



Mission as Challenge

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SEDOS

*(Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission)
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It encourages research and disseminates information
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Editor: Fr. John Paul Herman, SVD

Secretariat: Sr. Celine Kokkat, CJMJ

Translations: Ms. Philippa Wooldridge

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Editorial Committee

André-Léon Simonart, M.AFR

René Stockman, FC

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Editorial



Dear Members and Readers,

As missionaries, working for the Global mission, do we sometimes pause to reflect on the immense challenges that lie before us? The world is constantly

changing: we need to pause and think of the purpose and the end goal of our mission.

A missionary is a disciple of Christ and he/she truly needs to be like him, full of love and compassion. This means not only to take up one's Cross but also to invite others to become his disciples. That is why mission work is described as one of the most difficult tasks on the planet today, as it faces day-by-day new challenges.

Besides love and compassion, sacrifice is another essential element in his/her life. Sacrifice involves giving up one's family, culture, language, identity and near and dear ones. We can imagine the sentiments of the one who is being sent out leaving his/her land, family and friends to go to an unknown place, to a new culture, people, language and to a new environment. In the case of unfamiliar places, the challenges are even greater. Imagine a cross-cultural context, one may feel completely lost, lonely and depressed. In case of change in environment and the food, acute health problems may arise. Similarly, in case of an unknown language one can easily feel helpless. In such cases, one has to strive harder or give up one's mission.

When a missionary is sent to a foreign land where Christianity is seen as a foreign religion, sharing the Gospel becomes a real challenge. Sometimes the Truth the missionary brings contradicts the world view of the people and that can result in anger and rage. Besides, the difficult terrain, deserts, mountains, thick forests, rivers, severe climate etc. can pose big challenges. Furthermore, the changing times continue to pose new challenges. Gone are the

days when the West sent missionaries to places where the Gospel had not reached. Now the world has become a global village. With regard to knowledge, all the nations, are on a par. The resources are available everywhere and all people are found everywhere. The cross-cultural experience is a common factor, due to which a lot of unrest and conflict has arisen. The missionaries need to be trained as they are called to give a cross culture witness to spread the Message of Peace and Harmony.

We have also pondered over the new challenges faced by the missionaries in the context of changing landscape. The changes are so rapid that it is difficult to cope with them. In the era of communication and information technology there is a challenge to communicate the unchanging Truth of the Gospel. The Church although Universal, beyond any caste, creed and culture, is criticized today for being Western in nature. Today, no culture can be absolutized and it is believed that the Gospel can take root in each culture. Imposing one culture over another, has negative implications.

The Church is facing an exodus of people. Those leaving the Church are disinterested in an institutionalised Church. There is an urgency to do something; there is a need to create indigenous and contextualised churches, and this needs contributors, collaborators and builders, not dependents. The Mission needs missionaries who are dedicated, committed and filled with the Spirit. However, although there seems to be a heap of challenges, with the enduring and everlasting hope in Christ and faith in God's divine providence, one can meet all the challenges. It is the work of God, who is all powerful, and it is he who can change the face of the earth.

The current Bulletin, based on the theme, "Mission as Challenge", narrates various challenges missionaries usually face, arising from history and from new contexts.

James H. Kroeger, MM, in his article, "Pope Francis and Missionary Pneumatology" speaks about the "Vatican II era" emphasising four Church Documents that emerge as milestones

for appreciating a contemporary view of missionary evangelization. He quotes *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) which says, “We no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries,’ but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’” (n.119).

In the article, “La mission comme défi pour les Religieux aujourd’hui” **René Stockman, FC**, explains that mission is a challenge for religious today. He speaks about the challenge of proclamation, spreading the faith and witnessing through one’s life, a life that is prophetic and based on prayer.

The article, “The Mission of the Church in India: New Challenges and Opportunities”, by **John Paul Herman, SVD**, highlights some of the challenges faced by missionaries in India due to the increasing influence of fundamentalism in the political system.

In his article, ‘Misión en un horizonte divino “Missio Dei” setenta años más tarde’, **Christian Tauchner, SVD**, poses the question. “How could Christian mission still be justified when Western Christianity had so thoroughly discredited itself through colonialism, imperialism, and then especially also through the First and Second World Wars?

