathogenic or infectious. Without a doubt, this quantitative proportion is proof that good is fundamental and bad is relative; the first definitely precedes the latter: sickness presupposes health and disorder order, of which both are only the privation.

If we take this proportion as an indicator, we can say that, above all, there is an interdependence between all living things. We can no longer look at living things individually, or as distinct species that live at the expense of others according to the liberal competition model, where aggression can only come from the outside, where freedom is an individual matter, and in which from one another we can receive only limitations or hindrances. In itself, all life becomes a community of living beings cooperating for the benefit and growth within a hierarchy of mutual service.

### 3.1 Interdependence of Creation

*Laudato Si'* recalls an important paragraph from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 340: “God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the ea-



gle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other” (LS 86).

St. Thomas Aquinas observes that creation tends to achieve the divine likeness each according to its own nature. Now, since God is good, He communicates that goodness to others. Hence, “natural things have a natural inclination not only towards their own proper good, to acquire it if not possessed, and, if possessed, to rest therein; but also to spread abroad (*diffundat*) their own good amongst others, so far as possible”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in attaining good according to its nature, the apple tree extends its good through its roots that cooperate with the fungi attached to them, through its flowers that offer food for insects, and through its fruit that are necessary for the apple pie that we enjoy by the slice.

This goodness, not being in itself a moral or altruistic decision, is inscribed into the very being of Creation that, in the process of realizing itself, is at the service of one another. Of course, for a rational being that is endowed with intelligence and will, this natural tendency flourishes to its fullest in a conscious and voluntary manner; at the same time, the egoist, the wicked or the destroyer, cannot help but serve others in spite of himself: stubborn as they are, as is depicted in the Book of Job, they give us an example not to follow; their bodies after death nourish vermin; their souls, condemned to Hell, serve to demonstrate the righteousness of God.

### 3.2 The Image of the Tree

Thus, every being is missionary, and this universal mission of all Creation that springs from the life of the Trinity is the foundation for an ecology that is truly integral. In the *Summa Theologica*, where St. Thomas of Aquinas reflects upon the “Mission of the Divine Persons”, [the Angelic Doctor] writes: “The notion of mission includes two things: the habitude of the one sent to the sender; and that of the one sent to the end whereto he is sent. Anyone being sent implies a certain kind of procession of the one sent from the sender: either according to command, as the master sends the servant; or accord-

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<sup>2</sup> THOMAS OF AQUINAS, *Summa theologica*, Ia, q. 19, a. 2.

ing to counsel, as an adviser may be said to send the king to battle; or according to origin, as a tree sends forth its flowers”.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas continues that the mission of the Son from the Father cannot reveal the other two modalities. If the Son has been sent by means of commandment or advice, there would be inequality between the Divine Persons: the Father would be superior or wiser than the Son, and therefore the Son would not be God. The mission of the Son, just like the mission of the Holy Spirit, is not to be sent by command or counsel, but through procession of origin from the sender. And, curiously enough, to express this concept of Divine mission, in which Christian mission is rooted, St. Thomas uses the image of a tree sending out its flowers and fruits.

In the Bible, a tree is always a spiritual mother. The first commandment that Adam received in the first Chapter of the Book of Genesis was: “Be fruitful” (Gen 1:28). During the Last Supper, in Chapter 15 of the Gospel according to John, the disciples receive the commandment to *go and bear fruit that will remain* (cf. Jn 15:16). Let us take the tree as an example and recognize that the apostolic impetus is already present from the first moments of life, as it is with my stepmother’s most recent anecdotes and stories.

#### 4. Missionary and Ecological Conversion

We must conclude that missionary conversion is part of our nature. It is not a concession or specialty, but a clear acceptance of who we are and what we fulfil in every aspect of our being. To be ourselves is to be sent out. To work at one’s own perfection is to receive it and communicate it to others. On this missionary step, we occupy a special place that is situated between the visible and the invisible, the spiritual and the material. Like other living things in nature, we fulfil one another through interdependence and mutual service. However, through reason and knowledge of these relations, and by carrying within us faith in their Trinitarian source, we become stewards and caretakers, preserving plants and animals that otherwise nature – even without human excesses – would be destined for extermination. In this way, the protection and preservation of the environment is not so much done in the name of Nature, but rather in the name of the Lord, who is Creator and Redeemer.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Ia, q. 43, a. 1.

A characteristic of humankind is to open oneself to the other. Adam was created as one who cultivates the *adamah*: *the Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it* (cf. Gen 2:15). Adam was given the mission to take care of other species in the likeness of God, who extends His Providence over all of Creation. In this task, the proclamation of the Gospel becomes increasingly necessary. The hope of Heaven does not permit us to make a desert of this Earth. On the contrary, this hope leads us to cultivate the Earth now, despite its inevitable destruction, because this motivation for culture goes beyond simply protecting the future for it is done in the name of God Eternal.

Missionary and ecological conversion are intertwined, yet challenge one another. To understand integral ecology is to understand that mission is the essence of life. To undertake this mission to proclaim Salvation is to continue to care for living beings even though the predictions for their future are miserable; as in the story of Noah, who was capable of building an ark for the animals despite their condemnation to destruction in the flood; or again, as in the story of Moses, a child destined to be drowned in the Nile river – by law of the Pharaoh –, whose mother brings him forth into the world and opens a path in the sea for him.

#### 4.1 The Sacramental Role of the Mass and Eucharist

The place where missionary and ecological conversion meet in an indissoluble bond is the Mass (the meaning of which is “sent”). Gathering the fruit of the Earth and work of human hands, the Mass gives man the opportunity to integrate the life of the Trinity through the transubstantiation, thus manifesting and propagating communion. A beautiful passage in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* illustrates this: “It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes so that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cos-

mos gives thanks to God. Indeed, the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: ‘Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated *on the altar of the world*’ (John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 8). The Eucharist joins Heaven and Earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God’s hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, ‘creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself’ (Benedict XVI, *Homily on the Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ*). Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation” (LS 236).

#### 4.2 Συνεργούντος (in synergy)

The Eucharistic ‘motivation’ is, at the same time, both spiritual and material. The Mass not only reminds us and enlivens our mission as shepherds of this Earth, it also demands from us that very ‘materialness’ that we bring to the altar in the offerings made worthy of that name. The Easter candle obliges us to protect bees. Liturgical vestments require cotton and spinning that is to be collected with respect for both the plants and the weavers. The hosts require the best wheat: it would be unfortunate to find pesticides and other endocrine disruptors in the Body of Christ. The chalice awaits untreated wine of the best vintage, if possible; not the sweet and sulphite-filled matter that is bottled and stamped *pro missam*, but which forgets the concreteness of our mission.

In the Mass, the most noble spiritual act depends on the most ordinary things: water and heat, wheat, a vine, and the bee. The mission of all of Creation comes back to its principle and is made part of the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, in order to nurture our own mission which is to “proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15); that is, to proclaim to each other, to give and bear fruit as only men can do, with *the Lord working with us*, as the last verse of the Gospel according to Mark states (cf. Mk 16:20): *συνεργούντος*, in synergy, according to that symbiosis that comes from Heaven and is diffused throughout the entire Earth.

# La vie comme mission\*

❖ FABRICE HADJADJ

Rien n'est plus commun que l'apostolat. C'est ma belle-maman qui m'en fournit la preuve. Elle se sent investie d'une mission, elle témoigne sans cesse ; elle ne peut s'empêcher de relater ses dernières courses au supermarché, son passage chez le coiffeur ou ses rencontres dans la rue. Par sa bouche, la baisse du prix du poireau, la maladie du neveu du coiffeur ou les travaux sur l'avenue Jean-Jaurès deviennent des espèces de révélations, des choses qu'il faut que tout le monde sache – presque pour son salut.

Je parle de ma belle-maman, mais je pourrais aussi bien parler de mes enfants. La grand-mère ne fait que prolonger un élan qui prend naissance chez le petit-fils. Pierre, 3 ans, pointe son index et s'écrie : « Les moutons ! Les moutons ! » Il y a certes des moutons dans la prairie, mais il faut qu'il s'exclame, il faut qu'il me les montre, qu'il me commande par sa voix d'approcher et de les regarder à mon tour, comme Jésus qui dit : *Venez et voyez* (Jn 1, 39).

Que dire des adolescentes qui commencent en disant : « Tu devineras jamais ce qui m'est arrivé ! » Ou des bricoleurs qui vous font faire le tour de leur maison en commentant tous les travaux qu'ils y ont accomplis. Ou des commères qui se rapportent les derniers potins de la relation amoureuse et tumultueuse de Jean-Pierre et Jennifer... Il y a bien sûr le bourdonnement incessant des informations et la masse de plus en plus nombreuse des gens qui prennent des selfies et les publient sur Instagram pour montrer qu'ils sont à Rome, par exemple, avec M<sup>gr</sup> Giovanni Dal Toso, le président des Œuvres Pontificales Missionnaires, qui n'est pas une rock star, mais qui en vaut quand même le coup.

En dehors de tout jugement de valeur, indépendamment de la qualité de l'objet ou du type de témoignage, on peut affirmer sans

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trop de témérité que l'empressement missionnaire est universellement répandu, que l'esprit apostolique, la tendance au kérygme, c'est-à-dire à la « proclamation à voix haute » de ce qui s'est passé ailleurs ou à bas bruit, est quelque chose de si communément partagé que cela appartient à l'essence de l'homme, et peut-être plus encore de la femme, si l'on se fie au préjugé selon lequel la femme a un rapport au secret tel qu'elle ne peut le garder sans le communiquer à d'autres (ce n'est pas pour rien que ce soient des femmes que la Providence a choisi comme premiers témoins de la Résurrection).

## 1. L'élan missionnaire de l'humanité

Même lorsque c'est inutile, même lorsque l'interlocuteur est déjà au courant et qu'il n'a pas besoin de l'annonce du salut, les hommes ne peuvent se retenir : *Quand les Apôtres revinrent, ils racontèrent à Jésus tout ce qu'ils avaient fait.* Ce verset de l'Évangile selon saint Luc (9, 10) est des plus intéressants, parce qu'il inverse tous les signes de la mission. Quand on parle de mission, en effet, on insiste sur le fait de partir, non de revenir. Or ici les Apôtres reviennent. On insiste en outre sur l'adresse au non-chrétien, à celui qui a besoin de conversion. Or ici les Apôtres s'adressent à Dieu, lequel, on peut le croire, n'a définitivement pas besoin de conversion. La mission est terminée. En l'occurrence, à présent, elle est parfaitement inutile, sinon ridicule, et pourtant elle ne cesse pas. Les Apôtres ne peuvent endiguer le flot des paroles jaillissant de leur cœur. Ils *racontent les merveilles du Seigneur* au Seigneur lui-même, qui n'a pourtant pas à les apprendre et pour qui elles sont tout à fait ordinaires.

Cette mission qui perdure après la mission ne manifeste pas seulement le caractère essentiel de l'élan missionnaire dans l'humanité, elle nous indique aussi que la mission n'a pas d'abord un sens utilitaire. Il n'est pas rare que l'utilitarisme parasite notre intelligence de la mission. Le Christ ne dit-il pas : *Allez, faites des disciples de toutes les nations* (Mt 28, 19) ? La mission vise à augmenter le nombre des disciples, comme le marketing vise à augmenter le chiffre d'affaires. Il s'agit avant tout de répondre à l'exigence de multiplier les chrétiens comme on multiplie les clients, et donc d'employer des moyens analogues à ceux de la publicité pour refourguer une marchandise. Au conseil paroissial, on insisterait sur l'urgence missionnaire comme on le fait en comité de direction, en mettant l'accent sur la nécessité de la croissance de l'entreprise. Mais cette manière de décréter l'état

d'urgence réduit la mission à quelque chose d'optionnel et de volontariste. Elle suppose que l'on a envie de s'intéresser au salut des autres, ce qui n'est pas gagné, tant nous avons à faire pour tirer notre épingle du jeu ; elle laisse aussi entendre que tout repose sur un sursaut de la volonté, des efforts, des sacrifices, un certain renoncement. Ce serait une question de vouloir, non d'être ; un travail de commande, non une fructification naturelle – la fructification de cet arbre à jambes et à paroles qu'est l'homme, et qui ne porte son fruit qu'en marchant vers les autres et en leur racontant le réel.

Bien sûr je ne nie pas que la mission ait des aspects d'utilité, tout comme le chant des oiseaux. L'oiseau chante aussi pour marquer son territoire et propager l'espèce. Mais il est faux de penser que cette dimension utilitaire soit première. Elle est plutôt une délimitation à l'intérieur d'une dimension plus englobante de gratuité essentielle : la gratuité du fait que l'espèce rossignol existe, alors qu'elle aurait très bien pu ne pas exister, et qu'elle introduise dans le monde sa forme et son chant propre, alors même qu'il est tard et que la nuit est tombée. Ce rossignol qu'on appelle *philomèle*, « ami de la mélodie », ne chante pas d'abord pour se conserver, il se conserve pour élever son chant sous les étoiles. Il en va de même pour la mission. Elle ne relève pas étroitement de la survie de l'Église, mais de la vie même de l'homme dans son plein déploiement, de la gratuité de sa parole qui recueille l'univers et qui l'offre à son prochain.

### 1.1 La vie est mission

La mission n'est donc pas quelque chose qui s'ajoute à notre vie, comme une option, un accessoire ou un superflu. Elle est le mouvement même de cette vie. Le pape François ne cesse de le répéter depuis le début de son pontificat, notamment à travers son exhortation apostolique *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 273) : « La mission au cœur du peuple n'est ni une partie de ma vie ni un ornement que je peux quitter, ni un appendice ni un moment de l'existence. Elle est quelque chose que je ne peux pas arracher de mon être si je ne veux pas me détruire. *Je suis une mission sur cette terre, et pour cela je suis dans ce monde.* Je dois reconnaître que je suis comme marqué au feu par cette mission afin d'éclairer, de bénir, de vivifier, de soulager, de guérir, de libérer ».

La dimension *ontologique* de la mission précède donc et fonde sa dimension *morale*, ce qui est parfaitement résumé cinq années plus



tard dans une formule de l'exhortation apostolique *Gaudete et Exsultate* (n. 27) : « Nous sommes parfois tentés de reléguer au second plan le dévouement pastoral ou l'engagement dans le monde, comme si c'étaient des distractions sur le chemin de la sanctification et de la paix intérieure. On oublie que "la vie n'a pas une mission, mais qu'elle est mission" ».

La formule vient du philosophe espagnol Xavier Zubiri. Elle n'a pas chez lui la connotation de plénitude qu'on lui accorde volontiers dès lors qu'elle est reprise par le pape. Dire que la vie est mission, c'est précisément affirmer l'impossibilité d'une plénitude solitaire. La mission suppose en effet d'être envoyé *par* un autre et *pour* un autre, on peut même ajouter *avec* d'autres, car la mission n'est jamais celle d'un individu isolé. Être une mission, par conséquent, signifie ne pas être seulement par soi, avec soi et pour soi, mais être d'abord par d'autres, avec d'autres et pour d'autres. Il n'y a pas là concurrence ni aliénation, puisque cela est constitutif de mon être : je suis d'autant plus moi que je suis par d'autres, avec d'autres et pour d'autres ; et inversement, je ne puis être par d'autres, avec d'autres et pour d'autres que si je suis aussi moi, par moi, avec moi et pour moi, dans une réelle responsabilité. Et cependant l'autre face de la vie en tant que mission, c'est l'expérience d'une insuffisance : quelque chose m'est donné à faire, qui s'impose à moi, mais pas de l'extérieur, qui s'impose d'une imposition sans contrainte, car cela s'impose et cela me pose en même temps ; ce qui veut dire que je ne me suffis pas à moi-même, puisque par moi seul je ne suis rien. Après avoir dit que la vie n'a pas de mission, mais est mission, Zubiri souligne que le vide existentiel de l'homme est radical, « non seulement il n'est rien sans les choses et sans en faire quelque chose, mais par soi seul il n'a pas la force d'être en état de le faire, d'atteindre à l'être ».<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 La mission est ouverture aux autres

On devine ici pourquoi la mission comme vie et non comme option a quelque chose de redoutable, dont on peut vouloir se protéger. Car cela veut dire en même temps que la vie est détresse. Elle appelle au secours. Secours d'un autre pour moi, secours de moi pour un autre.

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<sup>1</sup> X. ZUBIRI, *Nature, Histoire, Dieu*, traduit de l'espagnol par L. Dal Corno et P. Secretan, éd. L'Harmattan, Paris 2009, 333-334.



Par là se dénonce l'absurdité de l'individualisme aussi bien que la « démesure anthropocentrique » (LS n° 116). Par là aussi s'entendent, de manière ontologique et non pas morale, les paroles de Jésus : *Celui qui voudra sauver sa vie la perdra, mais celui qui perdra sa vie à cause de moi et de la bonne nouvelle la sauvera* (Mc 8, 35), ou encore : *quiconque s'élèvera sera abaissé, et quiconque s'abaisse sera élevé* (Mt 23, 12).

Ces paroles renvoient au paradoxe de la Croix. Mais ce paradoxe de la Croix est d'abord celui de la Mission (la Croix s'inscrit dans la Mission du Fils). Il ne contient aucune négation : il ne s'agit pas de se nier soi-même pour s'ouvrir à l'autre ; de s'abaisser comme une carpe pour toucher le cœur d'un prince qui nous récompensera en nous changeant en rideau.

Ce paradoxe se situe dans la pure affirmation de l'être comme mission : si je suis une mission sur la terre, je suis d'abord un être d'écoute et d'annonce ; je m'abaisse dans le sens où j'entends la parole de celui qui est plus grand et qui m'envoie, et je suis élevé dans le sens où je me réalise dans une œuvre plus grande que moi. Dès que je prétends garder ma vie par moi et pour moi exclusivement, je la perds, non par une condamnation à mort venue du dehors, mais parce qu'il est de l'essence de la vie de ne pas être seulement par et pour elle-même.

Si la vie est mission, l'introspection ne découvre que le néant, la simple autoréférentialité ne débouche que sur l'insignifiance. Plus je me mets à l'abri dans ma forteresse, plus je m'effondre. Plus je veux être sans autre, comme mon propre fondement, plus je perds pied et sombre dans le désespoir.

## 2. Mission et écologie intégrale

L'enjeu de notre réflexion est toutefois d'aller un peu plus loin et de se demander si la formule de Xavier Zubiri, qui s'applique au sujet humain, peut s'étendre à tous les vivants, et même à tout être. Pour le dire avec le vocabulaire de la métaphysique, la question est de savoir si « être envoyé » peut être considéré comme un transcendantal : tout être serait en mission, non seulement ma belle-maman mais aussi le ver de terre ou le brin d'herbe, chacun selon son espèce. La mission se réaliserait sur toute l'échelle des êtres, avec des degrés divers de perfection, ce qui permettrait de considérer cette échelle de manière dynamique, comme celle de Jacob, où l'un ne serait lui-même

me qu'en étant aussi par et pour l'autre, où l'on ne s'élèverait au ciel qu'en descendant vers la terre.

S'agissant du magistère de François, cela reviendrait à penser l'unité entre l'exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* et l'encyclique *Laudato Si'* : Quel est le rapport entre conversion missionnaire et conversion écologique ? Est-ce un rapport accidentel, lié aux circonstances particulières de notre époque ? Ou bien est-ce un rapport essentiel, qui les ramène à une seule et unique conversion ? Qu'est-ce au fond que l'écologie intégrale par rapport à la mission de l'Église ?

### 2.1 *Laudato Si'* : « Tout est lié »

Certains pourraient ne voir dans *Laudato Si'* que l'ajout d'un volet environnemental à la doctrine sociale de l'Église. C'est déjà beaucoup. Il faudrait faire face à une crise sans précédent, appliquer les grands principes à cette situation unique, dégager ce que l'Évangile nous enseigne pour y répondre. La conversion écologique ne serait qu'un aspect de la conversion missionnaire : la mission ayant lieu de nos jours dans une maison commune de plus en plus dévastée, elle impose circonstanciellement de se soucier de la terre et de la biodiversité.

D'autres pourraient dire qu'avec l'écologie intégrale l'Église assume enfin les apports théoriques de l'écologie scientifique et de l'écologie politique. De même que les entreprises doivent opérer un *green-washing* et coller sur leurs produits un écolabel, l'Église doit montrer que la Lumière du monde est avant tout une lumière verte, comme on a dû montrer, au temps du marxisme, qu'elle était une lumière rouge. Mais la lumière est la lumière. Elle contient toutes les couleurs du spectre. C'est elle qui révèle le vert. Elle n'a pas besoin de lui comme d'une source, mais comme d'une réalité qui la réfléchit.

Penser la révélation à partir de l'écologisme serait prendre le vert comme critère de toute clarté. La tâche est donc plutôt de penser l'écologie à partir de la révélation et par conséquent de la mission de l'Église. Ce que je voudrais tenter d'explicitier ici, c'est que l'écologie intégrale repose en vérité sur une économie de la mission, qu'elle nous donne de voir toute créature comme missionnaire, et donc que la mission, une fois encore, n'est pas une éventualité ni une spécialité, mais l'état de base de toute chose. C'est d'ailleurs ce que chante depuis toujours le psaume 18 : *Sur toute la terre paraît le message, et la nouvelle, aux limites du monde.*

## 2.2 La vraie nature de l'écologie

L'encyclique *Laudato Si'* est traversée par un célèbre refrain : « Tout est lié ». Refrain qui tourne vite à la rengaine et pourrait nous empêcher de nous souvenir des couplets de la chanson. On répète que tout est lié, mais on ne sait plus ce qui est lié et comment cela se lie plus particulièrement.

Le premier point de vue est celui de l'écologie au sens strict, à savoir l'étude des milieux où vivent les plantes et les animaux, et des interactions et interdépendances de ces vivants entre eux et avec leur milieu. Or ce point de vue est immédiatement élargi par le pape dans une vision qui entend lier non seulement les êtres naturels, mais aussi la nature et la culture : « Étant donné que tout est intimement lié, et que les problèmes actuels requièrent un regard qui tienne compte de tous les aspects de la crise mondiale, je propose à présent que nous nous arrêtions pour penser aux diverses composantes d'une *écologie intégrale*, qui a clairement des dimensions humaines et sociales » (LS n° 137).

Cela signifie que la question écologique ne doit pas être séparée de la question économique et sociale. Beaucoup de déçus des utopies politiques se recyclent dans l'écologisme, passent de la cause sociale à la cause animale (en désespoir de cause), défendent les petites bêtes pour n'avoir pas réussi à défendre les petites gens. Or il est impossible de séparer défense de la vie et défense de la vie humaine, et d'une vie humaine digne de ce nom, qui n'est pas une simple survie.

Le « tout est lié » s'oppose à la vision purement concurrentielle et libérale que l'on rencontre même chez les écologistes les plus à gauche : pour qu'il y ait plus de nature, il faudrait qu'il y ait moins d'homme. De plus en plus on entend décréter que l'« homme » est pire qu'un prédateur, car le grizzly et le tigre du moins font partie de la nature et assurent l'équilibre d'un écosystème, alors que l'« homme » saccage tout, qu'il est le destructeur de la nature, le cancer de l'évolution, et donc l'erreur de la nature, le péché de l'évolution. Il faut remarquer qu'en général ici c'est un homme qui parle et qui fait le procès d'une humanité dont lui-même s'exclut comme une exception pleine de bons sentiments. Et cet homme au-dessus des hommes en arrive à la conclusion assez contradictoire que pour défendre la vie, il faut promouvoir la stérilisation et l'avortement. Le souci des générations futures aboutit au refus volontaire de les laisser venir au monde. Le sauvetage de la biodiversité conduit à la disparition du

seul animal capable d'avoir conscience de la diversité des espèces et de prendre soin d'une espèce différente que la sienne.

Le pape s'inscrit en faux contre cette dissociation contraire à la logique d'association que prône une vraie écologie : « Puisque tout est lié, la défense de la nature n'est pas compatible avec la défense de l'avortement » (LS n° 120). Il y a peut-être une question démographique, mais on ne la résoudra pas en faisant disparaître les hommes. Faire disparaître les hommes et leur condition dramatique n'est pas une réponse : c'est seulement abolir sur la terre la capacité de se questionner, de se remettre en cause ; c'est détruire le seul vivant qui interroge la vie et qui peut la détruire, sans doute, mais parce qu'il a d'abord pour tâche de la comprendre et de l'accompagner.

Entourer de soins une espèce différente est une assez bonne définition de la culture. L'arboriculteur veille aux fruits de ses arbres, le berger veille à ses brebis. On pourrait objecter que leur vigilance est encore une prédation : fruits et brebis ne sont là que pour leur utilité, afin d'être finalement dévorés par eux. Toutefois, en parlant ainsi, on renverse l'ordre des fins (et des faims). Le berger élève sans doute des brebis pour les manger, mais il mange aussi pour élever ses brebis, et comme élever des bêtes est un acte plus humain que simplement s'en nourrir, c'est l'acte de prendre soin des brebis qui est la fin de l'acte de les manger, et non l'inverse. Autrement dit, la question écologique n'est pas d'abord celle d'un retour à la nature, mais d'un retour à la culture, en tant qu'opération intelligente qui accueille et prolonge l'ordre de la nature.

### 2.3 Écologie intégrale : la dimension spirituelle

En devenant intégrale, l'écologie ajoute à la dimension horizontale de l'interdépendance une dimension verticale, qui unit la vie matérielle à la vie spirituelle – la rose ne trouvant son accomplissement qu'en étant cultivée et chantée par l'homme, et l'homme trouvant dans la rose de quoi chanter la beauté de la femme jusqu'à la Vierge Marie, *Rosa Mystica*.

L'extériorité et l'intériorité sont donc liées : « Les déserts extérieurs se multiplient dans notre monde, parce que les déserts intérieurs sont devenus très grands ». Ainsi parle Benoît XVI dans l'homélie pour l'inauguration solennelle de son ministère pétrinien. François le cite et commente : « La crise écologique est un appel à une profonde conversion intérieure. Mais nous devons aussi recon-

naître que certains chrétiens, engagés et qui prient, ont l'habitude de se moquer des préoccupations pour l'environnement, avec l'excuse du réalisme et du pragmatisme. D'autres sont passifs, ils ne se décident pas à changer leurs habitudes et ils deviennent incohérents. Ils ont donc besoin d'une *conversion écologique*, qui implique de laisser jaillir toutes les conséquences de leur rencontre avec Jésus-Christ sur les relations avec le monde qui les entoure. Vivre la vocation de protecteurs de l'œuvre de Dieu est une part essentielle d'une existence vertueuse ; cela n'est pas quelque chose d'optionnel ni un aspect secondaire dans l'expérience chrétienne » (LS n° 217).

On ne saurait être plus clair. La conversion écologique fait partie de la conversion la plus intérieure. Elle n'est ni optionnelle ni secondaire, elle est essentielle à l'expérience chrétienne et à l'existence vertueuse, parce que, de même qu'on ne saurait aimer un poète sans aimer et promouvoir sa poésie, on ne saurait aimer le Créateur sans aimer et protéger sa créature.

## 2.4 Le fondement théologique

Mais le pape François ne s'arrête pas en si bon chemin. Il remonte à la vie intime de Dieu, jusqu'au mystère trinitaire, premier principe du « tout est lié » : « Les Personnes divines sont des relations subsistantes, et le monde, créé selon le modèle divin, est un tissu de relations. Les créatures tendent vers Dieu, et c'est le propre de tout être vivant de tendre à son tour vers autre chose, de telle manière qu'au sein de l'univers nous pouvons trouver d'innombrables relations constantes qui s'entrelacent secrètement. Cela nous invite non seulement à admirer les connexions multiples qui existent entre les créatures, mais encore à découvrir une clé de notre propre épanouissement. En effet, plus la personne humaine grandit, plus elle mûrit et plus elle se sanctifie à mesure qu'elle entre en relation, quand elle sort d'elle-même pour vivre en communion avec Dieu, avec les autres et avec toutes les créatures. Elle assume ainsi dans sa propre existence ce dynamisme trinitaire que Dieu a imprimé en elle depuis sa création. Tout est lié, et cela nous invite à mûrir une spiritualité de la solidarité globale qui jaillit du mystère de la Trinité » (LS n° 240).

L'écologie a donc un fondement théologique. C'est parce que la création est l'œuvre du Dieu unique en trois Personnes que étendent partout la solidarité et la communion. L'entrelacement indémêlable des vies les plus diverses porte la signature trinitaire. Le fait que les

bourdons sont les serviteurs d'amour des orchidées, que les loups sont les amis des arbres parce qu'ils mangent les lapins qui autrement dévoreraient toutes les jeunes pousses, le fait que pour dire à ma femme « je t'aime », je m'appuie sur l'air régénéré par les forêts, sur le soleil, le sol, le porc des spaghettis à la carbonara qu'elle nous a préparés et tout ce que cela implique, à savoir toute l'histoire de l'univers, cette coopération de toutes choses, jusqu'au battement d'ailes d'un papillon au Brésil qui n'a pas provoqué de tornade au Texas, tout cela prend sa source dans la mutuelle involution du Père, du Fils et de l'Esprit.

## 2.5 La création divine et l'écosystème de la Trinité

Il convient de rappeler, pour éviter un grave malentendu, que le christianisme n'est pas une religion cosmique. C'est la piété païenne et la théologie stoïcienne qui voient dans le cosmos l'ultime référence, le modèle du renouvellement et de l'harmonie circulaire. La science moderne a définitivement brisé ce cercle. Avec le big bang, elle a admis la flèche du temps dans la nature, avec une tendance à l'irréversibilité et à l'entropie. Avec la paléontologie, elle nous a montré que la nature qui produit la biodiversité peut aussi bien la détruire, et que les dinosaures se sont éteints sans que l'homme en soit responsable. Il n'y a d'ailleurs que les enfants des hommes qui se souviennent du *Tyrannosaurus rex* et qui jouent encore avec sa réplique en caoutchouc.

Le cosmos, avec son zéro absolu, ses tsunamis et ses gripes espagnoles, ne saurait nous fournir la règle ultime du bien. C'est pourquoi le pape François met en garde contre la tentation de substituer à un « anthropocentrisme dévié » un « biocentrisme » aveugle (LS n° 118). La création est bonne, elle renvoie au Créateur et donc déploie partout en elle des signes du Bien éternel, mais elle est aussi blessée, frappée par un désordre originel qui trouve sa cause dans le péché des anges avant même le péché de l'homme. Aussi les écosystèmes ne sont-ils pas des systèmes toujours à l'équilibre ; ils aboutissent d'eux-mêmes, au bout du compte, à l'extinction. La Nature avec une majuscule, Gaïa comme être vivant personnifié, origine et fin de toute vie, sera toujours une allégorie ambiguë. Non seulement c'est une image de la Mère universelle qui nous ramène toujours dans son sein et nous confond dans une immanence sans la transcendance et l'ordre du Père ; mais son sein est aussi une tombe, de sorte que cette mère est également une marâtre, et que cette terre finira par tout ensevelir jusqu'à se consumer elle-même.

Le seul cycle vivant à être aussi l'événement d'une fécondité sans déclin, le seul écosystème à produire toujours une diversité infinie, maintenant et toujours, c'est celui de la Trinité. Et parce que l'homme est à l'image du Dieu trinitaire, il est entraîné à sauvegarder la diversité des vivants jusqu'à garder mémoire du tyrannosaure. Comme le dit le pape François dans *Evangelii Gaudium* (n° 215) : « Dieu nous a unis si étroitement au monde qui nous entoure, que la désertification du sol est comme une maladie pour chacun et nous pouvons nous lamenter sur l'extinction d'une espèce comme si elle était une mutilation ». De cette extinction, la Nature avec une majuscule ne se lamente pas, elle ne s'en moque pas non plus, elle ne lui est même pas indifférente. Toutes ces affections sont des possibilités humaines, et elles ne sont humaines que parce la nature en nous prend conscience et que nous savons que la diversité vivante est nécessaire, non seulement pour notre utilité, mais pour elle-même, afin de rendre sensible la splendeur de Dieu.

### **3. La mission universelle : les créatures « au service les unes des autres »**

Même si le cosmos n'est pas Dieu, il est d'origine divine, il est dans son principe le libre débordement d'une vie qui est communion. Et c'est pourquoi, plus fondamentalement que la concurrence et le carnage, s'y trouvent l'entraide et la coopération. Le *struggle for life* est secondaire par rapport à la symbiose.

La biologie a été récemment renouvelée par deux découvertes majeures, celle du microbiote intestinal et celle des mycorhizes souterraines. Nous savons désormais que nous avons dans notre corps cent fois plus de bactéries que de cellules, bactéries qui constituent notre jardin intérieur, une sorte de minuscule éden lové dans notre ventre, et qui joue un rôle non seulement digestif, mais aussi immunitaire et neurologique. Des chercheurs ont établi une corrélation entre un déséquilibre de cette flore intestinale et des troubles bipolaires ou même schizophrènes – ce qui veut dire que notre santé mentale dépend des microbes. De même, nous avons découvert que les plantes n'ont pu coloniser les terres émergées qu'avec l'aide de champignons microscopiques qui s'accrochent à leurs racines – les mycorhizes. Les plantes fournissent à ces champignons l'énergie qu'ils sont incapables de tirer directement du soleil, et ceux-ci les aident en échange à puiser les éléments nutritifs du sol, à s'adapter au



milieu et même à communiquer entre elles. Le réseau mycorhizien souterrain a été nommé par analogie avec Internet le *Wood Wide Web* ; il permet aux arbres de se transmettre de la nourriture et des informations : qu'un chevreuil broute les feuilles d'un arbre, celui-ci émet un signal par le canal des champignons attachés à ses racines et, après deux heures, à plusieurs mètres, un autre arbre se met à sécréter une substance amère et toxique pour l'herbivore.

On évalue aujourd'hui à seulement 1 % les micro-organismes pathogènes et infectieux. Sans doute n'est-ce pas cette proportion quantitative qui prouve que le bien est fondamental et le mal relatif, c'est une antériorité dans l'être même : la maladie suppose la santé, le désordre suppose l'ordre, dont ils ne sont que la privation. Ce dont cette proportion est l'indice, c'est avant tout l'interdépendance des vivants. Nous ne pouvons plus nous les représenter comme des individus ou des espèces qui vivraient seulement les uns aux dépens des autres, selon le modèle de la compétition libérale, où l'agression ne peut venir que de l'extérieur, où la liberté est individuelle et ne reçoit de l'autre que des limitations ou des entraves. Tout vivant assume en lui-même une communauté de vivants pour ne fructifier que dans une hiérarchie de services mutuels.

### 3.1 Interdépendance de la Création

*Laudato Si'* reprend en ce sens un paragraphe important du *Catéchisme de l'Église catholique* (§ 340) : « L'interdépendance des créatures est voulue par Dieu. Le soleil et la lune, le cèdre et la petite fleur, l'aigle et le moineau : le spectacle de leurs innombrables diversités et inégalités signifie qu'aucune des créatures ne se suffit à elle-même. Elles n'existent qu'en dépendance les unes des autres, pour se compléter mutuellement, au service les unes des autres » (LS 86).

Saint Thomas d'Aquin observe que les créatures tendent toutes à réaliser, chacune selon sa nature, la ressemblance divine. Or Dieu est bonté, il communique son bien à d'autres. C'est pourquoi « une réalité naturelle possède une inclination naturelle, non seulement à l'égard de son bien propre pour l'acquérir lorsqu'elle ne le possède pas ou pour se reposer en lui lorsqu'elle le possède, mais en outre pour répandre (*diffundat*) son bien propre en d'autres, autant qu'il est possible ».<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Sum. theol.*, Ia, q. 19, a. 2, resp.



Ainsi le pommier, en atteignant son propre bien, qui est de produire des pommes, répand aussi son bien, par ses racines qui coopèrent avec les champignons, par les fleurs qu'il offre au butinage des insectes, par les pommes qui servent à la tarte de la maîtresse de maison.

Cette bonté ne relève pas d'une morale, d'une décision altruiste, elle est inscrite dans l'être même des créatures, qui en se réalisant elles-mêmes, sont aux services des autres. Bien sûr, pour un animal rationnel, doué d'intelligence et de volonté, cette tendance naturelle ne peut pleinement s'épanouir que de manière consciente et volontaire, mais même l'égoïste, même le méchant, même le destructeur ne peuvent s'empêcher de servir d'autres malgré eux : ils exercent la patience des saints, comme le montre le livre de Job, et fournissent l'exemple à ne pas suivre ; leur corps finit par nourrir la vermine ; et leur âme, en se condamnant à l'enfer, sert à manifester la justice de Dieu.

### 3.2 L'image de l'arbre

Ainsi tout être est missionnaire, et cette mission universelle des créatures, à partir de la Trinité, fonde l'écologie intégrale en tant que vraiment intégrale. Dans le passage de la *Somme théologique* où il réfléchit aux « missions des Personnes divines », Thomas d'Aquin écrit : « Le concept de mission implique deux choses : l'une est un rapport de l'envoyé à celui qui l'envoie ; l'autre est un rapport de l'envoyé à celui vers qui il est envoyé. Que quelqu'un soit envoyé manifeste une certaine procession de l'envoyé par l'envoyeur ; soit selon le commandement, comme un maître envoie un serviteur ; soit selon le conseil, comme on dit qu'un conseiller envoie un roi à la guerre ; soit selon l'origine, comme on dit que la fleur est émise par l'arbre ».<sup>3</sup>

Or, précise Thomas, l'envoi du Fils par le Père ne peut relever des deux premières modalités. Si le Fils était envoyé par mode de commandement ou de conseil, il y aurait inégalité entre les Personnes divines, un Père supérieur ou plus sage que le Fils, et donc un Fils qui ne serait pas Dieu. La modalité de la mission du Fils, comme de celle de l'Esprit Saint, ne peut relever du commandement ni du conseil, mais seulement de l'origine. Et, très curieusement, pour exprimer cette modalité des missions divines dans lesquelles s'enracine la mis-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Ia, q. 43, a. 1, resp.

sion du chrétien, Thomas d'Aquin prend l'image de l'arbre – l'arbre qui envoie ses fleurs et ses fruits.

Dans la Bible, l'arbre est toujours un maître spirituel. Le premier commandement que reçoit Adam, au premier chapitre de la Genèse, c'est *Fructifiez* (Gn 1, 28) ; au chapitre 15 de l'Évangile selon saint Jean, le commandement que reçoivent les disciples lors de la dernière Cène, c'est *que vous portiez du fruit et que votre fruit demeure* (Jn 15, 16). Il s'agit donc de prendre l'arbre pour exemple, ou plutôt de reconnaître que dès les premiers frémissements de la vie, comme dans les dernières anecdotes de ma belle-maman, l'élan apostolique se rencontre déjà.

#### 4. Conversion missionnaire et écologique

Il faut en conclure que notre conversion missionnaire est tout ce qu'il y a de plus naturel. Elle n'est pas une concession ni une spécialité, mais une assomption lucide de ce que nous sommes, et qui se réalise à chaque degré de l'être. Être soi-même, c'est être envoyé. Réaliser sa perfection propre, c'est la recevoir et la communiquer à d'autres.

Dans cette échelle missionnaire, nous occupons une place spéciale, aux confins du visible et de l'invisible, du spirituel et du charnel. Comme les autres vivants naturels nous nous accomplissons dans l'interdépendance et le service mutuel, mais, connaissant par la raison ces relations, et portant même en nous par la foi leur source trinitaire, nous en devenons les intendants et les responsables, préservant des plantes ou des animaux que le climat, même sans notre mesure, pourrait vouer à l'extermination – préservation qui s'opère dès lors non pas au nom de la Nature, mais au nom du Seigneur, Créateur et Rédempteur. Le propre de l'homme est de s'ouvrir à ce qui lui est étranger. L'Adam a été créé comme celui qui cultive l'*Adamah* : *Le Seigneur prit l'homme et le conduisit au jardin d'Éden pour qu'il le cultive et qu'il le garde* (Gn 2, 15). Sa spécificité est de se préoccuper d'autres espèces que la sienne, à l'image du dieu qui est la providence de ses créatures.

Dans cette tâche, l'annonce de l'Évangile devient de plus en plus nécessaire. L'espérance du Ciel ne nous fait pas désertier la terre ; bien au contraire, elle nous donne de cultiver la terre alors même que sa destruction serait inévitable, parce que ce qui motive cette culture n'est pas d'abord la sanction du futur, mais la caution de l'Éternel. La conversion missionnaire et la conversion écologique s'in-

terpénètrent et s'interpellent l'une l'autre. Comprendre l'écologie intégrale, c'est comprendre que la mission est l'essence de la vie. Entrer dans la mission d'annoncer le Salut, c'est continuer de prendre soin des vivants quand bien même les pronostics ne seraient pas bons, c'est être capable, alors même que les animaux sont voués au Déluge, de leur bâtir une arche, comme dans l'histoire de Noé ; ou encore, alors même qu'un enfant est destiné à être noyé dans le Nil, de le laisser naître et ouvrir un chemin dans la mer, comme dans l'histoire de Moïse.

#### 4.1 Le rôle sacramentel de la Messe et de l'Eucharistie

Le lieu où la conversion missionnaire et la conversion écologique se nouent d'un lien indissoluble, c'est la messe (dont le nom signifie « envoi »). Elle recueille le fruit de la terre et du travail des hommes, lui donne d'intégrer par la transsubstantiation la vie trinitaire, manifeste et propage la communion. C'est un des très beaux passages de l'encyclique *Laudato Si'* : « Dans l'Eucharistie, la Création trouve sa plus grande élévation. La grâce, qui tend à se manifester d'une manière sensible, atteint une expression extraordinaire quand Dieu fait homme, se fait nourriture pour sa créature. Le Seigneur, au sommet du mystère de l'Incarnation, a voulu rejoindre notre intimité à travers un fragment de matière. Non d'en haut, mais de l'intérieur, pour que nous puissions le rencontrer dans notre propre monde. Dans l'Eucharistie la plénitude est déjà réalisée ; c'est le centre vital de l'univers, le foyer débordant d'amour et de vie inépuisables. Uni au Fils incarné, présent dans l'Eucharistie, tout le cosmos rend grâce à Dieu. En effet, l'Eucharistie est en soi un acte d'amour cosmique : “ Oui, cosmique ! Car, même lorsqu'elle est célébrée sur le petit autel d'une église de campagne, l'Eucharistie est toujours célébrée, en un sens, *sur l'autel du monde* ” (Jean-Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n° 8). L'Eucharistie unit le ciel et la terre, elle embrasse et pénètre toute la création. Le monde qui est issu des mains de Dieu, retourne à lui dans une joyeuse et pleine adoration : dans le Pain eucharistique, “ la création est tendue vers la divinisation, vers les saintes noces, vers l'unification avec le Créateur lui-même ” (Benoît XVI, *Homélie à l'occasion de la messe du Corpus Domini*). C'est pourquoi, l'Eucharistie est aussi source de lumière et de motivation pour nos préoccupations concernant l'environnement, et elle nous invite à être gardiens de toute la Création » (LS n° 236).

#### 4.2 Συνεργούντος (en synergie)

La « motivation » eucharistique est à la fois spirituelle et matérielle. La messe ne fait pas que rappeler et raviver notre mission de bergers des créatures terrestres, elle exige dans sa matérialité même que nous apportions à l'autel des offrandes dignes de ce nom. Le cierge pascal nous oblige à nous soucier des abeilles. Les vêtements liturgiques réclament un coton et un tissage qui soignent la plante et respectent les tisserands. L'hostie veut des champs du meilleur blé, car il serait malheureux de retrouver des pesticides et autres perturbateurs endocriniens dans le Corps du Christ. Le calice attend un vin non trafiqué, si possible du meilleur cru, et non cette piquette édulcorée et bourrée de sulfite, qui porte peut-être l'estampille *pro missam*, mais qui fait tout pour oublier le concret de notre mission.

Dans la messe, l'acte spirituel le plus haut dépend des matières les plus ordinaires, l'eau et la flamme, l'épi, la vigne et l'abeille... Les missions de toutes les créatures retournent ici à leur principe et sont rendues participantes des missions du Fils et de l'Esprit Saint, afin de nourrir notre propre mission, qui est de *proclamer la Bonne Nouvelle à toute la Création* (Mc 16, 15), c'est-à-dire d'être nous-mêmes, de donner du fruit et de faire donner du fruit comme seuls les hommes peuvent le faire, le Seigneur *travaillant avec nous*, comme dit le dernier verset de saint Marc (16, 20), *συνεργούντος*, « en synergie », selon cette symbiose qui vient du ciel et se diffuse partout sur la terre.

# The Church and the Mission *Ad Gentes* in the World

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The mission *ad gentes* refers to a series of activities that have been developed and supported by the Pontifical Mission Societies. These activities are a magnificent demonstration of the universality and catholicity of the Church, to which the mission *ad gentes* and the People of God, through the Pontifical Mission Societies, have so greatly contributed. The importance of these activities is confirmed by this Symposium.

The mission *ad gentes* constitutes a great treasure that needs to be preserved and safeguarded with constant attention because much of the future and vitality of the Church depends upon it. However, these activities require reflection, examination, and continual renewal precisely due to the importance of the mission *ad gentes* and because, by nature, it is subject to continual change. This constant flux demands that its most profound identity be understood with clarity so that – in its multiform adaptations –, its identity is neither altered nor diffused. One could speak of, so to say, the mission *ad gentes* as *the same melody interpreted in diverse manners* over time. Theological assessment and discernment of the signs of the times are needed for both the mission *ad gentes* as well as the Pontifical Mission Societies to continue to offer their essential services in a global Church experienced synodally as a communion of churches.

## 1. The Situation: Historical Challenges

At a theological, pastoral and organizational level, the mission *ad gentes* refers to a historic and contingent form and manner that the universal mission of the Church adopts and adapts at specific moments, and in determined circumstances. An example of this is reflected in the change in nomenclature of the principle organism: the

entity denominated initially as *The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* changed its name to *Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples* with the publication of Pope Paul VI's *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, issued on August 15, 1967. This evolution implies a change of perspective, which both the intra-ecclesial and extra-ecclesial circumstances required. The universal mission cannot always be carried out in the same way, but it should always have the peoples of the world constantly in mind.

The term mission *ad gentes* has developed throughout the modern era. This has been a consequence of the broadening of geographic horizons by navigation companies, and by the colonization endeavors that sprang forth from traditionally Christian countries. Previously, another term was used: 'the propagation of the faith'. In this new historical period, mission *ad gentes* began to assume specific connotations of its own: 'gentes' referred to groups of people who had not received the Gospel message, who lived far away, who had diverse and exotic cultures, and/or those who practiced 'strange' religions for example.