Had the signs of the times been misinterpreted?” He also describes mission as *missio Dei*. “Mission starts in the Mind of God.” Therefore, the focus of mission-theological consideration must be taken up on issues of the interpretation of history with a focus on the doctrine of the last things, i.e., eschatology.

The article by **Frans Wijzen, SMA**, “We did not come to demolish the Church but to build it up”, narrates the challenges faced by the foreign Missionaries and by the local church in The Netherlands.

In the article, “Nuovi scenari dell’Evangelizzazione per la Vita Consacrata in un contesto sinodale-interculturale”, **Fr. Amedeo Cencini**, speaks about the new scenarios opening for evangelization and for Consecrated life in a context, which is the synodal-intercultural context.

I am sure these articles will enlighten and guide you in your missionary journey.

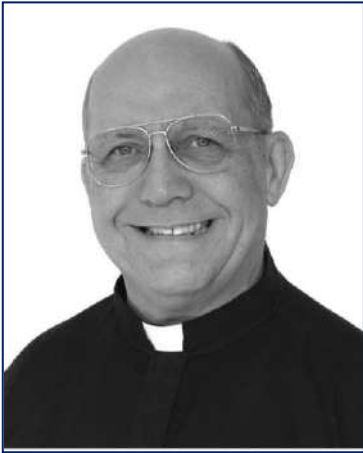
Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD
Director of SEDOS



***Congratulations to Sr. Mary Barron, OLA
The New President of UISG***

SEDOS Team congratulates Sr. Mary Barron, OLA for being elected as the New President of UISG. It is really a proud moment for all of us in SEDOS.

Pope Francis and Missionary Pneumatology



The Church has experienced a marvelous “missionary journey” in the Vatican II era. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the most significant religious event of the twentieth century, sought

the renewal, the *aggiornamento*, of the Church in all its dimensions. In the “Vatican II era” four Church documents emerge as milestones for appreciating a contemporary view of missionary evangelization: *Ad Gentes* (Vatican II, 1965), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 1975), *Redemptoris Missio* (John Paul II, 1990), and *Evangelii Gaudium* (Pope Francis, 2013).

Ad Gentes is the “mission document” of Vatican II, [AG] (“To the Nations”). One notes that this is the *first time* in the history of the Church that “the missions” were treated specifically by an Ecumenical Council. Commentators often highlight the breakthrough achieved by the Council on *foundational doctrinal principles* of the Church’s mission. *Ad Gentes* asserts that the mission of the Church is modeled on the *Missio Dei*, the divine missions of our Trinitarian God. “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature” (2).

Mission is not something that the Church “does”; mission fundamentally is what the Church “is”; mission is the core identity of the Church. *Ad Gentes* further asserts: “This decree flows from the “fount-like love” or charity of God...” (2). God is described in the original Latin text as *fontalis amor* (fountain-like love or fountain of love). Mission is thus an epiphany of our God; whose very identity is love. *Ad Gentes* asserts that the task of mission is shared by all the baptized: priests, deacons, religious, and laity—each “according to their own state” (26).

Evangelii Nuntiandi was authored by Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) who was canonized on October 14, 2018. He will always be remembered as a modern missionary pope; he made missionary journeys to all continents. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is the most quoted document in Pope Francis’ 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. Saint Paul VI notes that his words are designed to be a “meditation on evangelization” (5); the theme of meditation appears often throughout EN (cf. 40, 76).

Another pivotal theme centers on fidelity, a double fidelity—to God’s message and to people (cf. 4, 39, 63). This fidelity is “the central axis of evangelization” (4). The understanding of the term “evangelization” found in EN reflects a comprehensive and inclusive view, often termed *integral evangelization*. Paul VI speaks: “evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity” (18); he is the first pope to call Mary, the “Star of Evangelization” (82).

Redemptoris Missio by Saint John Paul II was issued on December 7, 1990 (the 25th anniversary of Vatican II’s *Ad Gentes*). John Paul II begins by stating his conviction about “the *urgency of missionary activity*, a subject to which I am devoting the present Encyclical” (1). The focus of John Paul II is direct and clear: “I wish to invite the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*” (2). All are invited to participate: “*Peoples everywhere, open the doors to Christ!*” (3).