The response to this new historical challenge produced a *concrete approach* for carrying out the universal mission of the Church. This occurred, as could not have happened otherwise, within the theological framework and the political structure of the era: that is, in connection with the Christian countries who took advantage of the occasion to conquer new territories, with a sense of cultural and religious superiority. In addition, they arrived with a negative consideration of non-Christian religions, and considered salvation of their followers, with a unidirectional proposal of mission, and with a clerical ecclesiological conception as their main objective. Within this context – that to us may seem somewhat ambiguous and unidirectional –, the greatest Christian fervor for the conversion and evangelization of the pagan world unfolded. On the one hand, missionaries gave their lives in order to offer these people what they considered most valuable, namely baptism in the name of Christ in the hope of salvation. On the other hand, Christians showed great generosity when institutional government support was lessened, by accompanying the work of the missionaries with their admiration, their prayer and their economic support (this became the premise and inspiration for the Pontifical Mission Societies). Thanks to this, one could say that the mission *ad gentes* was an enormous success. The Gospel was announced to peoples living in the four corners of

the world, ecclesial communities sprang up on all continents, the Church made herself more visibly universal and catholic, etc. This process was carried out within the model that can be summarized as the 'foreign missions'.

Over time, these historical circumstances changed, as did theological reflection. Due to this, a new paradigm began to take shape in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A century later, we are able to appreciate the prophetic and anticipatory character of Benedict XV's *Maximum Illud*. Benedict was able to intuit the cruxes of the historical circumstances and indicate pathways forward. From this perspective, the analogy we can draw between those circumstances and the present ones, together with the convocation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month in light of *Evangelii Gaudium* 15, becomes clear.

The extent of the tension that built up around the changes which led to a new paradigm, was displayed at the Second Vatican Council. It suffices to mention examples such as: the concerns and interests of a rather juridical and administrative character of the missionary bishops at the beginning of the Council; the difficult itinerary of the redaction of the *Ad Gentes* Decree; the reproaches against the centrally organized system of missionary activity; the discussions that theologians of differing positions maintained up until the last moment. The difficulties implied in this moment of transition were enormous, but the Council's contribution was no less significant: it articulated the mission *ad gentes*, and missions together with the universal mission of the Church; and, it resituated the missions within the mission of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council offered a theological framework within which to understand and carry out missionary activity, and establish the foundations for the model that the times required. This effort was displayed in the *Ad Gentes* Decree, although its premises and implications can be understood in all their richness only in light of all four Conciliar documents: *Dei Verbum*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and – in a more direct way – *Lumen Gentium*. The missionary Decree drew from these sources, and made it possible to face the present while at the same time advance toward the future of the universal mission.

Of the paradigm established in *Ad Gentes*, it would be helpful to underline four fundamental points: a) it roots missionary activity not only within the mission of the Church (relocating missions within mission), but also within the dynamism of Trinitarian life



and economy (chapter I); b) it states that missionary activity should be continually fine-tuned according to the socio-historical circumstances, which require discernment and continual adaptation (cf. AG 6); c) it offers a phenomenology of missionary work in its different phases (chapter II), which is meant to serve as a model for all pastoral action within the Church; d) it speaks of local churches as the principal proponents of the mission, making it apparent that they are born from the mission of the Church and that, from their very conception, they should live for the mission (chapter III).

Seen in historical perspective, one can observe how *Ad Gentes* draws life from the overall reflections of the Second Vatican Council – it was, in fact, approved at the end of the Council –, and at the same time serves, today more than ever, as encouragement and criteria for the post-conciliar Church in her present historical moment as it walks toward a new paradigm.

With this background in mind, as well as our present challenges, we will show, in the first place, the four aspects that we should consider in order to adequately understand the Church's mission *ad gentes* at the service of the world. First, we will look at the Mystery of the Triune God as origin, content and scope of the universal mission (section 2). Second, we will consider the Church's role as a servant of a project of love for the sake of the world and humanity (section 3). Third, we will speak of the constitution of the Church of Christ as communion of churches in the midst of diverse peoples and cultures (section 4). Fourth, we will touch on the participation and the corresponsability of all baptized people according to their charism and state of life (section 5). Then, based on these premises and strengths, we can look at the present aspects of the universal mission of the Church, as well as criteria for missionary formation and vivification, according to the charism of the Pontifical Mission Societies (section 6).

## 2. The Mystery of the Missionary God

One of the most renewing concepts within missiology, which began to make headway in the last half of the past century, has been *missio Dei*. In a spontaneous and natural way, it has come to form part of the stock of the different Christian traditions due to its radicality and fecundity (although it has also been object of unilateral interpretations). It has had positive repercussions in the field of missiol-

ogy as well as ecclesiology, based on a fundamental premise: in strict terms, one should not speak of ‘the mission of the Church’ or say that the Church ‘has’ a mission; rather, the mission is *from God*, in relation to which the Church acts as servant, as the sent one, as a sacrament. It becomes obvious then that *the mission* – because it is rooted in God, that is, in the Trinitarian economy –, *precedes the Church*. The mission calls the Church into existence and makes her intrinsically and in essence missionary. Therefore, it would be as redundant to speak of a ‘missionary Church’ as it would be to speak of ‘white milk’; in both cases, the adjective is not necessary if the noun conserves its authentic meaning.

This perspective becomes more palpable in light of a double specification: a) the missionary God is a *Triune God*: the Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit; b) this sending forth flows from the most intimate core of divine life and, therefore, seeks to offer happiness and fulfillment to all creatures, in all dimensions of their existence.

## 2.1 The Philanthropy of the Triune God

Taking up biblical and patristic language, the Second Vatican Council situates the mission *ad gentes* and the mission of the Church *in the heart of the Mystery of God*, that is, within the economic Trinity. This is the starting point and the content of the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium* as well as the first chapter of *Ad Gentes*. In this context, the ‘missions’ cannot be considered primarily from a geographical, juridical, or administrative perspective, but rather from the standpoint of offering a participation in the very life of God. This is the meaning of the word *Mystery* in the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*. In order to properly understand this word, it is helpful to remember the exact significance that was presented at the Council. ‘Mystery’ does not simply signify something that exceeds our rational capacity, but rather it refers to *the salvific plan that has been revealed* and is carried out over time. Contrary to the habitual understanding of the word, the aspects of manifestation, of effective experience, of the generation of history, of presence in the world, and among peoples, are made clear.

God’s initiative is made clear, above all, by both revelation and the conciliar texts. Out of pure gratuity and benevolence he goes out to meet the human person – humanity – as a friend, in order to

make himself present through actions and words (cf. DV 2). This dynamism springs forth, as LG 1 states (prolonging the patristic tradition), from the fontal love of the Father, origin of every gift. The philanthropy of God – his tenderness toward the human person, his preoccupation for his fulfillment and happiness – is a constitutive dimension of this Mystery.

This initiative born from God's love is manifest and carried out in the sending forth of the Son and Holy Spirit, and in their action as God's "hands". Each one of them, according to their own personal characteristics, brings about the unfolding of the project of life and communion that is offered to humanity and to all of reality.

## 2.2 It is Universal because of its Scope and Intensity

At its root and origin, the universal horizon of God's project and the missions of the Son and Spirit are made clear: happiness for all, based on the experience of filiation and fraternity. This is "God's dream", which is expressed in the symbols of *paradise* and *the Sabbath* which are present in the first chapters of Genesis. In *paradise*, a situation of ideal harmony (Adam – man – is in harmony with nature, with his fellow human beings, with God, with himself) is depicted in lively images; the *Sabbath* summarizes the goal of the creative act, which is that man, as a family, can permanently celebrate the festivity of creation within God's abode. Life, the primordial gift from God, is something good and beautiful, that should be protected and developed in all of its dimensions.

This "dream", however, was altered by the action of the "serpent" who seduced and contaminated human freedom. Adam finds that his relationship with nature, with God, with others and with himself, is ruptured; so the human family finds its unity fractured. The terrible history of violence, murder, resentment, weapons, injustice, confrontation between different peoples and races thus began. Evil and sin act as a virus that corrupts the work of God and hinders the fulfillment of his project. Human history becomes dramatic: pilgrimage and exile, with great doses of misfortune before the goal is achieved, fulfillment, consummation, when weeping and tears disappear.

This dramatic situation will shape the Son's and Holy Spirit's missions: they need to carry out the work of rescue, redemption, restoration, reconciliation, overcoming conflicts and opposition.

Difficulty and conflict will continually accompany the action of those the Father has sent. This mission is completely universal in extension – it is for everything and everyone –, and in intensity – it should include all dimensions of the human person. Thus, it will need to adopt very diverse manifestations and forms.

### 2.3 The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Son and Holy Spirit

Jesus, the Son, showed profound awareness of having been sent by the Father, to the point of radically identifying himself with his mission from the moment he came into this world. The proclamation of the Kingdom, which was at the center of mission, resounded like a jubilee. It aimed at recovering the innocence and goodness of creation and attaining the happiness that was desired from the very morning of creation. Christ assumed an itinerant life at the service of the Kingdom, one that always took him to other places to make the Kingdom/reign of God present. This God had a personal face, and it was made manifest and invoked as *abba*. This name/invocation made apparent, on one hand, the nearness and the limitless mercy of the Father, and on the other, the brotherhood of all human beings. Again, the experience of filiation and fraternity are the essential content of salvation offered to all.

This universal vocation to the Kingdom of God drove Jesus to overcome all the barriers and divisions that man's freedom generated. In his itinerant activity (permanently in a state of 'going out') He always sought the margins of society, where the poor, the wounded, the vulnerable, the excluded, the sinners – those who consciously did what was wrong and those who were considered sinners for not fulfilling the ritual purification laws –, were to be found. These are the beloved of God, and from them the reunification of brothers at war and the re-creation of the world will come.

Jesus' behavior provoked rejection and opposition, which led to his death on the Cross. Identifying himself with the mission meant giving his own life. He faced persecution and death with a love unto the extreme. It was the moment in which he consummated his mission and his filiation. That which he received freely he gave freely, that is to say, his pre-existence – his eternal generation by the Father – was the foundation and content of his pro-existence –, and the offering of his life as service for the good of all, with a universal openness that embraced even enemies and persecutors. His death

led to the Resurrection, of which the Father was protagonist in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Risen One goes out from the glory of his Father to meet his disciples as a guarantee of an unbreakable covenant and victory over death.

The Spirit, the power and joy of God's communication, accompanied and sustained Jesus' mission. On the one hand, he preceded the sending of Jesus and made it possible: he overshadowed Mary to make possible the Incarnation; he anointed Jesus in the moment of his baptism, when he was about to begin his public activity; he acted as a force that made it possible for him to heal; he was the power that made the Resurrection possible; and, he is the one who universalizes and makes present the salvific presence of the Risen One. On the other hand, he is the gift that Jesus bestowed upon his apostles as Advocate and Consoler, as encouragement and courage, as unveiler of the truth, as impulse that opened ever new ways and impelled the apostles to cross to new shores and advance continually to even further ones. He remains the fount of joy that convokes people for the celebration and radiates as invitation to those who are not within.

#### 2.4 Easter/Pentecost at the Center of the Mystery and of the Mission

The Mystery of the Triune God reaches its culmination in the Paschal event, of which the events of Pentecost form part. This is the consummation of the missions of the Son and the Spirit. The originating love of the Father has shown its ability to overcome all opposition and rejection, to vanquish hatred and violence. It shines forth in all its splendor as the power to pronounce a word of forgiveness and of love that is above any desire for vengeance. The Father brings about the Resurrection of the Son in the Spirit, thus establishing an unbreakable covenant between God and the human family.

Thus, the Paschal mystery is always the stimulus and content of the *kerygma*; it is the nucleus of the Christian message, the inspiration for giving witness, the dynamism of evangelization, the source of joy that unfolds as communication and receptiveness. The Paschal mystery is the essential missionary event: all christophanies in some way involve the sending of apostles. From the Risen One's mouth come the words "to all and in all places, until the ends of the earth" (cf. Ac 1:8). The Paschal event is the source of the Christian mission and the fragrance that all missionaries should emanate. Pen-

tecost, as we shall see, opens this up to all of humanity. As such, these events will always be the criteria for the purification and dynamism of the Church's missionary activity.

### 3. The Mission of the Church: Within the Dynamism of the Kingdom and the Paschal Mystery

The Church arose as a group of people who participate in the life of the Trinity, because they have been captivated by the possibilities the Kingdom offers and because they have been forgiven and renewed by the power of the Resurrection. Ecclesiology is, at heart, anthropology: the Church is a community of men transformed and transfigured. The Church is, above all, a personal reality – the divine Persons and the human persons in communion –, *who take on as their own the mission consummated by the Son and the Spirit at Easter/Pentecost.*

History remains open with its brokenness and wounds. The dramatic setting for the mission has not ceased to exist. It is what calls the Church into existence, because Easter/Pentecost is *a gift for the world that should reach all peoples.* The action of the Trinity calls for *a people who continues announcing, witnessing and celebrating* the newness introduced into the world, since this is the greatest gift that can be given to a humanity that is constantly seeking reasons for hope and reasons to live.

The whole history of salvation is shot through by the prolongation of this logic: the plan of God can only be carried out with the participation of human mediators. The vocation – of one or of some – should be seen as a service to all. *Mediators*, on an individual as well as a collective level, *are missionaries*, because their action serves the mission of God for the good of all humanity. Every call from God helps us to contemplate reality with the eyes of God, with a universal breadth in extension and in intensity.

Abraham is an archetypal example at the individual level. Against the backdrop of Babel (which reflects the division and confusion between the different peoples) he is called, and at the same time sent forth, to transmit God's blessing upon a multitude of nations; the mission is the motive and meaning of Abraham's vocation. The same can be said of Israel on a collective level: the covenant demands of the people that they act as witnesses to the wondrous works of God before all nations.



The Paschal/Pentecostal mission of the Church should be carried out amidst the confusion and conflicts that exist among the nations, as it was symbolically expressed in the story of Babel. The event of Pentecost, traditionally considered the anti-Babel, is the public manifestation of the Church, her presence in a divided world. Impelled by the Spirit, she emerges from the upper room – from internal and communal life –, to take on the complexities of the mission. Amongst diverse peoples, who live without communication because each is enclosed in its own language, the message of the Church achieves the miracle of re-encounter, of reconciliation into one common home. The mission is an encounter among peoples, since the preaching of the Gospel introduces a new dynamism of reconciliation and unity. This logic of the Spirit continues to manifest itself in ‘successive Pentecosts’ that make up the narrative of the *Acts of the Apostles*. The second chapter tells about the Jews of the Diaspora. Afterwards the apostles go out to the Samaritans, the converts to Judaism, the gentiles, the Macedonians, etc. The vocation/mission of the Church among the nations is to be the “universal sacrament of salvation” (AG 1), as a “sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1). This sacramentality contains a twofold dimension.

From the personal point of view, missionary activity and the preaching of the Gospel seek to restore humanity according to the image in which God created man from the beginning of time (cf. LG 2). From this perspective, *Ad Gentes* affirms that missionary activity “is closely bound up even with human nature itself and its aspirations”, since in revealing Christ to others, it reveals to them their authentic truth and integral vocation, a “redeemed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity and a peaceful spirit” (AG 8). The implications and concrete development of this reality within the complexities of the modern world is expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* (from the perspective of GS 22).

From the collective point of view, the diversity of nations causes the Church to *go out to others* to be born among them. It is no wonder that the Fathers saw already in Pentecost the Church that spoke all languages. Thus, she contributes to the unification of the world, while at the same time she herself is being configured: from “the Church of the Jews” she will become the “Gentile Church”, a “Church of pagans” (cf. Eph 2:11-20). This perspective affirms the



intimate connection between Church and mission. As mission is lived, the Church herself is being built up. It is the joyful experience expressed in the letter to the Ephesians: they, who were among the gentiles, have found a home within the Church; those who were far off have entered the home of the Father, because the hatred that separated them was destroyed by Christ, eliminating thus the obstacle to reconciliation. The missionary action of the Church, as meeting place among nations, recreates and reconfigures the world and establishes a multicultural Church that is for the world, and overcame the exclusivity that the nations faced among Jews and Gentiles or Greeks and Barbarians. As a People of peoples, the Church enriches her own catholicity by making hers the characteristics of diverse nations.

In this journey, the Church cannot cease to celebrate the liturgy – especially the Eucharist – as memorial and actualization of the Mystery that finds its fullness in the Paschal event (as SC 5 affirms). It is no wonder that one can say that the Eucharist makes the Church, since it makes it Church and not simply a human association. The liturgy cannot be separated from the life of the missionary Church. From within the liturgy, and in light of the liturgy, the Church lives out her service to humanity in the midst of the world – the “liturgy after the liturgy”, as an expressive group within the Orthodox Church likes to state. Let us recall that the purpose of the Eucharistic celebration is to constitute the congregated assembly as the Body of Christ. Thanks to the participation in the same bread, the body of each believer is temple of the Spirit; thus, it makes present the Church in all situations and circumstances of society and the world (cf. 1Cor 6:15-19). Thanks to the Eucharist, the Church is always a Church with open doors, present in all fringes of society. A Eucharistic Church is always in missionary mode.

#### **4. The Church as Communion of Churches: The Local Church Is Born from Mission and Lives for the Sake of Mission**

The Church that is born from the economic Trinity cannot be understood as an abstract or generic reality nor can it be reduced to its concrete expression at the local or regional level. It is the “body of the churches”, since “in and from [them] comes into being the one and only Catholic Church” (LG 23). The predominance of a centralist and unitary ecclesiology that impregnated the western Church in the second millennium, favored the use of the word

‘Church’, in a way that portrayed the dioceses more as administrative districts and the bishops as delegates or representatives of the Pope. Yet, tradition opens up another perspective, as St. Hilary of Poitiers, who was referred to in LG 23, pointed out: “Although there is one Church in the world, each and every city obtains its own church, and at the same time it is one in each of them [...] since one exists in many”.<sup>1</sup> Each city has received its church *because a missionary came to that city from elsewhere*, from another church. This ecclesiology was recovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in great part due to the missionary experience of the modern era. It helped us understand in all its depth the fact that the local church is born from *mission and lives for the sake of mission*.

*Maximum Illud* had already spoken of the “new churches” (MI 14). It insisted that in order for them to grow, it was necessary to form local clergy. This aimed precisely at the consolidation of the dioceses, which had thus far been considered ‘missions’, that is to say, as ecclesial realities of lesser ecclesiological and ecclesial importance than the dioceses from the older Christian order. The missions had opened the way for the process of ecclesiogenesis, that is to say, the coming into existence of Christian communities that were to be constituted as churches in the stricter sense. The coming into existence and multiplication of local churches is nothing more than the fulfillment of what began at Pentecost. One could even go so far as to say that the history of the Church consists in the prolongation of the dynamism of Pentecost: to make herself present among all peoples.

When we read the New Testament, we see that the churches are spoken of frequently and as something normal. The letters of St. Paul are directed to the churches as such. This fact has been taken into consideration and studied in greater depth in recent ecclesiology. Nonetheless, the dynamism that made this reality possible – missionary activity, the initiative of itinerant missionaries, the mission *ad gentes* – is not accentuated with the same emphasis and intensity. The *Acts of the Apostles* shows us this dynamism which brings about new churches: from the moment of Pentecost in Jerusalem we see the unfolding of the acts and initiatives of numerous Christians, who leave their homelands, announce the Gospel in foreign lands,

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<sup>1</sup> H. DE POITIERS, *Tractatus super Psalmos*, 14,3: PL 9, 206.

gather groups of people who are attracted by the good news, convert and baptize, configure 'assemblies' in which the testimony received by the apostles continues to be proclaimed and the celebration of the Lord, dead and risen, is celebrated. This is the missionary work that is presented in the second chapter of *Ad Gentes*, thanks to which each city receives its church. It is the dynamism that we need to recover as the paradigm for all pastoral action in the Church.

Every local church owes its existence to a missionary, to someone who came from elsewhere and gave rise to something new in a place (whether geographical, cultural, or anthropological) where Christianity did not exist. Mission precedes the concrete church that is born in a specific place. It is the 'magical moment' that every church should commemorate as reenactment of its birth and very identity.

The very name with which churches are designated expresses this missionary tension. *Ekklesia* (a word derived from the sphere of Greek life and politics) refers to an assembly, a gathering of people. In the case of Christians, the purpose and end are not, so to speak, political, but rather the salvific experience that proceeds from the risen Lord, living and present. The name *ekklesia* designates a *permanent state of mission*:

- a) the assembly has gathered because there has been a previous convocation, a first announcement, the proclamation of the *kerygma* as offering and hospitality. That is to say, at the origin of every church is a missionary witness;
- b) this announcement moves others, leading to a conversion in the life of the individuals and a discernment in the heart of the community to which they belong, since Christians make a uniqueness in the public and private realm present. This discernment makes the Christian Church present as a visible mass among other active groups in society;
- c) Christians gathered in assembly later separate, as ones sent to witness to the newness of life in their mostly pagan social milieu; the assembly (*ekklesia*) cannot be understood outside of this dynamism of the missionary sending forth;
- d) in the political realm of imperial Rome, the plurality of churches was seen as a provocation and a challenge to the political makeup: they confessed one Lord under whom all other divinized lords were no more than idols, thus introducing a type of behavior and alternative socialization that was worrisome to many observers.

The spontaneity with which the different churches, each as a collective 'we', felt that they were the protagonists of this process is surprising and admirable. This perspective allows us to understand the New Testament as a collection of missionary texts. The letters of St. Paul, to give a prime example, are 'letters from the mission and for the mission'. Thanks to them the churches felt as though they were part of the Apostle's mission. This involvement was lived out in different ways: by means of prayer, through the sending of collaborators, at times by means of economic support, for example, and most especially by giving witness to the Gospel newness by carrying it to their own social milieus (which is a source of great joy and pride for the Apostle, 1Thes 1:2-3). We could say that these communities fulfill the mission *ad gentes* as well as *inter gentes* in a harmonious way. Their communion, in and for the mission, seeks to go beyond all boundaries and shores, just as St. Paul did.

The awareness of the community's own responsibility and the need to respond to the power of the Gospel is shown in a very clear and exemplar way in the church of Antioch, as Ac 13:1-3 narrates. The *ekklesia*, in one of its gatherings (always liturgical in nature since they were carried out in the presence of the Lord and his Spirit) is unavoidably impelled towards a moment of discernment: if the Gospel had reached them from Jerusalem, could it be contained in the confines of the city or should it radiate beyond its boundaries? The dynamism of the Gospel was at stake, as well as the 'works of the Spirit', who himself had been given the task to remind them. As a result, they realized that they, as a church, could not keep the compelling power of the Gospel from spreading. They continued this first moment of discernment by identifying those members who possessed the charism of the mission *ad gentes*. Barnabas and Paul were chosen by the Spirit. They did not, however, carry out this task on their own behalf; it was the church's task. The members of the community laid their hands on them as a sign that the two were being sent on behalf of all, since they were taking on a responsibility of the whole community. The mission *ad gentes* comes about as an expression of a church that is aware of being on mission.

Today, Church can find in these communities an example, stimulus, and model. One could even go so far as to say that the churches of today can find in such communities a criterion for discerning not only their own missionary virtue, but also their own identity as a church. Can a church be faithful to its identity if it ceases to live

in this way? As *Ad Gentes* points out, all young churches belong to the communion of churches in view of evangelizing the world (cf. AG 38).

Since local churches are called to be the protagonists in carrying out the mission, each church should put into practice the indications of AG 6. They should discern in every step along the way the shape and form that the mission *ad gentes* ought to take in each circumstance. The missionary Decree offers two criteria for this discernment: a) the capacity for an ecclesial presence (resources, people, institutions, etc.); b) the recipients' circumstances and where they are at with regards to the Gospel. These two criteria are universally valid (we can consider the prototypical example of the change North Africa underwent.) In the same way, on a particular level, each individual church should discern which boundaries and barriers to overcome or which outlying communities to go out to. In this way, the mission *ad gentes* and ordinary pastoral efforts will find a meeting point and will enrich one another.

On these assertions, two of Pope Francis's fundamental statements in his proposal for pastoral and missionary conversion are grounded: a) the local church is the primary subject of evangelization, insofar as it is a concrete manifestation of the one Church in a particular place; in order for this to become a reality, the Church should "undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform" (EG 30); b) the missionary task must remain foremost in the Church, and missionary outreach should be the paradigm for all the Church's activity (cf. EG 15).

## 5. The Participation and Co-Responsibility of All in the *Mission Ad Gentes*

Given the nature of the local church and its missionary character, it follows that this task should fall to those who are Church by virtue of their baptism and the Eucharist. The internal logic of the history of salvation is fulfilled in baptism: the one who is called/chosen, is sent. Therein lies the full meaning of the motto for the *Extraordinary Missionary Month*: "*Baptized and Sent*", baptized in order to be sent. Likewise, in this light, we understand why the Pope insists on using the term 'missionary disciples' (and not missionaries and disciples). To be baptized is to participate in the Paschal event and, consequently, to accept being a principal actor in making this salvific

mystery known, witnessed to and celebrated. In light of the demands of baptism, we can see why the baptized person was considered by the Second Vatican Council as an *ad gentes* missionary in the full sense of the word, overcoming the narrow view (according to categories established by a clerical ecclesiology) of the baptized person as an ‘auxiliary’ missionary.

From within this baptismal perspective, we must qualify or specify the meaning of missionary collaboration, in order to avoid losing sight of what the very term implies. The collaboration of Christians (from outside or from afar) is not something that is done in order to help the ‘experts’, that is, the *ad gentes* missionaries. The latter do, as we shall see, have a particular purpose, but that does not mean that they fully embody or appropriate the mission *ad gentes*. Prayer and economic support should be the expression of every baptized person’s personal commitment to the mission *ad gentes* since it is a universal task, just as the faithful from Antioch believed. Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to fulfill a task on behalf of the whole community and for the good of everyone.

The baptized person should not lose sight of the universal vision of God, nor limit himself to the reduced space of his own ecclesial sphere. He should be in communion with all the churches and open to the demands of the mission to evangelize all peoples. The faithful Christian should become aware of the double dimension implicit within his baptism: he has been baptized by someone who accepted the solemn mandate of the Risen Lord, and at the same time, he – the baptized – in turn should partake in the commission to baptize all men.

It is impossible that such a far reaching task should be carried out by everyone in the same way. It is everyone’s task, but each one participates in it according to his own charism or his own ecclesial state of life. Each charism and every vocation in the Church expresses a different tonality and embodiment of the same baptismal grace. None of these tonalities or embodiments can be bereft of the grace of missionarity, otherwise the original gift would be distorted. *Ad Gentes* lists the missionary responsibilities of the different vocations and ministries within the Church. At the same time, the different decrees of the Second Vatican Council reiterate the missionary obligation of the different sectors or peoples. Missionarity impregnates the whole reality of the Church which – let us not forget – is a Church made up of people.



Therefore, every Christian and every ecclesial community should continually assess and discern how well it is living out this responsibility. Considering the theological identity of the local churches, it should be common practice for the dioceses to consider their pastoral projects and plans from the perspective of the fringes of society that they are called to reach. The mission *ad gentes* should not be reduced to a symbolic gesture, but rather should become the paradigm or criteria used to judge the authenticity of a pastoral plan that calls itself 'missionary'. The synodality that characterizes the life of the Church, as Pope Francis points out, aims at uniting or integrating the abilities of each of its members in light of the mission. This aspect would remain generic and abstract if it was not also embodied in *ad gentes* activity.

This framework gives full prominence to the charism of the mission *ad gentes* and *ad vitam*, as emblematic fulfillment of a communal and shared task, as well as the institutional makeup of those who possess this charism. In this area, it is necessary to apply the dialectics of 'some/all' in relation to the Church's ministerial dimension. In the Church, we can say, all things belong to all, as there are no spaces that are reserved for some. However, not everyone can do everything. Therefore, *some for the sake of all* totally consecrate themselves to the fulfillment of the shared task of the Church. All Christians, for example, should nurture the contemplative dimension of prayer, though some receive the charism of converting this dimension into the full meaning of their life story and project. They actualize in the heart of the Church an essential aspect of her identity (praise and adoration that springs forth from the profound experience of the love of a God whose essence is Love). Any local church that does not have a contemplative monastery at its center should consider it a loss or an impoverishment.

The same could be said of the *ad gentes* charism: there are ordained, lay or consecrated men and women who make it their life project to witness to the Gospel in those spheres or regions where the Gospel is not present. This personal commitment implies a real departure, separation, going to the margins of society where the habitual life of Christians is disrupted. Without this real departure, without a real exodus, the universality of the Church would not be made concrete, and missionarity would only remain a vague concept. This missionary action may be circumscribed within a specified timeframe (as Pius XII's invitation to priests in *Fidei Donum*).



This is a legitimate way of proceeding. Nonetheless, this should not obfuscate the quintessential character of those who give their entire lives to the mission. It is there that the charism of the mission *ad gentes* becomes a compelling force (or a prophetic example) for the church of origin and at the same time a living sign of the communion that exists among churches.

## 6. The Reshaping of the Mission *Ad Gentes*: The Charism of the Pontifical Mission Societies

Continued theological reflection, the global nature of the Church, the consolidation of the *communio ecclesiarum*, the backdrop of a globalized and multicultural civilization, the threats against the human family as a whole, the encounter among different religions with the need for sincere and cordial dialogue, the persistence of poverty and exclusion are all factors that demand a continual fine-tuning of the *ad gentes* mission. The mission *ad gentes* in its modern interpretation fostered the missionary zeal of the Christian people during the last centuries. Nonetheless, the mission *ad gentes* is a melody that should be interpreted according to the demands of each historical moment. In the current transition in which we find ourselves, it is especially important to be aware of the possibility of losing sight of the genuine meaning that the mission *ad gentes* has maintained throughout history. The priority given to mission could put at risk the existence of concrete ‘missions,’ or at the very least a depreciation of missionary spirit and dynamism.

The evolution of metaphors used to graphically and emotionally express missionary commitment is noteworthy. In the former model, it was habitual to speak of expansion, conquest, dissemination, and civilization.

Recently, another type of pluralistic language has been favored: interreligious dialogue, prophetic dialogue, inculturation, a preferential option for the poor, the defense of life and the integrity of creation, mission in six continents, reconciliation, mission *en retour* or *from everywhere to everywhere*, *inter gentes* mission, etc. Each of these aspects is important and should be recognized and respected. Having observed this multiplicity, and in order to avoid unilateral readings or reductionisms, Paul VI already pointed out in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that evangelization is a complex and on-going reality; nonetheless, he warned, that the explicit proclamation of Jesus’

Christ should never be lacking, nor the desire to reach the ends of the earth with his message (cf. Ac 1:8).

In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II conceded that the mission of the Church was still at its beginning stages. There had been such a disturbance in the social order that previous concepts were no longer sufficient to embrace the multiplicity of new situations. The cultural changes were so intense that both the theory and praxis of missionary activity needed to be enriched, which can only be done by reclaiming the centrality of the mission *ad gentes*. Aware that the world was at a historically critical junction, the encyclical's aim was to honor and actualize *Ad Gentes* on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was an attempt to reconcile two assertions that are not easy to harmonize: a) the need to recognize new missionary situations and landscapes (from social movements to the media), without neglecting geographical frontiers; and b) that the mission *ad gentes* should be at the center of the Church's concerns, as criteria for the missionaryity of the entire Church.

Pope Francis, aware of the critical junction at which we find ourselves now, reiterates EG 15 invitation, which cites and takes on the same goal as *Redemptoris Missio*, as a reference point for the Extraordinary Missionary Month. He centers his focus on the different types of fringes of society and the need for the evangelization of diverse groups. From this perspective, the geographical “peripheries” and those who have never heard the Gospel or do not know Christ remain prominent; hence, the purpose of his ‘missionary trips’, with a clear preference for Asia.

This new and always changing scenario continues to need the charism of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Their contribution is essential given what is at stake in this moment of transition. Missionary stimulus – founded on formation and spirituality – should form part of the essential ministries that animate the life of the Church in order to demonstrate that participation in the mission *ad gentes* and in the evangelization of today's world is the undeniable criterion of ecclesiality. Based on this criterion, all pastoral activity will receive a new dynamism, and ecclesial awareness a new vitality. Mission rejuvenates and gives hope to the Church, above all when one experiences the *communio ecclesiarum* within the universal Church and discovers her enormous evangelizing potential.

The Pontifical Mission Societies, from within a unified vision of the word mission, should continue acting as a stimulus for the mis-

sion *ad gentes*. Becoming more and more active in the life of the local churches, they should coordinate the different missionary channels in collaboration with the Conferences of Bishops, foster missiological reflection and its presence in different theological treaties, and vivify the *ad gentes* and *ad vitam* missionary realities. The Church cannot do without this prophetic entity. For there, the future and hope of the Church, and each and every church, is at stake.

# La misión *ad gentes* de la Iglesia en el mundo

❖ ELOY BUENO DE LA FUENTE

La misión *ad gentes* designa una serie de actividades al servicio de las cuales se han ido desarrollando las Obras Misionales Pontificias. Su importancia es confirmada por esta Asamblea. Es una prueba magnífica de la universalidad y de la catolicidad de la Iglesia, a cuya realización han contribuido la misión *ad gentes* y la participación del conjunto del Pueblo de Dios a través de las Obras Misionales Pontificias.

Esta realidad constituye un tesoro que debe ser conservado y cuidado con el máximo interés porque en ello se juega gran parte del futuro y de la vitalidad de la Iglesia. Dada su importancia y por estar sometida a cambios permanentes se requiere reflexión, profundización y renovación permanente. Además, esta evolución constante exige captar con claridad su identidad más profunda para que la transformación no altere o difumine su identidad. De este modo, se podrá descubrir que se trata de *una misma melodía con interpretaciones diversas*.

La valoración teológica y el discernimiento de los signos de los tiempos harán posible que tanto la misión *ad gentes* como las Obras Misionales Pontificias sigan prestando su servicio esencial en una Iglesia mundial vivida sinodalmente como comunión de iglesias.

## 1. La situación: las encrucijadas de la historia

La misión *ad gentes* (a nivel teológico, pastoral y organizativo) es una figura o una forma, histórica y contingente, que adopta la misión universal de la Iglesia en determinados momentos y en determinadas circunstancias. Esta figura debe irse re-configurando al ritmo de los tiempos. Así lo confirma la designación del organismo responsable, el cual, denominado inicialmente *Congregación de Propaganda Fidei* cambió su nombre en *Congregación para la Evangelización de los Pueblos*, con la publicación de *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae* del Papa

Pablo VI, emitida el 15 de agosto de 1967. Esta evolución implica un cambio de perspectiva, exigido por las circunstancias tanto intraeclesiales como extraeclesiales. La misión universal no se puede realizar siempre del mismo modo, pero siempre ha de tener en su horizonte los pueblos del mundo.

La expresión “*misión ad gentes*” se fue consolidando a lo largo de la época moderna a raíz de la ampliación del horizonte geográfico producido por las empresas de navegación y por los proyectos de colonización que surgieron de los países tradicionalmente cristianos. Hasta entonces se utilizaba otra terminología, sobre todo “propagación de la fe”. En la nueva experiencia histórica “*misión ad gentes*” fue asumiendo connotaciones propias y peculiares: “gentes” se refería a grupos humanos que no tenían conocimiento del Evangelio, que se encontraban a muchos kilómetros de distancia, que poseían culturas diversas y exóticas, que practicaban religiones extrañas.

La respuesta a este nuevo desafío histórico provocó *un modo concreto* de llevar adelante la misión universal de la Iglesia. Este se realizó, como no podía ser de otro modo, en el marco de la teología y de la estructura política de la época: en vinculación con los reinos cristianos que aprovecharon la ocasión para conquistar nuevos territorios, con actitud de superioridad cultural y religiosa, con una visión negativa de las religiones no cristianas y de la posibilidad salvífica de sus miembros, con un planteamiento unidireccional de la misión, dentro de una concepción eclesiológica clerical.

En este escenario (que a nuestros ojos encierra un carácter ambiguo y unilateral) se desplegó lo mejor del fervor cristiano de cara a la conversión y evangelización de los pueblos paganos: por un lado, los misioneros entregaron sus vidas para ofrecer a aquellas personas lo que consideraban más valioso (el bautismo en nombre de Cristo de cara a su salvación); por otro lado, el pueblo cristiano, cuando se debilitó el apoyo institucional de los gobiernos, mostró su generosidad acompañando la tarea de los misioneros con su admiración, oración y aportación económica (presupuesto y aliento de las posteriores Obras Misionales Pontificias). Gracias a ello, se puede afirmar que la misión *ad gentes* tuvo un enorme éxito: el Evangelio fue anunciado en todos los rincones del mundo (entre todos los pueblos de la tierra), surgieron comunidades eclesiales en todos los continentes, la Iglesia se hizo universal y católica de modo más visible. Este proceso se realizó dentro de un paradigma que puede ser sintetizado en la expresión “misiones extranjeras”.

Las circunstancias históricas y la reflexión teológica siguieron cambiando, y por ello a lo largo del siglo XX se fue configurando un nuevo paradigma. A un siglo de distancia podemos valorar el carácter profético y anticipatorio de Benedicto XV con *Maximum Illud*, que supo intuir la encrucijada del momento y marcar los caminos del futuro (desde esta clave resulta clara la analogía con la encrucijada actual y con la convocatoria del Mes Misionero Extraordinario a la luz de *Evangelii Gaudium* 15).

El Vaticano II fue escenario de la hondura y de la tensión del cambio que condujo a un nuevo paradigma. Basta mencionar las preocupaciones e intereses de los obispos misioneros en los inicios del concilio (de carácter más bien jurídico y administrativo), el difícil itinerario de la redacción de *Ad Gentes*, los reproches contra el sistema organizativo centralizado de la actividad misionera, las discusiones que sostuvieron hasta el momento final los teólogos de las diversas orientaciones. Las dificultades de la transición fueron enormes, pero enorme fue también su aportación: articuló la *misión ad gentes* y las misiones con la misión universal de la Iglesia, resituó las misiones en la misión de la Iglesia.

El Vaticano II ofreció un marco teológico para entender y realizar la actividad misionera estableciendo las bases del paradigma que requería aquel momento. Este esfuerzo se condensó en el decreto *Ad Gentes*, aunque sus presupuestos e implicaciones no se pueden captar en toda su riqueza más que desde las cuatro constituciones conciliares: *Dei Verbum*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Gaudium et Spes* y (de modo más directo) *Lumen Gentium*. El decreto misionero, alimentándose de esos manantiales, permitió afrontar el presente y avanzar hacia el futuro de la misión universal.

Del paradigma condensado en *Ad Gentes* conviene resaltar cuatro coordenadas fundamentales: a) hace radicar la actividad misionera no sólo en la misión de la Iglesia (la repatriación de las misiones en la misión) sino en el dinamismo de la vida y de la economía trinitaria (capítulo I); b) la actividad misionera debe irse modulando a la luz de las circunstancias socio-históricas, lo cual reclama un discernimiento y una adaptación continua (cf. AG 6); c) ofrece una fenomenología de la obra misionera en sus distintas fases (capítulo II), que ha de servir como el paradigma de toda acción pastoral de la Iglesia; d) presenta el protagonismo de las iglesias locales, haciendo ver que nacen de la misión y que, desde su nacimiento, deben vivir para la misión (capítulo III).

Visto en perspectiva histórica, se puede afirmar que *Ad Gentes* vive de la reflexión global del Vaticano II (de hecho fue aprobado al final del recorrido conciliar) y a la vez puede servir, hoy más que nunca, como aliento y criterio para la Iglesia postconciliar en el actual momento histórico mientras camina hacia un nuevo paradigma.

Teniendo en cuenta este trasfondo, y asimismo nuestra encrucijada, mostraremos en primer lugar los cuatro aspectos que debemos tener en cuenta para comprender adecuadamente la misión *ad gentes* de la Iglesia en su servicio al mundo: el Misterio del Dios Trinidad como origen, contenido y ámbito de una misión universal (2), la misión de la Iglesia en cuanto servidora de un proyecto de amor en favor del mundo y de la humanidad (3), la constitución de la Iglesia de Jesucristo como comunión de iglesias en medio de los pueblos y las culturas (4), la participación y la corresponsabilidad de todos los bautizados según su carisma y su estado de vida (5), desde estos presupuestos y fortalezas se podrán afrontar las coordenadas actuales de la misión universal y los criterios de una formación y animación misionera acorde con el carisma de las Obras Misionales Pontificias (6).

## 2. El Misterio del Dios misionero

Una de las categorías más renovadoras de la misionología, que se fue abriendo camino a partir de mitad del siglo pasado, ha sido *missio Dei*. De modo espontáneo y natural ha pasado a formar parte del acervo de las distintas tradiciones cristianas por su radicalidad y fecundidad (aunque también haya sido objeto de lecturas unilaterales). Ha repercutido favorablemente en el campo de la misionología y asimismo en el de la eclesiología desde un presupuesto fundamental: no se debe hablar en rigor de la misión de la Iglesia o de que la Iglesia “tenga” una misión; más bien, la misión es de Dios, respecto a la cual la Iglesia actúa como servidora, como enviada, como sacramento. Resultará obvio por ello que la misión (porque tiene su raíz en Dios, en la economía trinitaria) antecede a la Iglesia: la misión llama a la existencia a la Iglesia y la hace intrínseca y esencialmente misionera (sería por ello redundante hablar de “Iglesia misionera”, como lo sería hablar de “leche blanca”; en ambos casos el adjetivo no es necesario si el sustantivo conserva su sentido auténtico).

Esta perspectiva se hace más patente a la luz de una doble precisión: a) el Dios misionero es un *Dios trinitario*: el Padre envía al Hi-



jo y al Espíritu; b) este envío arranca de lo más íntimo de la vida divina y por ello aspira a ofrecer felicidad y plenitud a todas las criaturas, en todas las dimensiones de su existencia.

## 2.1 La filantropía del Dios Trinidad

Retomando el lenguaje bíblico y patrístico, el Vaticano II sitúa la misión *ad gentes* y la misión de la Iglesia *en el seno del Misterio de Dios*, en la economía trinitaria. Este es el punto de partida y el contenido del primer capítulo de *Lumen Gentium* que se repite en el capítulo primero de *Ad Gentes*. En esta perspectiva las “misiones” no podrán ser consideradas primeramente desde la clave geográfica, jurídica, o administrativa sino desde el proyecto de ofrecer una participación en la vida misma de Dios. Este es el sentido del uso de *Misterio* en el primer capítulo de *Lumen Gentium*. Para su recta comprensión conviene recordar su exacto significado, presentado en el aula conciliar: “Misterio” no designa simplemente algo que desborda nuestra capacidad racional, sino *un proyecto salvífico* que se manifiesta y se va realizando en la historia. Contra la concepción habitual, pone de relieve su aspecto de manifestación, de experiencia efectiva, de generación de historia y de presencia en el mundo, entre los pueblos.

Los datos de la revelación, así como los textos conciliares, ponen de relieve ante todo la iniciativa de Dios que, por pura gratuidad y benevolencia, sale al encuentro del ser humano, de la humanidad, como amigo, para hacerse presente mediante acciones y palabras (cf. DV 2). Este dinamismo brota, como dice LG 1 prolongando la tradición patrística, del amor fontal del Padre, origen de todo don. La filantropía de Dios (su sensibilidad hacia los seres humanos, la preocupación por su plenitud y felicidad) es dimensión constitutiva del Misterio.

Esta iniciativa del amor del Padre se concreta y se realiza en el envío y la acción del Hijo y del Espíritu, las “manos” de Dios. Cada uno de ellos, desde su característica personal, despliega ese proyecto de vida y de comunión que se ofrece a la humanidad y a la realidad entera.

## 2.2 Universal por su amplitud y su intensidad

Desde su raíz y origen resulta patente el horizonte universal del proyecto de Dios y de las misiones del Hijo y del Espíritu: felicidad para todos basada en la experiencia de filiación y de fraternidad. Es el

“sueño de Dios”, que se expresa en los símbolos del paraíso y del sábado presentes en los primeros capítulos del Génesis: el *paraíso* describe con vivas imágenes una situación ideal de armonía (Adán – el ser humano – está en armonía con la naturaleza, con sus semejantes, con Dios, consigo mismo); el *sábado* condensa el objetivo del acto creador: los seres humanos, como una familia, pueden celebrar permanentemente la fiesta de la creación en el hogar del Padre. La vida, don primordial de Dios, es algo bueno y hermoso, que debe ser defendido y desplegado en todas sus dimensiones.

Ahora bien, ese “sueño” quedó alterado por la acción de la “serpiente” que seduce y contamina la libertad humana: Adán ve rota la relación con la naturaleza, con Dios, con los otros, consigo mismo; la familia humana ve resquebrajada su unidad; se inicia la terrible historia de la violencia, del asesinato, del resentimiento, de las armas, de la injusticia, del enfrentamiento entre pueblos y razas. El mal y el pecado actúan como virus que corrompen la obra de Dios y dificultan el cumplimiento de su proyecto.

La historia humana será dramática: peregrinación y exilio, con grandes dosis de desventura hasta que se logre la meta, la plenitud, la consumación, cuando desaparezcan el llanto y las lágrimas.

Esta situación dramática modulará las misiones del Hijo y del Espíritu: debe realizar una obra de rescate, redención, restauración, reconciliación y superación de conflictos y oposiciones. La dificultad y el conflicto acompañarán siempre la acción de los enviados del Padre. Esta misión es absolutamente universal en extensión (se dirige a todo y a todos) y en intensidad (debe tener en cuenta todas las dimensiones del ser humano). Por ello deberá adoptar concreciones y figuras muy diversas.

### 2.3 El Reino de Dios en la misión del Hijo y del Espíritu

Jesús, el Hijo, reflejaba una profunda conciencia de enviado del Padre, hasta el punto de identificarse radicalmente con su misión desde que hizo su aparición en este mundo. El anuncio del Reino, que estaba en el centro de misión, resonaba como un jubileo: aspiraba a recuperar la frescura y la bondad de la creación, a alcanzar la felicidad anhelada desde la mañana de la creación. Al servicio del Reino, Jesús asumió una vida itinerante, que le llevaba continuamente a otro lugar para hacer presente el Reino/reinado de Dios. Ese Dios tenía un rostro personal, que se manifestaba y era invoca-

do como *abba*. Esta designación/invocación ponía de relieve, por un lado, la cercanía y la misericordia ilimitada del Padre, y por otro lado la fraternidad de todos los seres humanos. La experiencia de filiación y de fraternidad son contenido esencial de la salvación ofrecida a todos.