Mission is “the greatest and holiest duty of the Church” (63). Missionary dynamism should become contagious! *Local Churches* are the central actors in mission today—no longer the duty of missionary societies. Significant and surprising is the fact that *one unique quote* appears verbatim no less than three times in the text (6, 10, 28). “We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.” God’s loving plan of salvation includes each and every person! “Modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to

teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (EN 41; RM 42).

Evangelii Gaudium (*The Joy of the Gospel*) is Pope Francis’ first apostolic exhortation (2013). Francis is proposing a profound missionary renewal of the entire Church. Francis asserts that we need an “evangelizing Church that comes out of herself,” not a Church that is “self-referential” and “lives within herself, of herself, for herself.” “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything.... All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (27).

“Missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*... (15). Let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’” (25). Pope Francis’ convictions come from his deep personal relationship with Christ. “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.... I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (3). A pivotal insight of Pope Francis is that “we are all missionary disciples” (119); through baptism, “all ... have become missionary disciples” (120). “We no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries,’ but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’” (120).

For Pope Francis, salvation history is a “great stream of joy” (5) which we must also enter. Unfortunately, “there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter” (6). “An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral” (10). We must *not* become “querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses’” (85). “Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor” (109).

Holy Spirit and Missionary Activity

One could easily present an extensive panorama covering the growing awareness of the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church’s mission in the Vatican II era; however, our journey will only make two brief stops at significant moments and

then proceed to explore the insights of Pope Francis at greater length.

Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN) emerged from the 1974 world-wide synod on evangelization. Paul VI was designated to compose the final document from the synod. It is dated December 8, 1975, the tenth anniversary of the close of Vatican Council II. Section 75, entitled “Under the Action of the Holy Spirit,” has seven full paragraphs devoted to the Spirit. A few significant direct quotes are given here. “Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit.” “It is the Holy Spirit who, today just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows oneself to be possessed and led by him.”

“Techniques of evangelization are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit.” “We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit.” “It must be said that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization.” “Through the Holy Spirit the Gospel penetrates to the heart of the world, for it is he who causes people to discern the signs of the times—signs willed by God—which evangelization reveals and puts to use within history.”

Redemptoris Missio (RM) devotes an entire chapter to the Holy Spirit; chapter three bears the title: “The Holy Spirit, the Principal Agent of Mission.” “The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church’s mission. His action is preeminent in the mission *ad gentes*” (RM 21). “The mission of the Church, like that of Jesus, is God’s work or, as Luke often puts it, the work of the Spirit.... The coming of the Holy Spirit makes them [apostles] *witnesses* and *prophets*.... The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus with ‘boldness’” (RM 24).

“Even before activity, mission means witness and a way of life that shines out to others” (RM 26). “We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.... The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions” (RM 28). “Whatever the Spirit brings about in human

hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel” (RM 29). “Today all Christians ... are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit” (RM 30).

Pope Francis has spoken frequently on the role of the Holy Spirit in the missionary Church (Pentecost Sunday homilies, audiences, ordinations, confirmations, etc.). Early in his ministry (April-June 2014) he presented a seven-part catechesis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit; this panorama provides a convenient structure to present Francis’ rich insights. In addition, one notes that concrete mission experience continually relies on these seven Spirit-inspired gifts for a fruitful ministry. In short, this presentation seeks to fashion the numerous insights of Francis’ decade-long ministry (2013-2023) into a holistic “missionary pneumatology.”

Beginning his catechesis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit (4-9-14), Francis notes: “You know that the Holy Spirit constitutes the soul, the life-blood of the Church and of every individual Christian: He is the Love of God who makes of our hearts his dwelling place and enters into communion with us. The Holy Spirit abides with us always, he is always within us, in our hearts. The Spirit himself is ‘the gift of God’ par excellence (cf. Jn 4:10), he is a gift of God, and he in turn communicates various spiritual gifts to those who receive him.... The gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord.”

One may look to various scripture passages to find material about various spiritual gifts. In Isaiah 11:1-2 one reads: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.” In First Corinthians 12:8-10, Paul lists various gifts of the Spirit that are given diversely to different people. In Ephesians 4:7-13 numerous gifts are mentioned; specifically, “the gifts he gave were that some would be

apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ” (4:11-12). These various gifts been abundantly verified in our missionary communities!

Wisdom. This first gift of the Spirit, as noted by Francis (4-9-14), “is not simply human wisdom, which is the fruit of knowledge and experience.... Wisdom is precisely this: it is the grace of being able to see everything with the eyes of God. It is simply this: it is to see the world, to see situations, circumstances, problems, everything through God’s eyes.... Obviously, this comes from intimacy with God.... And when we have this relationship, the Holy Spirit endows us with the gift of wisdom. When we are in communion with the Lord, the Holy Spirit transfigures our heart and enables it to perceive all of his warmth and predilection.” “The Holy Spirit thus makes the Christian [missionary] ‘wise.’ Not in the sense that he has an answer for everything, that he knows everything, but in the sense that he ‘knows’ about God; he knows how God acts. He knows when something is of God and when it is not of God; he has this wisdom which God places in our hearts. The heart of the wise person in this sense has a taste and savor for God.... And, this is something that we cannot invent, that we cannot obtain by ourselves; it is a gift that God gives to those who make themselves docile to the Holy Spirit.”

In his 2019 Pentecost homily, Francis further emphasizes that the “wise” person in harmony with the Spirit adopts God’s “way of seeing things.” Then, “everything changes: with the Spirit, the Church is the holy People of God, mission is not proselytism but the spread of joy, as others become our brothers and sisters, all loved by the same Father. Without the Spirit, though, the Church becomes an organization, her mission becomes propaganda, her communion an exertion.” Francis quotes Saint Pope Paul VI: “The Spirit is the first and last need of the Church” (11-29-72).

We implore Mary as the “Seat of Wisdom” (*Sedes Sapientiae*) to intercede for us so that in our mission we can see with God’s eyes, feel with God’s heart, and speak with God’s words.

This is true wisdom. We recall the words of Saint James (3:17): “The wisdom that comes down from above is essentially something pure; it makes for peace, and is kindly and considerate; it is full of compassion and shows itself by doing good; nor is there any trace of partiality or hypocrisy in it.” We all struggle to be “wise” missionaries!

Understanding. Here we are not focusing on human understanding or intellectual prowess (our struggle with diverse languages, cultures, and pastoral situations has shown us our limited human understanding and comprehension). We can never comprehend all things or have full knowledge of God’s designs. Understanding as a gift of the Spirit enables us to understand things *as God understands them*. At the last supper Jesus promises his disciples the gift of the Spirit of truth (Jn 16:13), so they will be able to “understand” the complete truth. Jesus asks his Father to “Consecrate them [disciples] in the truth; your word is truth” (Jn 17:17). Genuine understanding emerges as we seek intimacy with God and appreciate his loving plan for us.

The gift of understanding is closely connected with faith. Saint Augustine of Hippo in his *Confessions* has noted: “Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.” We can also recall that the theological approach fostered by Augustine and Anselm of Canterbury centered on *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). Pope Francis writes: “When the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts and enlightens our minds, he makes us grow day by day in the understanding of what the Lord has said and accomplished” (4-30-14).

There is an episode in the Gospel of Luke (24:13-35) that helps us appreciate true understanding. The Emmaus narrative recounts the faith-journey of two disciples. They are totally overwhelmed by the events of Jesus’ death and burial. Common sense tells them to leave Jerusalem and return home to their village. Overcome by sadness and despair, they are joined by Jesus, whom they do not recognize. When this stranger explains the Scripture that the messiah had to suffer and so

to rise again, their minds are slowly opened and hope is rekindled in their hearts. Pope Francis notes: “This is what the Holy Spirit does with us: he opens our minds, he opens us to understand better, to understand better the things of God, human things, situations, all things” (4-30-14).

This gift of understanding is important in missionary and pastoral situations and in all of Christian life. How often our “understanding” only comes through years and decades of mission experience! As evangelizers tell their stories (joyful, tragic, humorous, personal, communitarian, successful, disappointing, etc.), understanding grows—all under the inspiration of the Spirit. We sincerely ask “faith-understanding” as a gift from the Spirit, to appreciate all things that happen to us as God understands them! As disciples, we are making our contemporary Emmaus journey.