Esta vocación universal del Reino empuja a superar todas las barreras y divisiones que se van creando por la libertad humana. En su actividad itinerante (permanentemente en salida) Jesús se sitúa siempre en las periferias, donde se encuentran los pobres, los heridos, los vulnerables, los excluidos, los pecadores (aquellos que han cometido el mal conscientemente y aquellos que son considerados como pecadores por no cumplir las leyes rituales de pureza). Ellos son los preferidos del Padre, y desde ellos ha de venir la reunificación de los hermanos enfrentados y la recreación del mundo.

Este modo de actuar de Jesús fue generando rechazo y oposición, lo que le condujo hasta la muerte en cruz. La identificación con la misión implica la entrega de la propia vida. El afrontó la persecución y la muerte con un amor llevado hasta el extremo. Es el momento en el que consuma su misión y su filiación: lo que había recibido gratis lo entrega gratis, es decir, la pre-existencia (su engendramiento eterno por el Padre) es la base y el contenido de su pro-existencia (la entrega de su vida como servicio en favor de todos, con una apertura universal que implica a los enemigos y los perseguidores).

La muerte desembocó en la resurrección, acontecimiento protagonizado por el Padre en el poder del Espíritu. El Resucitado sale al encuentro de sus discípulos desde la gloria del Padre, como garantía de una alianza insuperable y de la victoria sobre la muerte. El Espíritu, la fuerza y el gozo de la comunicación de Dios, acompaña y sostiene la misión de Jesús. Por un lado, antecede y hace posible el envío de Jesús: viene sobre María para hacer posible la encarnación, unge a Jesús en el momento de su bautismo cuando va a comenzar su actividad pública, actúa como fuerza que le hace capaz de realizar curaciones, es el poder que hace posible la resurrección, es el que actualiza y universaliza la presencia salvífica del Resucitado. Por otro lado, es el don que éste otorga a sus apóstoles como abogado y como consuelo, como estímulo y como coraje, como desvelador de la verdad, como impulso que abre siempre caminos nuevos y que empuja a cruzar orillas y a pasar continuamente a los otros, es la fuente de la alegría que convoca a la celebración y que irradia como invitación a quienes se encuentran fuera.

## 2.4 Pascua/Pentecostés en el centro del Misterio y de la misión

El Misterio del Dios Trinidad alcanza su punto culminante en el acontecimiento pascual, del cual forma parte esencial lo sucedido en Pentecostés. Es la consumación de las misiones del Hijo y del Espíritu. El amor fontal del Padre ha mostrado su capacidad de superar toda oposición y todo rechazo, de vencer el odio y la violencia. Brilla en todo su esplendor como capacidad de pronunciar una palabra de perdón y de amor más allá de todo deseo de venganza.

El Padre resucita al Hijo en el Espíritu, estableciendo así una alianza insuperable entre Dios y la familia humana. Por ello, la Pascua permanece siempre como estímulo y contenido del *kerygma*: es el centro del anuncio cristiano, el aliento del testimonio, el dinamismo de la evangelización, la fuente de alegría que se despliega como comunicación y acogida. La Pascua es acontecimiento esencialmente misionero: todas las cristofanías incluyen la constitución de los apóstoles, de la boca del Resucitado brota la indicación “a todos y en todas partes, hasta los confines de la tierra” (cf. Hc 1:8). La Pascua es la fuente de la misión cristiana y el perfume que deben irradiar todos los misioneros. Pentecostés, como veremos, lo amplía a la humanidad entera. Por ello, permanecerán siempre como criterio para purificar y dinamizar la actividad misionera de la Iglesia.

## 3. La misión de la Iglesia: en el dinamismo del Reino y de la Pascua

La Iglesia surge como el grupo de personas que participan de la Vida de la Trinidad porque han quedado seducidas por las posibilidades del Reino y porque se han visto perdonadas y renovadas por la fuerza de la resurrección. La eclesiología es en último término una antropología: la Iglesia es la comunidad de los hombres transformados y transfigurados. La Iglesia es ante todo una realidad personal (las Personas divinas y las personas humanas en comunión), *que asumen como propia la misión consumada por el Hijo y por el Espíritu en Pascua/Pentecostés.*

La historia sigue abierta con sus quiebras y dolores. El escenario dramático de la misión no ha desaparecido: es lo que llama a la existencia a la Iglesia, porque Pascua/Pentecostés *es un don para el mundo que debe llegar a todos.* La acción de la Trinidad reclama *un pueblo que siga anunciando, testimoniando y celebrando* la novedad que ha

introducido en el mundo, pues es el mejor regalo que se puede ofrecer a una humanidad que siempre busca motivos para la esperanza y razones para vivir.

Con ello no hace más que prolongar una lógica que atraviesa toda la historia de la salvación: el designio de Dios sólo puede ser llevado adelante contando con la participación de mediadores humanos; la vocación de uno o de algunos debe ser vista como servicio a todos. *Los mediadores*, tanto a nivel individual como a nivel colectivo, *son misioneros*, porque actúan al servicio de la misión de Dios en favor de la humanidad. Toda llamada por parte de Dios ayuda a contemplar la realidad con los ojos de Dios, con una amplitud universal en extensión y en intensidad.

Abraham es un ejemplo paradigmático a nivel individual. Sobre el trasfondo de Babel (que refleja la división e incomprensión entre los diversos pueblos) es llamado (y a la vez enviado) para que transmita la bendición de Dios sobre una muchedumbre de pueblos; la misión motiva y da sentido a la vocación de Abraham. Lo mismo podríamos decir de Israel a nivel colectivo: la alianza reclama un pueblo que actúe como testigo de las maravillas de Dios ante el resto de los pueblos.

La misión pascual/pentecostal de la Iglesia deberá desplegarse entre las incomprensiones y conflictos que existen entre los pueblos, como quedó simbólicamente expresado en Babel. El acontecimiento de Pentecostés, considerado tradicionalmente como el anti-Babel, es la presentación pública de la Iglesia, su presencia en un mundo desgarrado. Impulsada por el Espíritu, sale del cenáculo (la vida interna, comunitaria) para afrontar el escenario complejo de la misión: en la diversidad de pueblos, que viven sin comunicación porque cada uno se cierra en su propia lengua, el anuncio de la Iglesia logra el milagro del re-encuentro, de la reconciliación en un hogar común.

La misión es un encuentro de pueblos, pues el anuncio evangélico introduce un dinamismo de reconciliación y de unidad. Esa lógica del Espíritu se seguirá manifestando en los “sucesivos pentecostés” que estructuran el relato de *Hechos de los Apóstoles*. En el capítulo 2 se trataba de judíos procedentes de la diáspora, posteriormente se irá saliendo al encuentro de los samaritanos, de los prosélitos, de los gentiles, de los macedonios. La vocación/misión de la Iglesia debe realizarse entre los pueblos “sacramento universal de salvación” (AG 1), “sacramento o signo e instrumento de la unión íntima con Dios y de

la unidad de todo el género humano” (LG 1). Esta sacramentalidad encierra una doble dimensión.

Desde el punto de vista personal, la actividad misionera y el anuncio evangélico buscan la restauración humana conforme a la imagen de Dios impresa desde la creación (cf. LG 2). En esa perspectiva, *Ad Gentes* afirma que la acción misionera mantiene “una conexión íntima con la misma naturaleza humana y sus aspiraciones” pues al manifestar a Cristo revela a los hombres su verdad auténtica y su vocación integral, una “humanidad renovada, llena de amor fraterno, de sinceridad y de espíritu de paz” (AG 8). Las implicaciones y el desarrollo concreto en la complejidad del mundo moderno será expresado en *Gaudium et Spes* (desde la clave de GS 22).

Desde el punto de vista colectivo, la diversidad de pueblos provoca que la Iglesia vaya *pasando a los otros* para nacer entre los otros. Con razón los Padres veían ya en Pentecostés a la Iglesia que habla todas las lenguas. Así contribuye a la unificación del mundo a la vez que se va configurando a sí misma: de la “Iglesia de judíos” pasará a ser una “Iglesia gentil”, una “Iglesia de paganos” (cf. Ef 2,11-20). Esta perspectiva ratifica la íntima implicación de Iglesia y misión. La misión va realizando a la misma Iglesia. Es la experiencia gozosa que expresa la carta a los efesios: estos, que pertenecían a la gentilidad, han encontrado en la Iglesia su casa; los que estaban lejos han entrado en el hogar del Padre, porque el odio que los separaba ha sido destruido por Cristo, eliminando así el obstáculo para la reconciliación.

La acción misionera de la Iglesia, como encuentro de pueblos, recrea y reconfigura el mundo y va conformando una Iglesia mundial y multicultural (superando las alternativas excluyentes que enfrentan a los pueblos, sea entre judíos y gentiles o entre griegos y bárbaros). En cuanto Pueblo de pueblos la Iglesia va enriqueciendo su catolicidad porque asume como propias las características de los diversos pueblos.

En esta itinerancia la Iglesia no puede dejar de celebrar la liturgia (especialmente la eucaristía) como memorial y actualización del Misterio que encuentra su centro en la Pascua (como afirma SC 5). Con razón se puede decir que la eucaristía hace la Iglesia, pues la hace ser Iglesia y no simplemente una sociedad humana. La liturgia no puede estar desvinculada de la vida de la Iglesia misionera. Desde la liturgia y a la luz de la liturgia se realiza el servicio a la humanidad en el entramado del mundo (la “liturgia después de la liturgia”, como prefiere decir una significativa corriente de la Iglesia ortodoxa).



Recordemos que objetivo de la celebración eucarística es que la asamblea reunida se constituya como Cuerpo de Cristo: gracias a la participación en un mismo pan, el cuerpo de cada creyente es templo del Espíritu; por ello hace presente la Iglesia en todas las situaciones y circunstancias de la sociedad y del mundo (cf. 1Cor 6,15-19). Gracias a la eucaristía la Iglesia es siempre una Iglesia de puertas abiertas, presente en todas las periferias. Una Iglesia eucarística está siempre en estado de misión.

#### **4. La Iglesia como comunión de iglesias: la iglesia local nace de la misión y vive para la misión**

La Iglesia que surge de la economía trinitaria no puede ser entendida como una realidad abstracta o genérica ni puede identificarse con su figura en un lugar o en una región. Es el “cuerpo de iglesias”, pues “en ellas y a partir de ellas existe la Iglesia católica, una y única” (LG 23). El predominio de una eclesiología centralista y unitaria, que se implantó de modo general en la Iglesia occidental a lo largo del segundo milenio, privilegiaba la designación “Iglesia”, respecto a la cual las diócesis parecían nada más que circunscripciones administrativas y los obispos delegados o representantes del Papa.

La tradición abre otra perspectiva, como lo muestra san Hilario de Poitiers (citado en LG 23): “Aunque la Iglesia es una en todo el orbe, sin embargo cada ciudad obtiene su iglesia, si bien es una en todas ellas [...] porque una existe en muchos”.<sup>1</sup> Cada ciudad ha recibido su iglesia porque *un misionero ha venido de fuera*, de otra iglesia. Esta eclesiología ha sido recuperada en el siglo XX en gran medida gracias a la experiencia misionera de la época moderna: ello ha permitido comprender en toda su profundidad que la iglesia local *nace de la misión y vive para la misión*. Ya la *Maximum Illud* había hablado de “Iglesias jóvenes” (MI 30). Para que estas se desarrollaran reclamaba la constitución y formación del clero nativo. Este proyecto apuntaba precisamente a la consolidación de las diócesis, que venían siendo consideradas como “misiones”, es decir, como realidades eclesiales de menor importancia eclesiológica y eclesial que las diócesis de vieja cristiandad. La práctica misionera había permitido experimentar el proceso de eclesiogénesis, es decir, el nacimiento de comu-

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<sup>1</sup> H. DE POITIERS, *Tractatus super Psalmos*, 14,3: PL 9, 206.



nidades cristianas que debían llegar a constituirse en sentido estricto como iglesias.

El surgimiento y la multiplicación de las iglesias locales no es más que la realización de lo iniciado en Pentecostés. Se podría incluso afirmar que la historia de la Iglesia ha consistido en prolongar aquel dinamismo de Pentecostés: hacerse presente en todos los pueblos. La lectura del Nuevo Testamento permite constatar que se habla con frecuencia y normalidad de iglesias (en plural). Las cartas de san Pablo son dirigidas a las iglesias en cuanto tales. Este dato ha sido valorado y profundizado por la eclesiología reciente. Pero no se destaca con la misma fuerza e intensidad el dinamismo que ha hecho posible esa realidad: la actividad misionera, la iniciativa de misioneros itinerantes, la misión *ad gentes*.

El relato de *Hechos de los Apóstoles* permite seguir ese dinamismo que hace surgir iglesias: a partir del momento de Pentecostés en Jerusalén se despliega la acción y la iniciativa de numerosos cristianos que salen de su residencia habitual, anuncian el Evangelio en otros lugares, congregan a un grupo de personas atraídas por una buena noticia, se convierten y bautizan, se configuran como “asamblea” en la que se sigue proclamando el testimonio recibido de los apóstoles y se sigue celebrando el memorial del Señor muerto y resucitado. Esa es la obra misionera presentada por el capítulo segundo de *Ad Gentes*, gracias a la cual cada ciudad va recibiendo su iglesia. Es la dinámica que debe ser recuperada como paradigma de toda acción pastoral de la Iglesia.

Cada iglesia local debe su existencia a un misionero, a alguien que vino de fuera y que dio origen a algo nuevo en un lugar (geográfico, cultural, antropológico) en el que no existía el cristianismo. La misión antecede a la iglesia que nace en un lugar. Es el “momento mágico” que toda iglesia debería recordar como memorial, como actualización de su nacimiento y de su identidad misma.

El nombre mismo con que se autodesignó recoge esta tensión misionera: *ekklesia* (término proveniente del ámbito profano y político griego) se refiere a una asamblea, a un grupo de personas que se encuentran reunidas; en el caso de los cristianos la motivación y el objetivo no son de carácter estrictamente político sino la experiencia salvífica que procede del Jesús resucitado que sigue vivo y presente. El nombre designa un estado permanente de misión:

- a) la reunión de la asamblea se ha producido porque ha habido previamente una convocatoria, un anuncio primero, la pro-

clamación del kerygma como ofrecimiento y acogida; es decir, el testimonio misionero se encuentra en el origen de la realidad de cada iglesia;

- b) esa convocatoria suscita que algunos se sientan interpelados, lo cual implica una conversión en la vida del individuo y un discernimiento en el seno de la sociedad de la que forman parte, pues los cristianos hacen presente una peculiaridad en el espacio público y privado; este discernimiento hace presente a la Iglesia cristiana como una magnitud visible entre otros grupos protagonistas de la vida social;
- c) los cristianos reunidos en asamblea se separan posteriormente, como enviados y por ello como testigos en el entramado social, mayoritariamente pagano, de una novedad de vida; la asamblea (la *ekklesía*) no se entiende a sí misma más que en ese dinamismo del envío misionero;
- d) en el espacio político de la Roma imperial, la pluralidad de iglesias representaba una interpelación o un desafío de carácter político: confesaban a un Señor respecto al cual todos los demás señores divinizados no pasaban de ser ídolos, introducían un tipo de comportamiento y de socialidad alternativo que resultaba inquietante a muchos observadores.

Es sorprendente y admirable la espontaneidad con la que las diversas iglesias, en cuanto “nosotros”, se sienten protagonistas de este proceso. Esta perspectiva permite entender el Nuevo Testamento como un conjunto de escritos misioneros. Las cartas de san Pablo, como ejemplo prototípico, son “cartas desde la misión y para la misión”: gracias a ellas las iglesias se sienten partícipes del proyecto del apóstol. Esta implicación se realiza de modos diversos: mediante la oración, mediante el envío de colaboradores, en ocasiones mediante la ayuda económica y de modo especial mediante el testimonio de la novedad evangélica que irradian en su entorno (lo cual constituye uno de los motivos de gozo y de orgullo del apóstol: 1 Tes 1,2-3). Podríamos decir que aquellas comunidades realizan de modo armónico la misión *ad gentes e inter gentes*. Esa comunión en y para la misión aspira a rebasar todas las fronteras y orillas, como lo realiza san Pablo.

Esta conciencia de la propia responsabilidad y de la respuesta a la fuerza del Evangelio se muestra de modo nítido y ejemplar en la iglesia de Antioquía según narra Hech 13,1-3. La *ekklesía*, en una de sus reuniones (siempre de carácter litúrgico por realizarse en presencia del Señor y de su Espíritu) se ve empujada a un discernimiento inelu-

dible: si el Evangelio había llegado desde Jerusalén hasta ellos ¿podía quedarse en el reducido espacio de la ciudad o debía avanzar más allá de sus fronteras? Estaba en juego el dinamismo del Evangelio y la “obra del Espíritu”, como este se encarga de recordarles. En consecuencia, se dan cuenta de que ellos, como iglesia, no pueden frenar la fuerza del Evangelio. Este primer discernimiento se prolonga en la identificación de aquellos miembros que poseen el carisma de la misión *ad gentes*. Bernabé y Pablo son señalados por el Espíritu. Pero no son ellos a título individual quienes deben llevar adelante la tarea. Esta corresponde a la iglesia. Por ello todos imponen la manos sobre ambos como signo de que son enviados en nombre de todos ya que asumen una responsabilidad comunitaria. La misión *ad gentes* surge como expresión de una iglesia con conciencia de misión.

Toda Iglesia actual encuentra en estas comunidades un ejemplo, un estímulo y un modelo. Se podría decir incluso con más fuerza: encuentran ahí un criterio para discernir no sólo su calidad misionera sino su propia identidad como iglesia. ¿Puede una iglesia ser fiel a su identidad si prescinde de este modo de actuar? Como señala *Ad Gentes*, toda iglesia joven queda insertada en la comunión de iglesias (cf. AG 38) de cara a la evangelización del mundo.

Dado el protagonismo de las iglesias locales, cada una de ellas debe realizar lo que indica AG 6. Debe discernir en cada momento el modo o la figura que la misión *ad gentes* adopta en su circunstancia. El decreto misionero señala dos criterios: a) la capacidad de presencia eclesial (recursos, personas, instituciones); b) la situación de los destinatarios y su distancia respecto al Evangelio. Estos criterios son válidos a nivel universal. Basta pensar, como ejemplo prototípico, en el cambio experimentado por el Norte de África. Igualmente a nivel concreto cada iglesia concreta debería discernir las fronteras o barreras que debe superar o las periferias a las que debería salir. De este modo la misión *ad gentes* y la pastoral ordinaria se encontrarían y se enriquecerían. En estos presupuestos encuentran su legitimidad dos afirmaciones fundamentales del papa Francisco en su propuesta de conversión pastoral y misionera: a) la iglesia local es el sujeto primario de la evangelización, en cuanto manifestación concreta de la única iglesia en un lugar del mundo; para que ello se haga real debe “entrar en un proceso decidido de discernimiento, purificación y reforma” (EG 30); b) el anuncio misionero es la tarea primordial de la Iglesia, y la salida misionera debe ser el paradigma de toda obra de la Iglesia (cf. EG 15).

## 5. La participación y corresponsabilidad de todos en la misión *ad gentes*

Dada la realidad de la iglesia local y su naturaleza misionera es lógico que este servicio recaiga sobre todos aquellos que son Iglesia en virtud del bautismo y de la eucaristía. En el bautismo se realiza la lógica profunda que hemos descubierto en la historia de la salvación: el llamado/elegido es un enviado. Ahí radica todo el sentido del lema del Mes Extraordinario: *bautizados y enviados, bautizados para ser enviados*. Y asimismo se comprende la insistencia del papa en hablar de discípulos misioneros (no discípulos y misioneros). El bautismo es la participación en el acontecimiento pascual, y en consecuencia la asunción del protagonismo para que ese misterio salvífico sea anunciado, testimoniado y celebrado. Por exigencia del bautismo es comprensible que el bautizado pueda ser considerado por el Vaticano II como misionero *ad gentes* en el pleno sentido de la palabra, superando la situación en la que no pasaba de ser un misionero “auxiliar” (según lo había establecido una eclesiología clerical).

Desde la perspectiva bautismal hay que matizar o precisar el sentido de la cooperación misionera, para evitar que se diluya o difumine lo que el mismo término pretende expresar. La co-operación de los cristianos no es una actividad que se realiza (desde fuera o desde la distancia) en favor de los “especialistas”, de los misioneros *ad gentes*. Estos, como veremos, tienen su peculiaridad, pero ello no significa que absorban o se apropien de la misión *ad gentes*. La oración o la aportación económica deben ser expresión del compromiso personal de cada bautizado en la misión *ad gentes*, porque es tarea de todos, como lo veían los fieles de Antioquía: Pablo y Bernabé asumían un encargo que realizaban en nombre de todos y en favor de todos.

El bautizado no debe prescindir de la visión universal de Dios ni limitarse al reducido espacio de su ámbito eclesial. Ha de estar en comunión con todas las iglesias y abierto a las necesidades de la evangelización del mundo entero. El creyente debe descubrir en su bautismo una doble dimensión: él ha sido bautizado porque alguien asumió el envío solemne del Resucitado, y a la vez responde a ese mandato colaborando para que otros sean también bautizados.

Una tarea tan amplia no puede ser realizada de igual modo por todos sus protagonistas. Es tarea propia de todos, pero cada uno desde su carisma o desde su estado eclesial. Cada carisma y cada vocación en la Iglesia son una modulación y una concreción de la gracia

bautismal. Ninguna de esas modulaciones y concreciones puede carecer de la gracia de la misionariedad porque en tal caso se estaría falsificando el don originario. *Ad Gentes* enumera la responsabilidad misionera de las distintas vocaciones y ministerios en la Iglesia y, a la vez, los distintos decretos del Vaticano II vuelven a repetir la obligación misionera de los diversos sectores o personas. La misionariedad impregna la realidad entera de la Iglesia que – no lo olvidemos – es una Iglesia de personas. Por ello cada cristiano y cada comunidad eclesial deben valorar y discernir continuamente cómo está realizando esa responsabilidad. A la luz de la identidad teológica de las iglesias locales debería ser normal que toda diócesis planteara sus planes o proyectos pastorales desde las periferias que en cada momento está llamada a rebasar.

La misión *ad gentes* no debería quedar reducida a un adorno sino convertirse en instancia o criterio de la veracidad de una pastoral que se pretende “misionera”. La sinodalidad que caracteriza la vida eclesial, como subraya el papa Francisco, tiene como objetivo la convergencia o la sinergia de las capacidades de cada uno de cara a la misión. Esta quedaría como algo genérico y abstracto si no se concretara también en una actividad *ad gentes*.

Este marco da todo su relieve al carisma de la misión *ad gentes* y *ad vitam*, como realización paradigmática de una tarea común y compartida, y a la configuración institucional de quienes poseen tal carisma. En este campo hay que aplicar la dialéctica algunos/todos de la ministerialidad eclesial. En la Iglesia, podríamos decir, todo es de todos, ya que no hay espacios reservados a los demás. Ahora bien, no todos pueden hacerlo todo. Por tanto, *algunos en nombre de todos* se consagran enteramente a esa tarea. Todo cristiano, por ejemplo, debe cuidar la dimensión contemplativa de la oración, si bien algunos reciben el carisma de convertir esa dimensión en el sentido total de su biografía, de su proyecto de vida, haciendo presente en el seno de la Iglesia un aspecto esencial de su propia identidad (la alabanza y adoración que provienen de la profunda experiencia del amor de un Dios cuya esencia es Amar). Una iglesia concreta debe sentir como una carencia o como una insuficiencia el hecho de que no exista ningún monasterio contemplativo en su seno.

Lo mismo podemos decir del carisma *ad gentes*: hay hombres y mujeres (ordenados, laicos o consagrados) que convierten en proyecto de vida su presencia como testigos del Evangelio en ámbitos o regiones en las que el Evangelio no está presente. Ese compromiso per-

sonal implica una salida efectiva, una distancia, el acceso a periferias en las que se rompe la vida habitual de los cristianos. Sin la salida efectiva, sin un éxodo real, la universalidad carecería de concreción y la misionariedad quedaría en lo genérico. Esto se puede realizar (como pedía Pío XII en *Fidei Domum* a los presbíteros) por un tiempo determinado. Esa modalidad está legitimada, como indicábamos. Pero no puede ocultar el carácter paradigmático de quien se compromete por toda la vida. Desde ese nivel el carisma de la misión *ad gentes* actuará como interpelación (o instancia profética) para su iglesia de origen y a la vez en signo vivo de la comunión entre las iglesias.

## **6. En la reconfiguración de la misión *ad gentes*: el carisma de las Obras Misionales Pontificias**

La profundización teológica, el carácter mundial de la Iglesia, la consolidación de la *communio ecclesiarum*, las coordenadas de una civilización globalizada y multicultural, las amenazas que penden sobre la familia humana en su conjunto, el encuentro entre las religiones y la necesidad de un diálogo sincero y cordial, la persistencia de las exclusiones y de la pobreza... constituyen un conjunto de factores que obligan a modular la misión *ad gentes*. Esta, evidentemente, ha sostenido la animación y la espiritualidad misionera de los últimos siglos desde una de sus figuras. Ahora bien, la misión *ad gentes* es una melodía que debe ser interpretada de modo acorde a las necesidades de cada época histórica. En la transición actual hay que estar atentos especialmente al peligro de que se difumine el sentido genuino que la misión *ad gentes* ha ocupado en la historia. La prioridad que se otorga a la misión podría perder la concreción de “las misiones”, pero en tal caso perdería aliento y dinamismo.

Es significativa la evolución de las metáforas mediante las cuales se expresa gráfica y emocionalmente el compromiso misionero. En el paradigma anterior era habitual hablar de expansión, de conquista, de difusión, de civilización. Recientemente se privilegia otro tipo de lenguaje más plural: diálogo interreligioso, diálogo profético, inculturación, opción preferencial por los pobres, defensa de la vida y de la integridad de la creación, misión en seis continentes, reconciliación, misión *en retour* o *from everywhere to everywhere*, *misión inter gentes*. Cada uno de estos aspectos tiene su importancia y debe ser respetado y reconocido. Observando esta variedad, y de cara a evitar unilateralidades o reduccionismos, ya Pablo VI reconoció en *Evan-*



*gellii Nuntiandi* que la evangelización es una realidad compleja y progresiva; advertía no obstante que nunca puede faltar el anuncio explícito de Jesucristo y la aspiración a llegar hasta los confines del mundo (cf. Hc 1:8).

En *Redemptoris Missio*, Juan Pablo II reconoció que la misión de la Iglesia estaba todavía en sus comienzos. Se había producido un trastrocamiento tal de situaciones que los viejos conceptos no eran capaces de asumir la variedad de nuevas situaciones.

Los cambios culturales son tan intensos que hay que enriquecer la teoría y la praxis de la actividad misionera. Ello sólo se puede hacer reivindicando la centralidad de la misión *ad gentes*. Desde esta conciencia de encrucijada la encíclica tenía como objetivo honrar y actualizar *Ad Gentes* en su 25 aniversario. Intenta conciliar dos afirmaciones que no siempre se conjugan armoniosamente: a) hay que reconocer nuevos escenarios y situaciones misioneras (desde movimientos sociales a medios de comunicación), entre las cuales no se deben descuidar las fronteras geográficas; b) la misión *ad gentes* debe ser colocada en el centro de las preocupaciones de la Iglesia, como criterio de la misionariedad de la Iglesia entera.

El papa Francisco, consciente de la encrucijada de nuestra época, recoge la misma interpelación en EG 15, que cita y asume el intento de *Redemptoris Missio* como punto de referencia del Mes Extraordinario. Ha puesto en el centro de sus intereses las periferias de diverso tipo y la necesidad del primer anuncio a destinatarios diversos. En este horizonte conservan todo su relieve las periferias geográficas y quienes no han escuchado el anuncio del Evangelio o desconocen a Jesucristo (de ahí el sentido de sus “viajes misioneros”, con clara opción por Asia).

Este escenario, novedoso y siempre cambiante, sigue necesitando el carisma de las Obras Misionales Pontificias. Su aportación es esencial dado lo que está en juego en este periodo de transición. La animación misionera (basada en la formación y en la espiritualidad) debe formar parte de los ministerios esenciales de la vida eclesial: para hacer presente que la participación en la misión *ad gentes* y en la evangelización del mundo es criterio irrenunciable de eclesialidad; desde este criterio la pastoral entera podrá recibir un nuevo dinamismo y la sensibilidad eclesial una nueva vitalidad. La misión rejuvenece y da esperanza a la Iglesia, sobre todo cuando se experimenta la *communio ecclesiarum* en una Iglesia mundial y se descubren sus enormes potencialidades evangelizadoras.



Las Obras Misionales Pontificias, desde una visión unitaria de la misión, deben seguir actuando como estímulo de la misión *ad gentes*. Insertándose cada vez más en las iglesias locales, deberán coordinar los distintos cauces misioneros en conexión con las Conferencias Episcopales, fomentar la reflexión misionológica y su presencia en los distintos tratados teológicos, hacer viva la realidad de los misioneros *ad gentes* y *ad vitam*. La Iglesia no puede prescindir de esta instancia profética. En ello está en juego el futuro y la esperanza de la Iglesia y de cada una de las iglesias.



# Salvation in Christ, the Church, and Other Religions in Light of Vatican II\*

❖ FABRIZIO MERONI

“Scitis autem dico, non per fidem,  
sed per amorem.  
Scitis dico, non ex credulitate,  
sed ex operatione”<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this essay is to deepen our understanding of the salvific and providential openness towards the believers of other Religions, and their salvation in Christ with the sacramental mediation of his Church. A close reading of *Lumen Gentium* (LG) and other crucial Second Vatican Council documents can help us better grasp what salvation in Christ and the theology of the Church entail in terms of the Trinitarian origins; the historical relation of the Church to the world as the new People of God; and her eschatological fulfillment as the heavenly Jerusalem. In addition, from a hermeneutical perspective which takes the ecclesiology of LG into account, we feel confident that the nuptial sacramentality of the Paschal creation of the Church, her spousal form as body and bride of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, her head and spouse, can offer us greater theological understanding leading to a deeper contemplation of other Religions and their members in God’s plan of creation and salvation. It would be against the nature of a magisterial document to suggest an exhaustive exposition of the theme here considered. The intrinsic

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\* An earlier version of this essay, titled “Christ’s Salvation, Church and Other Religions in Light of Vatican II”, was published in F. MERONI (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church. 1916 – October 31 – 2016*, Aracne, Canterano (Rome) 2017, 197-225. The essay has been included in this volume with the authorization of the publishing house.

<sup>1</sup> “I assure you that it is not by faith that you will come to know him, but by love; not by mere conviction but by action”: GREGORY THE GREAT, *Homily on the Gospels*, Homily 14, PL 76, 1129B.

tension and unfinished nature of the Church's understanding of the revealed Truth according to the Tradition, requires further explanations, prayer, faithfulness and theological research.<sup>2</sup> However, this essay seeks to be a contribution to the wider understanding of the salvific and inclusive nature to other Religions and their salvation in Christ. Aware of the absence of any nuptial unifying category in LG as well as in the other conciliar documents, we argue that the sacramental necessity of the Church for the salvation of all humanity, for the baptized and unbaptized alike, points to the ecclesial form of our communion with God as nuptial and fruitful for everyone to be saved and eschatologically transfigured for eternal life.

## 2. That All May Be Saved

Human salvation, and Christ's Paschal mystery within their cosmological and eschatological dimensions, are always at stake when we are asked to understand and inquire into the mystery of the Church and her relationship with other Religions (LG 13). The documents from the Second Vatican Council, especially *Lumen Gentium* (LG), *Ad Gentes* (AG), *Nostra Aetate* (NA) and *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), providentially affirm the possibility of eternal salvation of the members of other Religions. The seeds of religious truth, good and beauty can be found here as the providential graceful openness and preparation to the Christian Gospel.<sup>3</sup> The dogmatic Constitution on the Church clearly states that all human beings, whether they be baptized or unbaptized, according to God's creation and redemption, belong and are ordered in different ways and degrees to his Son's Church. Therefore, the soteriological and eschatological horizon of our discussion becomes vividly relevant so that all of the ecclesiological considerations we are about to make need to be measured and challenged by the unique and eternal desire of God to save all humanity and the world he freely created out of his Trinitarian love (1Tim 2:3-4; Jn 11:51-52, 12:32; 1Jn 2:2). In the Church, ful-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. LAKELAND, "Lumen Gentium: The Unfinished Business", *New Blackfriars*, vol. 90, n. 1026, 2009, 146-162, 153.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Vatican City, 19 May 1991, n. 15. Hereafter DP. Cf. J.A. DINOIA, *The Diversity of Religions*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 1992, 27.

fillment of God's creation and Jesus Christ's redemption reveal their correspondence and providential convergence in the Paschal mystery of the crucified and risen Son of God. "Salvation embraces all creation. It makes the unity of the supernatural order coextensive with the unity of the universe."<sup>4</sup>

The documents *Lumen Gentium* (LG 14) and *Ad Gentes* (AG 7) uphold the need of the Christian faith of the Catholic Church and of the baptism for all to be saved (Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his body and Bride and our sacramental participation in the Paschal mystery are essential for everyone, for Christian (baptized) and non-Christian (unbaptized), to come to the fullness of life, to his eternal salvation.<sup>5</sup>

In his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990), John Paul II reaffirms this Catholic doctrine tradition stating the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for this salvation (RM 9, 55). "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6), whose divine and prior initiative stirs and makes our salvific faith possible (Jn 3:16-17, 10:28-29; Rom 8:3-4; Gal 4:4-7; 1Jn 4:10). Theological charity, qualifying the soteriological efficacious quality of Christian faith, represents the working activity of a living faith in Christ and the transforming grace of his Paschal gift, the Holy Spirit. Full incorporation by baptism and Catholic faith are not ipso facto a guarantee of eternal salvation for the Catholic faithful as well (LG 14). Instead, it becomes a saving faith, if it is informed by charity, and works as a bodily dimension of transfiguring Love (Gal 5:6; Rom 1:17; 2:13; Jm 2:26; Catechism of the Catholic Church 1814-1816).

The radical change from a pessimistic to an optimistic soteriology in the Church's understanding of the salvation of non-Christians requires us to unfold how the essential need of Church, faith and baptism is to be understood (DP 14, 15). However, if we would like to understand how LG treats this topic, we need to take into consid-

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<sup>4</sup> C. JACOBS-VANDEGEER, "The Unity of Salvation: Divine Missions, the Church, and World Religions", *Theological Studies*, vol. 75, n. 2, June 2014, 260-283, 280.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. COLZANI, "Universalità della salvezza e mediazione sacramentale", *Euntes Docete*, vol. 61, n. 2, 2008, 95-115; S. BULLIVANT, "Sine Culpa? Vatican II and Inculpable Ignorance", *Theological Studies*, vol. 72, n. 1, March 2011, 70-86, 70.

eration GS as well, because of its theological understanding of history and the world within God's plan of salvation. There we can find the crucial Christological and anthropological elements for the Church-world relationship, in GS 22:

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, 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.

Here, in GS 22, we do not find a reference to other Religions when it presents the central role of the Paschal mystery and the idea of its participation for those who do not belong to the pilgrim Church. The human problem of suffering and death within the great mysteries of human life and the suffering of Christ represent the anthropological context for the salvation of all as taught by GS 22. Therefore, the men and women who are dealing with the essential quest for meaning in their life and death, are open to religious experience which can take, for many – though not for all –, the historical form of their own religion practiced for the sake of the fullness of their human existence.

Salvation thus takes place by incorporation through baptism into the Paschal mystery whose first fruit of the new Creation is the Church (Pentecost in Ac 1) and her eschatological fulfilment (Ef 2; Rev 19 and 21). The soteriological centrality of the Paschal mystery as historical fulfilment and eschatological fullness of Jesus Christ's divine Incarnation brings to its completion God's Creation and its anthropological disclosure in the nuptial<sup>6</sup> image of man and woman, their original unity and divine vocation to be one and to be

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<sup>6</sup>Our understanding of the nuptial or spousal meaning and character of all reality (man and woman, human body, love, sexual difference, etc.) refers to and is founded upon John Paul II's anthropology, specifically articulated in JOHN PAUL II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, Pauline, Boston, MA 2006. Cf. A. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 2005; M. OUELLET, *Divine Likeness. Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, 2006; C. ANDERSON, J. GRANADOS, *Called to Love*, Doubleday, New York 2009.

fruitful. The humanity that Christ made his own by uniting himself with all human beings is taken to its fulfilment in the Paschal mystery by dying to its male headship, rising to the nuptial communion with the Church, his Bride, his female and generating body through the seed of the Holy Spirit. As Joseph Ratzinger states in *The Ecclesiology of the Constitution Lumen Gentium*, in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, “God finds for himself a bride for the Son, the one bride who is the one Church.”<sup>7</sup> The nuptial relation, therefore, safeguards the real unity between Christ and the Church without substitution as a consequence of this communion. No one, be it Christian, member of other Religions or human being can be saved outside the Paschal mystery of Christ, the new Adam (Rom 5:12-21; 1Cor 15:21-22.45), and the nuptial communion of his pilgrim Church, predestined from the outset of Creation to be, in Eve-Mary, the glorious Bride, spousal of the new Jerusalem for all peoples (Ef 5:21-33; Rev 12:17; 19:7; 21:2.9; 22:17). The Paschal grace works in the hearts of men and women of good will to fulfil their ultimate divine vocation and make them one with the crucified and risen Lord in his Church. The way it works is invisible, and mysteriously known to God alone. This grace pertains to the sacramental nuptial communion between Christ and his Church, and is active in all men and women’s religious belonging.

The efficacious invisibility of this Paschal work of the risen Lord reaches all humanity for the sake of its salvation in the liturgical and missionary work of the Church. The first Constitution and document to be approved by the Council Fathers (November 22, 1963), *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), establishes the foundational background for the Church living experience of her sacramental instrumentality and of her vicarious form on behalf of all humanity. As Joseph Ratzinger continues, “the Church derives from adoration, from the task of glorifying God. Ecclesiology, of its nature, has to do with liturgy.”<sup>8</sup> The Church, therefore, is the liturgical community of those marked by God’s Word and Sacraments for the salvation of all humanity in the only mediation of Jesus Christ: on earth still as a pilgrim sacramental interceding com-

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<sup>7</sup> J. RATZINGER, *The Ecclesiology of the Constitution Lumen Gentium*, in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA 2005, 134.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.



munity of God's People, in heaven as the glorious dwelling place of God with all peoples. SC 2 presents the Eucharistic Church in her divine and human reality centered in the redemption of Jesus Christ for all humanity as the liturgical and eschatological outset of her nature in history and of her relationship with all peoples and their other Religions.

While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ, at the same time it marvelously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd (SC 2).

Liturgical worship, Eucharist on her earthly pilgrimage and adoration in heaven, constitute and reveal the mission of the Church as her essential nature (LG 11). By the attraction of her being lifted up on the Cross with her Spouse and not by proselytism or ecclesiastical strategies, the Church relates herself to her baptized and unbaptized children in their religious experience (LG 3, 48). "The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows *by 'attraction'*: just as Christ 'draws all 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>9</sup> The liturgy is the essence of her mission and her priority.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, her mission in and with the world unfolds her liturgical and nuptial unity with Christ her Head and Spouse. The Church's relation to her risen Lord and to the world has always been as the One crucified, experienced and revealed in the movement of the Eucharistic attraction, because of divine love, which is the only cause, reality and essence of God's cre-

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<sup>9</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the Eucharist inaugurating the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops*, 13 May 2007, Aparecida Brazil. Cf. V GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE BISHOPS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, *Concluding Document*, Aparecida Brazil, 13-31 May 2007, n. 159; FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, n. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. C. JACOBS-VANDEGEER, "The Unity of Salvation", 280.

ation and redemption. As such, divine love can only attract by way of self-giving, a self-emptying and a self-receiving for the sake of the salvation and glory of the O/other.

The liturgical context sets the right eschatological horizon in our history to better understand how God's grace works for the salvation of all humanity, through the sacramental means and the Eucharistic form of his Church related to all human beings' salvation and concrete religious experience in and through their other Religions. The Liturgy of the Church is clearly understood as the work of Christ, the only Mediator between God and Man (1Tim 2:5; LG 14, 50) for the salvation of all humankind for the perfect glory of God, his Father. In Christ's death and resurrection, the Church stands as the first fruit of the new reborn humanity, and the historical instrument and form of the Holy Spirit to achieve, in both visible and invisible ways, the salvation of all human beings. The Word of God, liturgically sacrificed in the Eucharist and sung in the Divine Office, is offered to the Church as her daily unceasing intercession for the salvation of all humanity in communion with her divine Lord, the incarnate author of the universal hymn of praise to God the Father in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ prays for us, in us and is prayed by us for the universal salvation: he is the High priest of the New and Eternal Covenant (SC 7, 83-88).

The unity of the whole human race in him, which began with the incarnation, must be understood to be strengthened and perfected through the crucifixion, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Finally, it will be consummated when the human beings reach 'the halls of heaven'. This picture of Christ as the Cosmic Choirmaster serves brilliantly to symbolize the union in him of all the baptized and non-baptized alike. Long before they might become aware of this, even those who have never heard his name are mysteriously but, through grace, truly in the hands of Christ the Choirmaster of the world. The redemption may be depicted as a united musical engagement. Though its powerful image of Christ the universal Choirmaster and/or Cantor, the Council encourages those who pray and/or sung the Divine Office to give themselves wholeheartedly to two projects: praising God and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. Through its first document, Vatican II shows its openness to the entire human race and leaves us once again with the question:

what should Christians, and especially those devoted to the Divine Office, believe and think about the divine plan of salvation for all human beings?<sup>11</sup>

### 3. The Unity of Humankind

In LG 13 the ontological unity of all human beings in their proper nature as human and their call is clearly stated. From the very beginning of Creation, to be one as the unique and united People of God out of different peoples and nations in Christ the Head through and as a Church, the body and Spouse of his Son.<sup>12</sup> This anthropological unity is theologically prefigured and historically unfolded by God the Father in creating the humanity (man and woman) for the sake of being one as Church (the New Eve) beginning with the “first just man” (*Ecclesia ab Adam, ab Abel* in LG 2). The concept of the natural created unity of all humankind belongs to the very essence of the Christian faith and represents the foundation for the Catholic doctrine of other Religions.<sup>13</sup>

All men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God’s will may be fulfilled. In the beginning God made human nature one and decreed that all His children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one (Jn 11:52). It was for this purpose that God sent His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things (Ef 1:2), that He might be teacher, king and priest of all, the head of the new and universal people of the sons of God. For this too God sent the Spirit of His Son as Lord and Life-giver. (LG 13).

Since Creation, all human beings are one in origin and final destiny.<sup>14</sup> In their original unity as man and woman they belong to

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<sup>11</sup> G. O’COLLINS, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. E.T. GROPPE, “Revisiting Vatican II’s Theology of the People of God after forty-five years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue”, *Theological Studies*, vol. 72, n. 3, 2001, 586-619, 614.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. M. RUOKANEN, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, E. J. Brill, Leiden-New York-Koln 1992, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 56.

God's People as Eve-Mary-the Church belong to Christ-New Adam-Head and Spouse. Jesus Christ, the Logos of God the Father, is actively mediating the creation of all things within which man and woman are molded in the image of God (2Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; Gen 1:27). In his Paschal mystery his Incarnation is revealed in terms of nuptial unity with the entire humanity as the Church, his Body and Bride (Jn 1:1-3, 10; Ac 17:26; Ef 1:1-14, 2:11-22, 5:21-33; Col 1:15-20; 1Cor 8:6, 15:28; Heb 1:2; Rev 19:6-9, 21). By assuming the created image of man and woman in his incarnation and Paschal nuptiality with the Church, the Son of God, the eternal icon of the Father, makes us share the communion of divine life without contradiction and without dissolving our natural consistency in a false mysticism (cf. AL 63, Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, March 19, 2016). The origin and destiny of all human beings, both in their original innocence and in their actual historical state of sin and redemption in Jesus Christ (AG 3), are one and unique for each man and woman, for all humankind. Human life and the created world are seen as a journey from God and to God (Jn 13:3). Man and woman in their anthropological nuptiality come to unfold the central place in which, thanks to their male and female body, the image of God is taken to its fulfilment for the fullness of human life, for the original unity of all humankind and for the glory of God, revealing the nuptial relationship between God and the world, Christ and the Church through the sacramental reality of the People of God (LG 9-17), Head and Body (LG 7, 52; RM 18), Groom and Bride (LG 6, 9; RM 9).

This unique friendship between a man and a woman acquires an all-encompassing character only within the conjugal union. Precisely as all-encompassing, this union is also exclusive, faithful and open to new life. It shares everything in constant mutual respect. The Second Vatican Council echoed this by stating that “such a love, bringing together the human and the divine, leads the partners to a free and mutual self-giving, experienced in tenderness and action, and permeating their entire lives” (AL 125).

In LG, within the ecclesiological horizon of the baptismal People of God, and bringing together the Old and the New People of God, chapter 2 affirms the common origins, vocation and predestination of all humanity to become the Church of Christ. The People of God

and the Church, whose only Head is Jesus Christ (LG 7, 9, 13, 17), are used as synonymous in the documents of the Second Vatican Council<sup>15</sup> avoiding any contraposition between them, both highlighting the sacramental dimension of the People of God, on the one hand, and the biblical and historical character of the Church, on the other.<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, the Church has been designated a ‘people’ in the New Testament texts (2Cor 6:16; Rom 9:25-26; Tit 2:14; 1Pet 2:9-10; Ac 15:14).<sup>17</sup> As the universal sacrament of salvation (LG 1, 9, 48; AG 1; GS 45), and in order to grow from being the sacramental seed and beginning of God’s Kingdom on earth (LG 5) to her fullness in heaven (LG 48-51; AG 9; GS 40) the Church unites all peoples as one in the communion with God and among themselves (LG 1). Being the universal sacrament, the Church stands as visible and efficacious sign and instrument of the whole work that God is accomplishing in the world. The Church is God’s work “reconciling the world to himself” (2Cor 5:18), and making her the Paschal and eschatological fruit, the visible sign and efficacious means for the salvation of all humankind in one new people. The essence of the Church resides in her sacramental communion with God and unity among all men and women “By the power of the Holy Spirit the Church is the faithful spouse of her Lord and will never fail to be the sign of salvation in the world” (GS 43). Through the Church, the world should be filled with the Spirit of Christ who increasingly illuminates the whole human society with his saving light (LG 36). Her sacramentality is universal because she is related to the salvation and communion with God of all peoples, both baptized and non-baptized, belonging to the New People of God, to the Old People (Jews) and to men and women of other Religions or non-believers. Jesus Christ is the Head, the only Savior and Redeemer of the entire human race (LG 1-8, 16, 17; SC 83; AG 1-9; GS 22). Christ, as the invisible image of God, in his Cross, restores the unity of humanity and by overcoming the fragmentation of sin, he reconciles man with God, with himself, with his fellow hu-

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. F. A. SULLIVAN, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, Paulist Press, New York 1992, 153.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. R. RYMARZ, “The New Evangelization in an Ecclesiological Context”, *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. 52, n. 5, 2011, 772-784, 773.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. E.T. GROPE, “Revisiting Vatican II’s Theology of the People of God after forty-five years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue”, 594.

mans and with the entire creation. The unity given by Christ's grace in our redemptive filial adoption reveals the ultimate gratuity and unmerited love of all creation in its unity in and through the eternal Logos.<sup>18</sup> His divine presence and grace embrace everyone and draw all peoples to the Father through himself in the personal communion of the Church.

Given to this unity in origins and destiny, which is positively grounded by NAE (1, 5) and GS (12, 22, 24, 29, 34, 41, 52 and 68) on being created in the image of God, all people are ordered, oriented, destined and called to become full members of the Church (LG 11, 13, 16). God's image grounds and defines the dignity and equality of all human beings (NA 5; AG 12). This dignity consists of living our existence according to a law written by God in our human heart upon which all will be judged (Rom 1:19-21; 2:13-16). Conscience is the most intimate core and sanctuary where men and women are alone with God, whose voice echoes in their inmost being (GS 16). The religious openness of the human heart searches the meaning of human existence, life and death, suffering and injustice, illness and pleasure, about the mystery of God and the world. All these existential questions are common to all human beings (GS 3, 4, 10, 18, 21, 22) and lies at the root of all religious traditions (NA 1). "The voice of the Creator in the depth of human conscience is not limited to strictly moral questions, but conscience also touches the question of religious truth".<sup>19</sup>

Along the history of salvation toward its eschatological fulfilment, all human beings, in different degrees, are ordained to the Church in a way, as described by LG 13-17, of a concentric centripetal movement toward God, through Christ in the Spirit (LG 4, 48). By his Incarnation, Christ unveils the full meaning of our humanity (GS 22) answering all religious questions of human heart (GS 41) and revealing the uniqueness of man and woman as the only creature willed and created for its own sake, and fulfilled in its own self-giving. The idea of the growth of the humankind towards

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. P. O'CALLAGHAN, "Cristo revela el hombre al propio hombre", *Scripta Theologica*, vol. 41, n. 1, 2009, 85-111, 105; A. WALKER, "The Original Best: The 'Coextensiveness' of Being and Love in Light of Gaudium et Spes", 22, *Communio*, vol. 39, n. 1, Spring-Summer 2012, 49-65, 59.

<sup>19</sup> M. RUOKANEN, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 57.



its unity is an essential part of the theological understanding of the created world in the Vatican II documents.<sup>20</sup> In a very ordered manner, Catholics, Christians, Jews (LG 16; NA 4), Muslims (LG 16; NA 3) and all peoples of other Religions are called and drawn to God in the ecclesial form of the catholic unity (LG 16). For the first time in history, an Ecumenical Council (LG 16) speaks positively of Muslims, their monotheistic and Abrahamic faith, worship and hope in God our Creator. NA 2, in the line of human existential questions for meaning rooted in our heart, will add also a positive evaluation of the religious experience of Hinduism and Buddhism.

All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it. And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation (LG 13).

In Christ, whose holy name has a universal soteriological and unique role (Ac 4:12), all human beings find the fullness of their life, the truth and the way of everything which is good and true, holy and graceful in their Religions (NA 2; GS 95). In talking about the human family in its cultural and scientific undertakings for a world more human, GS 57 adds beauty to the pairing of truth and goodness. While the fullness of God's salvific Revelation is to be found in Jesus Christ, those who live and belong to other Religions, beyond the visible boundaries of his Church, are not left in any meaningless soteriological emptiness or insignificant call and relation to the truth and its life in Christ (RM 28, 29). God's reconciliation in Christ of all human beings happens through, in and for the ecclesial sacramental mediation (2Cor 5:18-19 cited in the footnote of NA 2). The Church, therefore, is not only instrumental, or just the fullness of means for the salvation of all humankind. As nuptial unity with God through Christ, she is also the existential, personal and eschatological form of being one with God and with all human beings.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. R. KERESZTY, "Catholicity and the Mission of the Church", *Communio*, vol. 39, n. 1, Spring-Summer 2012, 72.



Yet the Church, which has received from the Lord Jesus the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom “is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that Kingdom.” At the same time the Church “slowly grows to maturity (and) longs for the completed Kingdom” (LG 5). Thus “the Kingdom is inseparable from the Church, because both are inseparable from the person and work of Jesus himself... It is therefore not possible to separate the Church from the Kingdom as if the first belonged exclusively to the imperfect realm of history, while the second would be the perfect eschatological fulfillment of the divine plan of salvation” (DP 34).

This is the theological meaning of her being the universal sacrament, the graceful personal and communal transfiguration, of all peoples in the one New People of God. Our salvation, as reconciling recapitulation in Christ of all realities, is performed and achieved by God who is pleased to call men and women to share his divine life (AG 3). Not just singly, apart from any mutual bond, but rather God the Father wishes to mold all human beings, baptized and unbaptized, into a people in which his children, once scattered, might be gathered together (cf. Jn 11:52), according to LG 13 and AG 2. In virtue of her being an efficacious sign of the unity of all humanity in Christ, the Church is a visible and structured society (LG 8; GS 40, 44). The Logos by his Incarnation, entering the world, assumes our historical humanity into himself by the way of recapitulating the entire creation in his own Paschal redemption (GS 38, 45; AG 3).

Finally, according to LG (13, 16), the Catholic faithful, catechumens and other Christians belong (*pertinent*) to the new people of God in varying ways by incorporation through baptism. Instead, the unbaptized, and all those who do not belong to God's people, are called, ordained (*ordinantur ad*) and oriented to it in a very concentric centripetal soteriological movement of attraction from and toward God in Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup>

The publication of LG (November 21, 1964) placed the Jewish people in the second group of those who are called and ordained, while eleven months later, NA 4 (October 28, 1965), still referring

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. E.T. GROPPE, “Revisiting Vatican II’s Theology of the People of God after forty-five years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue”, 601.

to Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom 11:17-24), "describes the church's relation to the Jewish people in terms that can support the position that Jews do in fact belong (*pertinent*) to the people of God".<sup>23</sup>

To the Church, as the sacrament in which the Kingdom of God is present "in mystery", are related or oriented (*ordinantur*) (LG 16) the members of other religious traditions who, inasmuch as they respond to God's calling as perceived by their conscience, are saved in Jesus Christ and thus already share in some way in the reality which is signified by the Kingdom. The Church's mission is to foster "the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ" (Rev 11:15), at whose service she is placed. Part of her role consists in recognizing that the inchoate reality of this Kingdom can be found also beyond the confines of the Church, for example in the hearts of the followers of other religious traditions, insofar as they live evangelical values and are open to the action of the Spirit. It must be remembered nevertheless that this is indeed an inchoate reality, which needs to find completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet realized fully only in the world to come (DP 35).

#### 4. The Church: Fulness of Form and Means for Our Salvation

The LG does not elaborate any spousal understanding of the relationship between the Catholic Church and other Religions in the filial vocation and nuptial destiny of their members. However, we can affirm that, by placing the Paschal mystery at the core of universal salvation as the fullness of God's self-revelation, the real unity of the universal human community and of each person in Christ from creation to its fulfilment in the eschatological Kingdom (Ef 1:3-14 and Col 1:12-23; RM 5, 10), can be achieved only in and through the Church as the ecclesial form, body and bride of Jesus Christ, Head and risen Spouse. Within the Paschal mystery (GS 22) we come to understand the unity of all humanity in its created origins, in its eschatological destiny and its historical pilgrimage as New People of God, Church of Christ as seed and beginning of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 606, 618.

God's Kingdom (LG 5). The crucial and essential place of the Paschal mystery as the heart of the created world establishes, a very concrete, given and unequivocal form for all – Christians and other Religions' members – to be related and associated to Jesus Christ and his Church. The absoluteness of Christian Revelation mirrored in the Catholicity of Christ's Church relates to the work of Christ's Spirit in the universe thanks to the very fact that the fulfilling, definitive and unsurpassable character of the Paschal Event entails an intrinsic positive freedom from limits, a self-gift of God to the world by the way of a saving crowing of all things He created. Other Religions and God's grace working in and through them are always related, in the way of being ordained to their Paschal fullness, in the event of the Jesus Christ, Head and Body, Spouse and Bride.<sup>24</sup> As the eschatologically redeemed humanity the Church in her unique spousal identity as the woman, from the very beginning she has been created to be in and through Mary, the new Eve mother of all living human beings, the ecclesial body-bride of her risen Lord in the attractive burning love of the Spirit. Everyone, either belonging through baptism and faith to the Church or as a member of other Religions, is predestined to be saved in the form of the risen Lord, and his Paschal nuptial relationship with the redeemed humanity, the new Jerusalem, the Church, who in heaven corresponds to the eschatological fulfilment of God's Kingdom (LG 48).

The fullness of means found in the Catholic Church (LG 14; UR 3) (Divine Scriptures, Sacraments and Charity) for the sake of communicating the fullness of salvation and revelation of life and truth of Jesus Christ to all humanity, according to Vatican II (LG 13-17 and GS 22, 24), does not reduce the Church to a simple instrument for universal salvation. The Church does not merely offer the means for our salvation, as if it had been once achieved, she could be left behind and the saved humanity could move forward and meet the risen Christ beyond her and without her. In the Eucharist, the sacramental memorial of Christ's Paschal mystery, the Church is generated as body and bride revealing the eschatological fullness of the image of God by which all human beings are marked.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, "The Absoluteness of Christianity and the Catholicity of the Church", *Communio*, vol. 40, n. 1, Spring 2013, 132-160, 133.

The *communio*-ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council “is in its inmost nature a Eucharistic ecclesiology”.<sup>25</sup> By the Eucharistic sacrifice, she unfolds and realizes for all baptized and unbaptized men and women, the real meaning of their humanity, bodies, sexual difference and anthropological fruitfulness. Filiality, nuptiality and fruitfulness are intrinsically meant for everyone in order to achieve salvation, as fullness of life and love in God within his spousal communion which is the Church.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the Eucharist is not mentioned in LG and AG as one of the three necessary elements for our salvation in Christ, because it is the form of the Church, as Christ’s ecclesial body wherein men and women are defined as members of the Eucharistic communion in order to be offered as the Church Bride for the holy, living and acceptable sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2).<sup>27</sup> This Eucharistic form of the Church as fulfillment of the redeemed humanity reveals, at the anthropological level for all human beings, the meaning of their human body sexually differentiated and its fruitfulness in the gift of self (AL 74, 75, 151). In the universal human experience of conjugal love, all, even the unbaptized, can experience the Eucharistic fruitfulness of their bodies in the irreversible reciprocal gift of their selves in the unity of their marriage and family wherein “one learns that love always bears fruit”,<sup>28</sup> the undivided unity of the couple and the generation of the children.

The Eucharistic form of Christ’s historical life is the living source of the Church’s cosmic liturgy. When he hands over the substance of his life to the Church, Christ communicates a form or a way of life that can include or embrace every aspect of human existence, and ultimately the entire material order of creation. To receive this gift in the Spirit in which it was given is to offer the whole of one’s life in communion with the Son.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> J. RATZINGER, *The Ecclesiology of the Constitution Lumen Gentium*, 131.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. A. LÓPEZ, “‘Blessed is She Who Believed’: Mary’s Faith and the Form of the Christian Existence”, *Communio*, vol. 40, n. 4, Winter 2013, 680-712, 681.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. R. RYMARZ, *The New Evangelization in an Ecclesiological Context*, 777.

<sup>28</sup> J. GRANADOS, “The Liturgy: Presence of a New Body, Source of a Fulfilled Time”, *Communio*, vol. 39, n. 4, Winter 2012, 529-553, 551.

<sup>29</sup> N.J. HEALY Jr., “The Eucharist as the Form of Christian Life”, *Communio*, vol. 39, n. 4, Winter 2012, 587-593, 592.

The family is a school of deeper humanity (GS 52) because it is a school of unifying love and birth<sup>30</sup> (AL 165, 168, 172). In the sacramental dimension of the Christian family the natural marriage and family are taken to their Christological and ecclesiological fulfillment by manifesting to all, baptized and unbaptized, the living presence of Christ the Savior in the world and the relation of the Church to the world (GS 48). “Natural marriage, therefore, is fully understood in the light of its fulfillment in the sacrament of Matrimony: only in contemplating Christ does a person come to know the deepest truth about human relationships” (AL 77).

The family as the domestic Church (LG 11) reveals the Church as a real family of God, on the one hand, while on the other, the spousal dimension of all humanity in its unity and in the bodily individuality of each man and woman. As the universal sacrament of human salvation in Jesus Christ, the Church is the only and unique communal form of all human beings in their eschatological creation and redemption by the union with God (LG 1, 9, 48, 49; AG 1; GS 45). In an invisible manner, yet real and efficacious, she gives form to the new eschatological identity of those redeemed, either coming from the pilgrim earthly historical Church or unbaptized members of other Religions. The Church, in the glorified Virgin Mary (LG 63-65 and 68), Mother of the Church and Bride of the crucified and risen Lamb, shapes and places, through the Holy Spirit, all saved reborn children of God (Jn 3:1-21; Rm 6:1-14; Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12, 21:2-3.9-10), in the only glorious Jerusalem coming down from heaven as the Bride of Christ, dwelling place of God with humanity and Temple of the Spirit (SC 2; LG 4).

The centrality of the Paschal mystery in its nuptial relationship Christ-Church, the unity in origins and destiny of all human beings as the family of God, the universal anthropological character of the human sexual difference as image of God, require from us an understanding of the relationship between the Church and the other Religions in terms of the eschatological nuptial mystery. Indeed, the followers of other Religions are still men and women called to unifying conjugal love, to form families and communities and give birth to children according to their proper scriptures, cultic rites and

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. D.S. CRAWFORD, “Family and the Identity of the Person”, *Communio*, vol. 39, n. 1, Spring-Summer 2012, 169-185, 182.

moral precepts. Through the anthropological centrality of man and woman, the Church is the entire creation saved and the glorification of God through the Paschal transfiguration of the world. The Church is more than the ecclesial instrument of and for our salvation: she is the nuptial destiny and eschatological goal of God's creation since the very beginning of time. Besides being an efficacious instrument, the Church is the original and concluded bodily form of all created matter called to be personally and fruitfully saved and glorified in us as Christ's Bride. All matter wishes to become human body so as to be offered in freedom, love and fruitfulness for the glory of its Creator through the mediation of human spiritual body (Phil 3:20-21).<sup>31</sup> Thus, the anthropological and universal sexual difference and its nuptial reality unfold the real meaning of matter and living spirit explicitly signified in the sacrament of marriage as the foundation of the family and the Church from creation. God entrusts the human family with the divine task to make the world a domestic community in which everyone should love and be loved as brothers and sisters, since all are, through the mediation of their earthly parents, real children of God, the Father (AL 183, 188, 194, 276, 315). "Begetting and raising children, for its part, mirrors God's creative work" (AL 29).

Furthermore, "if we recognize the possibility for people outside of the Church to love with the habit of charity, then we acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and their attainment of the divine nature".<sup>32</sup> Faith as knowledge of God's self-disclosure and self-communication, even when he cannot be believed and professed in the fullness of Christian revelation as Trinitarian and Incarnated God, can be experienced and believed in and through a specific form of love, which is unifying, fruitful and self-giving. That experience is normally available to all men and women in their nuptial filiality and sexual difference oriented to marriage, especially monogamous and indissoluble, marriage (GS 47-52). In this way the Church is not only a final eschatological causality for the members of other Religions, but also the instrumental efficient and formal causality for the salvation of all, be they baptized and or unbaptized.<sup>33</sup> "Non-

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. R. KERESZTY, "Catholicity and the Mission of the Church", 78.

<sup>32</sup> C. JACOBS-VANDEGEER, "The Unity of Salvation", 274.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 276, 281.



Christians are neither formally nor anonymously part of the church, but they participate in the supernatural order of salvation, the constitution of which requires the church".<sup>34</sup> Members of other religious traditions, too, are called and live the ordinary human experience to become one in flesh without destroying their anthropological sexual differentiation and, thanks to it, becoming fruitful. Rites, myths and moral precepts should help them to be concretely loving persons in the serious self-giving of the conjugal relationship or in the virginal ascetical life without any depreciation of their body, of its anthropological sexual difference and of their conjugal love (AL 77).

Beyond the visible boundaries of the Church, but never without or against Christ's Church, the positive response to grace, working throughout the universe of those belonging to other Religions, would stand in their concrete and charitable love in the ordinary and universal experience of marriage and family. Conjugal love, in its universally created primordially, constitutes the universal order of love in the elementary experience of our humanity, in its male and female revelation. Choosing the good of this order entails love for all who benefit from this natural relation of marriage and family, the anthropological foundation of every interpersonal relationship<sup>35</sup> in their nuptial order (spouses, parents, children, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends etc.).

For it is through the body that man perceives an original language, a language he has not created but is nonetheless interior to him, and that allows him to love. Thanks to the recovery of the language of the body he perceives that nature is not external to human action, but is a dimension of human action: man's primordial receptivity. [...] It is through the consideration of the body that human love is open from itself to a transcendent dimension, and God can join together without becoming oppressive, for he does so by the same action in which man and woman join together.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>36</sup> J. GRANADOS, "The Body, the Family and the Order of Love: The Interpretative Key to Vatican II", *Communio*, vol. 39, n. 1, Spring-Summer 2012, 201-226, 208-209.



Marriage as the primordial sacrament<sup>37</sup> efficaciously manifests for all human beings, baptized and unbaptized, the protological and eschatological form of our salvation as graceful fulfilment of our created humanity in the Church as Christ's Bride. Being created for the Lord, we belong to him and become one spirit with him in and through our body, sexually differentiated by its nuptial vocation for love and self-gift (1 Cor 6: 12-20). Creation is a gift, and the capacity of nature to desire what can only be received as a gratuitous gift is a sign of God's generosity.<sup>38</sup> Religious experience that would not become a source of power and loving openness towards the human concreteness, but would persist in the abstractive and subjective movement towards the universal, and would thereby prove that is not yet able to nourish and fruitfully communicate the unconditioned divine Origin.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the unity and fruitfulness experienced in conjugal love, from the very beginning of the world, entails the anthropological openness of all men and women to Christ in concrete and historical ways. Members of other Religions can be, concretely more open, affected and shaped by God's saving grace in the form of the nuptial mystery of Christ and the Church thanks to their human conjugal and family love.

As stated by Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, "the idea of sacramentality suggests that God uses created realities as instruments of grace, that we especially mediate God's love to one another".<sup>40</sup> At the end of our life we will be judged upon love.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the Lord will judge us according to our works of charity (Mt 25: 31-4). Insofar as all peoples, baptized and unbaptized, will become the heavenly Church through salvation by faith informed by charity, more will be asked of Christians, since they received in Scripture and sacraments the fullness of Christ's saving revelation in history.

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<sup>37</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, Pauline, Boston, MA 2006, 19 and 97.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. N.J. HEALY Jr., "Christian Personalism and the Debate over the Nature and Ends of Marriage", *Communio*, vol. 39, n. 1, Spring-Summer 2012, 186-200, 198.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. K. RIESENHUBER, "Understanding Non-Objective Meditation", *Communio*, vol. 15, n. 4, Winter 1988, 451-467, 465.

<sup>40</sup> C. JACOBS-VANDEGEER, "The Unity of Salvation", 277.

<sup>41</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, 2 February 1994, n. 22.

All peoples, bad and good alike, are called to the eschatological nuptial banquet of heaven. The heavenly king, in his loving compassion will not treat us according to our sins nor repay us according to our faults (Ps 103:8-10), but will judge us “according to our wedding garment” for the nuptial banquet of his Son (Mt 22:1-14). Namely, salvation will be freely and gratuitously granted to those who, “dressing the appropriate wedding garment”, will be able to participate in the everlasting nuptial communion between God and humankind. According to Jesus’ parable, those who refused to come to the nuptial banquet and those without the wedding garment will be “condemned”, not the ones who, in ways known only to God (GS 22), accept the invitation and enter the banquet hall nuptially dressed. All sinners, baptized and unbaptized, will be offered nuptial salvation as a pure and unmerited gift provided that our God is good and merciful beyond any human expectation (Mt 5:45; 7:7-12; 20:1-16). Thus, the constitutive sexual differentiation offers to everyone, in his or her earthly pilgrimage, the existential way and supernatural call to God’s love in its nuptial mystery. Jesus Christ’s historical revelation, his Bride the Church and the sacrament of marriage still unveil on earth, the meaning and the graceful fulfilment of our anthropological nuptiality that is offered to everyone as the ordinary place wherein we can love, and become fruitfully one. “The strength of the family lies in its capacity to love and to teach how to love” (AL 53).

Other Religions provide signs and elements of truth and goodness as long as they enable their followers to acquire the wedding garment in the elementary human experience of the sexual difference, unifying love and generative fruitfulness. By dying after a life of fruitful love, God’s grace will configure, form and associate even them to the Bride of his Son, the heavenly Church. Human death, for those who lived out Christ’s love in the providentially possible way to them, and will be the passage and Paschal entrance to God’s Kingdom, the fullness of the sacramental baptism and Christian faith for Christians, and the novelty of supernatural baptism and light of nuptial truth for all the redeemed unbaptized on earth (Rom 6:1-10).

## **5. The Nuptial Mystery of the Church and Other Religions**

As we can see, Vatican II does not illustrate a salvific role to other Religions as sacred institutions or ways of salvation. It does, howev-

er, teach that God's revelation and salvation, in some sense, are universally available and invisibly efficacious for their followers. In addition, Vatican II states the theological predestination, ordination and vocation of all humankind and of individual members of other Religions to the New People of God, the Church of his Son Jesus Christ, in their respective order Catholics, Christians, Jews, Muslims, members of other religions and unbelievers. The Christological centrality of Jesus Christ's Paschal mystery, including the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, along with the movement of invisible but real attraction of all human beings to God through Christ by the Spirit, and the logic of the order and vocation of all human peoples to the Church, facilitate our understanding that other Religions – as human, historical and spiritual institutions of religious scriptures, as well as rites and moral precepts generating culture and societies – need to be theologically analyzed for their anthropological concerns and symbolic openness to the filial, nuptial, and fruitful identity and dignity of all human beings created in God's image.

All men and women are called to love and to the human generative unity in body and spirit. The soteriological meaning and the eschatological value of other Religions should be discerned in terms of how they offer religious instruments, cults and moral aid, to their members for the ongoing process of becoming more capable to love in terms of marriage and family (DP 29, 30). Insofar as faith informed by charity is essential for the salvation of the baptized, fruitful love comes to be the ordinary way for all men and women to be opened to God's saving grace and reach Christ's salvation invisibly. The invisible presence of Christ is patterned, measured and discernable from his historical revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ and his Church (RM 29). In other words, there is an ecclesial character – an orientation toward the Church – in every offer of grace. And since the offer of grace is made to all, all are, by that fact, "related to the church".<sup>42</sup> Since God does not want to save men and women as individuals but he instead redeems a people for himself (LG 9), the communal and social dimension of becoming one people entails and refers, anthropologically speaking, to the conjugal reality of human love in its bodily sexual differentiation

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<sup>42</sup> F.A. SULLIVAN, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, Paulist Press, New York 1992, 155.

and its generative fruitfulness. The Church, both as Body-Spouse and People of God, is involved in the anthropological process of becoming one with Christ for men and women, who love, marry and give birth to children, thanks to their religious belief and hope for the fullness of life.

In LG, it is affirmed that all humankind will be saved as Church, People of God (LG 13). In addition, GS explicitly points out that all human beings will be saved through the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ reaching all of them in invisible ways known only to God. Therefore, we can come to recognize that if there is any salvific role for other Religions referring to their followers does not lie in themselves as institutions. After all, it would be misleading to try to identify from the Christian perspective soteriological practices of other Religions and label them as positively salvific in disconnection with the entire religious tradition of their scriptures, rites and doctrines.<sup>43</sup> We do not have the theological right to judge and sort out their religious practices for the sake of our theological understanding of the relation and comparisons between Christian salvation and their offers of salvation. This implies a disrespect of the peculiarity of each religious tradition, its specific value for the life of its members as a whole and an impoverishment of the cultural richness of the diversity of other Religions for interreligious dialogue. They cannot save unless Jesus Christ saves in, through, and with his Church. Even before accepting the Gospel, members of other Religions in its own cultural and religious scriptures, rites and moral precepts, already enjoy some elements which are good and true, the real presence of God's grace among them. Beyond LG 17, the decree on the missionary activity of the Church (AG 9, 11, 15 and 18) introduces and develops the patristic theme of the seeds of the Word,<sup>44</sup> which are spread invisibly throughout the cosmos, and thus to other religious experiences outside of the Church. These living seeds of the divine Word sown and hidden in creation and in other religious traditions, originating from God and leading to him, are the Holy Spirit at work in the heart of all human beings (GS 38). "All the 'logoi spermatikoi' already are, and always have been, integrated within the

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. J.A. DINOIA, *The Diversity of Religions*, 61.

<sup>44</sup> Unlike LG 16 which refers in its footnote to Eusebius of Caesarea, AG 3 cites Irenaeus and Clemens of Alexandria.

fullness of Christ”.<sup>45</sup> Any sort of separation between the divine Word of God, its seeds and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith (RM 6). Historical revelation in Jesus Christ and the universal gracious presence of God to all creation and in the depth of human spirit, even if it is not consciously reflected, “are identical in content. Surrender to the unconditioned Mystery in the depths of the spirit thus does not detract from its manifestness in the man Jesus, but is ordered to it and discloses it to understanding (cf. Jn 6:45)”.<sup>46</sup> Salvation entails an ever-increasing intimacy with God’s love<sup>47</sup> and the offer of salvation, across human history, beyond the visible boundaries of the Church, which always consists in the gift of the Triune God.<sup>48</sup> Thanks to this invisible, yet active presence of God’s grace, even those who do not know the Gospel of Christ and his Church, without their personal fault and rejection, can be saved. Seeking God for the sake of truth,<sup>49</sup> trying to do his will as they can grasp it through the dictates of their conscience (Rom 1:19-20; 2:14-16) and conjugal and fraternal love, are all fruits of the invisible growth in the Spirit of the risen Lord (LG 16).

Where *Lumen Gentium* 16 considers “preparation for the Gospel” to be all that is “good or true” (found before accepting faith in Christ) “given by him who enlightens all human beings in order that they may finally have life” (Jn 1:4, 9), *Ad Gentes* 3 speaks of this preparation taking place through “human undertakings”, including religious ones, that are providentially guided by God. Jn’s Gospel inspires the first way (found in LG) of describing the “preparation for the Gospel”, and the Acts of the Apostles (esp. Ch. 17) the second

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<sup>45</sup> H.U. VON BALTHASAR, “The Absoluteness of Christianity and the Catholicity of the Church”, 156.

<sup>46</sup> K. RIESENHUBER, *Understanding Non-Objective Meditation*, 451-467, 459.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. C. JACOBS-VANDEGEER, “The Unity of Salvation”, 261, 264.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>49</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance. Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA 2004, 83: “This desire for rationality, which still constantly pushes reason to go beyond itself in a way it would rather avoid, is part of the essence of Christianity. We could also say that the Christian faith, which grew out of the faith of Abraham, insists relentlessly on the question of truth and, thus, on what in all circumstances concerns all men and unites them all. For we have all to be pilgrims of truth”.

way (found in AG). Neither way envisages the search for God involving merely human efforts. For the first way, the light and life coming from the Word of God are essential; for the second way, God is the intimately present Pedagogue whose providential guidance prepares people to receive the Gospel.<sup>50</sup>

After Vatican II, in the field of Christian theology of other Religions, serious and considerable attempts have been made in order to argue, in the Rahnerian light of a Christocentric inclusive pluralism,<sup>51</sup> the salvific value of other Religions qua institutions of sacred scriptures, rites and moral precepts. Edging beyond a positive evaluation of what good and true can be found in them and their theological relationship with Christ and his Church for the individual salvation of their followers, other Religions as such are thought to have their own salvific and revealing value in God's plan of salvation for all those who will never, without fault, become Christian and member of the Church. The cosmic and eschatological Logos, Son of God, would salvifically act in ways that go beyond his humanity, though always related to the humanity he assumed in his Incarnation. The Christological origins and character of creation would offer to all human beings a certain type of Christ's revelation of the Father in God's self-communication to every human being and his own Religion. The Holy Spirit, as well, permeates the universe making God's self-revelation accessible to each individual person thanks to their religious Tradition.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, if these Religions are carrying elements of truth (revelation) and good (salvation) whose fullness lies in the purification, elevation and consummation of the Church's mission, this evangelizing process entails a degree of continuity between what God has already granted to other Religions and what they become. In light of the understanding that other Reli-

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<sup>50</sup> G. O'COLLINS, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 115-116. Cf. G. PHILIPS, *La Chiesa e il suo Mistero. Storia, testo e commento della Lumen Gentium*, Jaca Book, Milano 1975, 189.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 1997; G. O'COLLINS, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 316; ID., *Christianity and the Religions. From Confrontation to Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY 2002, 160, 186.



gions have salvific value for their followers, even after the coming of Jesus Christ, these religions “can be encompassed in God’s will to save their adherents insofar as these Religions can provide the means by which non-Christians can express their acceptance of God’s offer of grace”.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, other Religions are held as ‘participated mediations’ in the one, unique mediation of Christ in creation and salvation, fully visible and active in his Church, the sacrament of God’s Kingdom.<sup>54</sup> By practicing their religious traditions, their members would be transcendently opened to God’s self-communication through a positive response in their belief and loving service of the others. Other Religions, thus, would mediate a faith that pleases God by manifesting how this graceful saving faith is a possibility open to all.<sup>55</sup> God is not far from everyone (AG 3) and Christ has united himself in some sense to every human being (GS 22) and to his cultural and social reality (AG 10). There is no possibility for anyone to be outside of God’s grace. Christ’s Paschal mystery and the universal cosmic presence of the Holy Spirit would be historically and anthropologically mediated to their members through other Religions. In them God provides ways to know him and be saved, although the Church founded by Christ would offer fuller knowledge of God and richer means of salvation. Some form of knowledge of God is possible by the power of reason and by discerning created nature, but the fullness of God’s knowledge is achievable only through

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<sup>53</sup> J.A. DINOIA, *The Diversity of Religions*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> “In Christianity, God’s personal presence to human beings in Jesus Christ reaches its highest and most complete sacramental visibility through the word revealed in him and the sacraments based on him. However, this complete mediation of the mystery of Christ reaches only Christians, members of the sacrament-church, from which they receive the word and whose sacramental economy they share. Can other religions contain and signify in some fashion God’s presence to human beings in Jesus Christ? Does God become present to them in the very practice of their religions? The answer has to be ‘yes’. Their religious practice is indeed what gives expression to their experience of God and of the mystery of Christ. It is the visible element, the sign, the sacrament of that experience. This practice expresses, sustains, supports, and contains, as it were, their encounter with God in Jesus Christ”. In J. DUPUIS, *Christianity and the Religions*, 188. Cf. J.A. DINOIA, *The Diversity of Religions*, 48; G. O’COLLINS, *Salvation for All. God’s Other Peoples*, Oxford University Press, New York 2008, 218.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. G. O’COLLINS, *Salvation for All*, 248; ID., *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 120-127.



divine self-revelation.<sup>56</sup> They claim that Vatican II “does not expressly speak of ‘ways of revelation and salvation’, but what it says of Islam and, to a lesser extent, Hinduism and Buddhism, and other Religions, amounts to recognizing them to be such ‘ways’ to God”.<sup>57</sup>

In its doctrines, rites and moral values, each religious tradition fosters not only ways of thinking and believing but also ways of being, acting, loving, working that encompass the entire life of their members<sup>58</sup>. Its soteriological endeavor shapes distinctive conceptions of human nature, created world and afterlife existence. In order to take into serious consideration the plural variety and particular difference of each religion in God’s plan of creation and salvation, we cannot just try to understand them inside of a soteriological perspective provided that the question of salvation for unbaptized members of other Religions can make irrelevant the existent difference among religions.<sup>59</sup> LG and Vatican II, instead, do not state any theological recognition and soteriological sufficiency for the other Religions as saving institutions mediating Christ’s salvation for their members. The secret and invisible presence of Christ as the cosmic Logos, also in religious efforts, is understood as divine pedagogy to prepare the way for the Gospel (AG 3, 9) within the universal presence of his Holy Spirit who fills the whole world (GS 11). The mission of the Church, by healing, elevating, fostering and consummating them in the fullness of her Head and Bridegroom’s revelation and salvation (Jn 1:17), takes them to their divine origins and eschatological and Paschal fulfilment (LG 13, 17, AG 9, GS 76). Following the Roman Catholic Tradition, according to LG their religious traditions as such, are not ordinary ways of salvation for their adepts.<sup>60</sup>

On the contrary, they can be theologically evaluated and soteriologically scrutinized in terms of how they can help their members to be more and more transfigured in God’s image as man and woman,

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. R.B. SHEARD, *Interreligious Dialogue in the Catholic Church since Vatican II*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY 1987, 41.

<sup>57</sup> G. O’COLLINS, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 163.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. J.A. DINOIA, *The Diversity of Religions*, 56.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. S. MADRIGAL, *Iglesia es Caritas. La eclesiología teológica de Joseph Ratzinger-Benedicto XVI*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2008, 410.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. R. B. SHEARD, *Interreligious Dialogue in the Catholic Church since Vatican II*, 47; M. RUOKANEN, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 70, 99.

children of the Triune God called to be fruitfully one in body and spirit (love, marriage and family).<sup>61</sup> Doing so, they can love sharing God's salvific grace in the spousal form of Christ-Church unity without being historical baptized members of the Church on the earth.

Marriage, therefore, as the primordial sacrament in God's creation establishes a conjugal form of love for all men and women in their concrete filial, nuptial and fruitful vocation to become in the Paschal mystery, and the when and how are known only to God, the Church of Jesus Christ for the heavenly glorification. By ordering in a very distinct and drawing movement all peoples to God in the Church of his Son, Vatican II reveals that for all human beings, Christians and unbaptized, the Church is both a sacramental means and an eschatological form of being saved, of belonging to God as sons and daughters in his only-begotten and risen Son. Marriage and family represent, from the outset of creation and from the completion of Jesus Christ's redemption, the innermost core of human condition of life and love experienced, celebrated, taught and practiced by all human beings thanks to their religious traditions. Although the Church does not judge and evaluate in any specific discrimination which sacred scriptures, rites and moral precepts of other Religions are ways to Christ's salvation for their members, fruitful and unifying love remains the universal and common way for the salvation of all. Any ascetical and monastic abstinence of conjugal love in marriage present in other Religions can graciously open to God's salvation as long as it is not a form of despising or depreciation of human body and its nuptial sexual difference and fruitfulness. Moreover, abstinence and monastic life, in other Religions as well, represent a state of life for very few elected people. It cannot represent the common ordinary way of historical existence for the great majority of their members. Due to the unity of humankind and to the sacramental nuptial form of Christ-Church's redemption, the Church may and should challenge her interreligious dialogue and mission in favor of love and life within the marriage and family experience accessible to every human being. He who does not love, does not know God (1Jn 4:8 in NA 5). Human

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. G. COLZANI, "L'Umanità di Gesù testimonianza dell'antropologico universale", *Euntes Docete*, vol. 61, n. 2, 2008, 27-57, 45.

love in its divine origins and essence is always already nuptial for the personal communion with God reflected in our experience, as men and women, of marriage and family.

The unity in origins and destiny of all humankind finds its concrete fulfilment in the belonging and different ordering orientation of all to the People of God. The Catholic unity, ordered according to the sacramental belonging to Christ through faith, baptism and Church, shapes men and women upon the personal truth of the incarnate Son. By his incarnation, he united himself to each human being, sharing the form of being child of God by embracing everyone and everything in him, leaving nobody and nothing out (Col 3:11; 1Cor 15:28; Jn 1:11-14).<sup>62</sup> Once in Christ, the universal possibility for everyone to belong to God and to become his people was historically and bodily begun with the foundation of his Church in the Paschal mystery (Ef 2:14). Other Religions should be evaluated in their openness to salvation in what is the most uniquely human and unifying all humankind, namely being created man and woman in the image of God. This nuptial dimension is so humanly universal that it has been willed by God the Creator as the form of his communion with us as people. Indeed, the Church is in the blood of Christ and recreated humanity as his bride.

## 6. The Mission of the Church

The Council manifests a positive tension between a providential presence of human beings belonging to other religious traditions and the urgent necessity of the Church's mission. According to LG 17, obeying to her risen Lord's command (Mt 28,19-20; Jn 20: 21; 1Cor 9:16), the Church driven by the Holy Spirit cooperates so that the plan of God the Father, who established Christ as the cosmic principle of his creation and Mediator of his universal salvation of the entire humankind (LG 14, 56, 60, 62; AG 3; RM5), can be fulfilled. "Only in Jesus can human beings be saved, and therefore Christianity has an evident claim to universality. The Christian message is directed consequently to all human beings and has to be

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. A. LÓPEZ, "Vatican II's Catholicity: a Christological Perspective on Truth, History, and the Human Person", *Communio*, vol. 39, n. 1, Spring-Summer 2012, 82-116.

announced to all”.<sup>63</sup> Spreading and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, calling to conversion is essential for the Church’s witness and martyrdom, in words and deeds (AG 13, 15, 39, 40).<sup>64</sup> The urgency of Church’s mission derives from the radical newness and fullness of life revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced by his disciples (RM 7). The love of Christ impels us (2Cor 5:14): “the mission is an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us” (RM 11). By attraction and not by proselytism, the Church, drawn by Jesus Christ and prompted by his Spirit (Rev 22:17) through the intercession of the Virgin Mary Queen of the Apostles (LG 17; AG 42; GS 3), attracts all peoples and the entire world into the New People of God, Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God (2Cor 4:6). The mission of the Church like that of Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit (RM 24). Therefore, the time for missionary activity extends between the first coming of the Lord and the second when the Church will be gathered from all peoples like a harvest into the Kingdom of God (LG 7, 13, 17, 19, 20). The Gospel must be preached to all nations before the Lord shall come (cf. Mk 13:10). Missionary activity consists of the manifestation and fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation in the world. “The goal of the mission of the Church is the glory of God and of Christ who desires the salvation of all people through the foundation of new ecclesial communities [...] The Holy Spirit prompts them to that”.<sup>65</sup> The Church serves the Kingdom of God by establishing communities and founding new particular churches (RM 20, 48). By the preaching of the Gospel and by the celebration of the sacraments the Church will be gathered from all nations and be eschatologically fulfilled into the Kingdom of God as the Spouse of Christ, the author of our salvation (AG 9). The active mission of the Church enhances the pneumatological transfiguration of the world, the christification of men and women making the universe grow in the fullness of God’s Kingdom, the heavenly Jerusalem, Holy City and Bride of the Lamb (LG 7). Moreover, as we have already seen, there is a missionary aspect to liturgy: public worship, especially in the Eucharist, and

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<sup>63</sup> INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Christianity and the World Religions*, Vatican City 1997, n. 49.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. M. RUOKANEN, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 91.

<sup>65</sup> G. PHILIPS, *La Chiesa e il suo Mistero*, 194.

personal prayer are at the service of humanity's salvation for the sake of God's glory (LG 17).

The Church of Jesus Christ in her apostolic and catholic constitution finds herself truly in the mission that constitutes her and gives her the ecclesial vocation to be experiencing communion with God and unity of the whole of humankind. Her mission springs from God's creation (the Christological unity in origins and destiny of all human beings and of the entire creation), and from the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ (Cross and resurrection of Christ in a nuptial outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the unity with his Church) revealing the meaning of Incarnation and the pneumatological predestination of all to be eschatologically recapitulated in Jesus Christ. The Church's mission, according to Vatican II, entails the historical growth of men and women toward the fullness of their humanity, Jesus Christ, in and through their spiritual and physical participation in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:1-10). Indeed, the Holy Spirit, present in all creation (Gen 1:1; Jn 3:8) and in the heart of every human being created in the image of God, anticipates and prepares the missionary work of the Church (AG 4). God makes himself present in many ways, "not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain "gaps, insufficiencies and errors" (RM 55).

Sin and a conscience rejection of truth and goodness demand from the Church the essential need of her missionary preaching of Christ's salvation. "But very often, men, deceived by the evil one, have become vain in their reasoning and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator (Rm 1:21 and 25)" (LG 16). Any hopeful desire for universal salvation in Christ for all and any positive evaluation of other Religions for what good, true, and beautiful we can recognize in them must not avoid the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ's salvation and the sacramental need of his Church and mission (RM 44, 46).<sup>66</sup> "Through

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. R. MARTIN, *Will Many Be Saved?*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge UK, 2012. The attempt to support the need of the mission of the Church based on the sinfulness and possible damnation of baptized and unbaptized sinners is exaggeratedly overemphasized and quite impossible to uphold. LG 16 seems to be insufficiently studied given the absence of a broader connection with other significant texts of Vatican II.

her mission, the Church liberates men from ‘the slavery of error’ and purifies that which is good in the hearts and cultures of men “for the glory of God and the confusion of the devil”<sup>67</sup> (LG 17; AG 9). The invisible seeds of the cosmic Logos, as preparation for the Gospel, yearn to be brought to fullness of growth and redemption from sin in the incarnate and Paschal Jesus Christ, now present and active in and through the universe by his glorified body and living Spirit (RM 29). Salvation from sin and from culpable refusal of God and his spousal love is very possible also for those who belong to other Religions and have not received the Christian baptism yet. “It is only those who are culpably outside the Catholic Church who are thereby excluded from salvation”<sup>68</sup> according to the official Catholic doctrine reaffirmed by LG 14. Sinfulness of Christians and need of conversion for Catholics as well keep alive the sacramental need of the mission of the Church in a purifying dialogue with the world (GS 43). God’s reconciling mercy requires the urgent and universal need of the mission of the Church for all human beings, baptized and unbaptized (DP 31, 32, 36). All of us, sinners, need sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation (LG 8). All of us are in need of his divine mercy (Rom 3: 23-24).

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<sup>67</sup> M. RUOKANEN, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 103.

<sup>68</sup> F.A. SULLIVAN, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 151.

## Index of Names

- Abraham 51, 71, 106  
Adam / Adàn 24, 25, 40, 48, 68, 87  
Anderson Carl 86  
Balthasar von Hans Urs 97, 106  
Barnabas / Bernabé 56, 58, 76, 77  
Benedict XV 9, 45, 65  
Benedict XVI / Benoît XVI / Ratzinger Joseph 19, 26, 34, 41, 87, 88, 98, 106  
Bueno de la Fuente Eloy 5, 6, 8, 9  
Bullivant Stephen 85  
Clemens of Alexandria 105  
Colzani Gianni 85, 110  
Dal Corno Léonel 14, 30  
Dal Toso Giovanni 11, 27  
Dinoia Joseph Augustine 84, 105, 108  
Dupuis Jacques 107, 108  
Eusebius of Caesarea 105  
Francis / François / Francisco 5-9, 13, 14, 16, 19, 21, 29, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 57, 59, 61, 76, 78, 80, 88, 91  
Granados José 86, 98, 101  
Gregory the Great 83  
Groppe Elizabeth T. 90, 92, 95, 96  
Hadjadj Fabrice 5, 6, 7  
Healy Jr. Nicholas J. 98, 102  
Hilary of Poitiers / Hilario de Poitiers 54, 73  
Irenaeus 105  
Jacob 16, 31  
Jacobs-Vandegeer Christiaan 85, 88, 100, 101, 102, 106  
Job 23, 39  
John / Jean 24, 40  
John Paul II / Jean-Paul II / Juan Pablo II 9, 26, 41, 61, 80, 85, 86, 102  
Kereszty Roch 94, 100  
Lakeland Paul 84  
López Antonio 98, 111  
Luke / Luc 8, 12, 28  
Madrigal Santiago 109  
Mark / Marc 26, 42, 112  
Martin Ralph 113  
Mary / Marie 19, 34, 50, 97, 99  
Meroni Fabrizio 5, 7, 83  
Moses / Moïse 25, 41  
Noah / Noé 25, 41  
O'Callaghan Paul 93  
O'Collins Gerard 90, 107, 108, 109  
Ouellet Marc 86  
Paul / Pablo 9, 54-58, 74-77, 96  
Paul VI / Pablo VI 9, 44, 60, 63, 79  
Philips Gérard 107, 112  
Pius XII / Pío XII 59, 79  
Riesenhuber Klaus 102, 106  
Ruokanen Mikka 90, 93, 109, 112, 114  
Rymarz Richard 92, 98  
Scola Angelo 86  
Secretan Philibert 14, 30  
Sheard Robert B. 109  
Stornelli Emiliano 9  
Sullivan Francis A. 92, 104, 114  
Thomas Aquinas 23-24, 38-40  
Walker Adrian J. 93  
Zubiri Xavier 14, 15, 30, 31





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# General index

<b>Preface</b> (FABRIZIO MERONI) .....	5
FABRICE HADJADJ <b>Life Is Mission</b> .....	11
FABRICE HADJADJ <b>La vie comme mission</b> .....	27
ELOY BUENO DE LA FUENTE <b>The Church and the Mission <i>Ad Gentes</i> in the World</b> .....	43
ELOY BUENO DE LA FUENTE <b>La misión <i>ad gentes</i> de la Iglesia en el mundo</b> .....	63
FABRIZIO MERONI <b>Salvation in Christ, the Church, and Other Religions in Light of Vatican II</b> .....	83
Index of Names .....	115
Authors .....	117

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## Life Is Mission

*Life Is Mission* features the lectures delivered by Dr. Fabrice Hadjadj and Dr. Fr. Eloy Bueno de la Fuente on the occasion of the General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies held in Sacrofano (Rome), from May 27 to June 1, 2019. From different but complementary perspectives, the authors provide a thorough and insightful examination of the pneumatological and soteriological dimension of *mission*, drawing attention to the theological rationale that should guide the pastoral ministry and the overall missionary endeavour of Christians.

Dr. Hadjadj and Dr. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente's works greatly contribute to meet the need for a renewed understanding of what *mission* is about, which is among the main reasons underlying Pope Francis's magisterial and hortatory insistence in addressing missionary subjects. Therefore, this volume, promoted by the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) within the series *Omnis Terra – PMU CIAM Publications*, aims to reach out to all the *Baptized and Sent of the Church of Christ*, religious and lay, women and men, who are *on Mission in the World*, as a source of inspiration for their approach to evangelization and the witness of the faith in missionary territories.

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