Counsel. Another generous gift of the Spirit is counsel. Psalm 16:7 notes: “I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also, my heart instructs me.” This gift makes us sensitive to the Spirit’s voice, guiding our thoughts, our feelings, and our intentions according to the heart of God. Counsel nurtures our interior sensitivity to our conscience; in addition, it aids us in taking the correct action with the right intention. Francis notes that this Spirit-given gift “leads us more and more to turn our interior gaze to Jesus as the model of our way of acting and relating to God the Father and with our brethren”; in short, we seek to make choices in our mission “according to the logic of Jesus and his Gospel” (5-7-14).

Pope Francis asserts that “the essential condition for preserving this gift is prayer.” Our prayer can be simple: “Lord, help me, give me counsel, what must I do now?” Personally, I have prayed thousands of times in diverse situations: “Come, Holy Spirit.” What is happening here? Simply, we are making room so that the Spirit may come and help us in the present moment. In seeking the Spirit’s gift of counsel, little by little we are putting aside our own way of thinking, our own ambitions, even our own prejudices. We are humbly asking: “Lord, what is your desire, your will, your

pleasure?” “How can I best serve the persons in this current situation”?

We can take consolation from Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:19-20: “Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your Father speaking through you.” Certainly, this is true; yet, we remind ourselves that we need to make room for the Spirit to counsel us through silence, prayer, meditation, the Eucharist, scripture-reading.

Yes, the Spirit does speak through us in our mission work. All of us have heard someone say: “Father, your words were so helpful to me; heartfelt thanks”! “Your homily last Sunday really touched my heart”! And, we are left wondering: “What did I say or do”? Such situations confirm Jesus’ words that it really is the Spirit of our Father speaking at that moment. Also, we do well to occasionally recall the narrative of Balaam and his donkey (Numbers 22:21-39)!

Fortitude. Having reflected on the Spirit’s gifts of wisdom, understanding, and counsel, we now consider what the Lord does for us to sustain us in our weakness; he gives us his gift of fortitude. This gift is manifested continuously throughout life—both in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. We are meant to be strong every day of our lives, as parents, teachers, laborers, health-care workers, technicians, etc. We seek to carry forward faithfully with our lives in our humdrum—even monotonous—daily routine. We appreciate Saint Paul’s words: “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). If we are tempted to lose heart, to question if our efforts are worthwhile, to give in to laziness or discouragement, we can invoke the Holy Spirit to make us strong in following Jesus with renewed strength and enthusiasm.

Inevitably, difficult moments and extreme situations arise; here the gift of fortitude can manifest itself in an extraordinary, exemplary way. As Francis notes, we think of “those who are facing particularly harsh and painful situations that disrupt their lives and those of their loved ones.... The Church shines with the testimony of so many brothers and sisters who have not hesitated to give their very lives in

order to remain faithful to the Lord and his Gospel. Even today there is no shortage of Christians who in many parts of the world continue to celebrate and bear witness to their faith with deep conviction and serenity, and persist even when they know that this may involve them paying a higher price” (5-14-14).

Francis continues: “We too, all of us, know people who have experienced difficult situations and great suffering. Let us think of those men and women who have a difficult life, who fight to feed their family, to educate their children; they do all of this because the spirit of fortitude is helping them.... These brothers and sisters of ours are saints, everyday saints, hidden saints among us; the gift of fortitude is what enables them to carry on with their duties as individuals, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, citizens.... It will benefit us to think about these people; if they do all of this, if they can do it, why can’t I? And, it will also do us good to ask the Lord to give us the gift of fortitude” (5-14-14).

We can recall some examples of fortitude from Scripture; Francis cites: “Noah, mocked by all, builds an ark and is saved; Abram leaves his land with only a promise in hand; Moses stands up to the might of Pharaoh and leads his people to freedom; the apostles, huddled fearfully in the upper room, go forth with courage to proclaim the Gospel” (5-19-13). “This gift [fortitude] must constitute the tenor of our Christian life, in the ordinary daily routine.... We need to be strong every day of our lives.... When we face daily life, when difficulties arise, let us remember this: ‘I can do all things in him who strengthens me’ [Phil 4:13]” (4-14-14).

Knowledge. When we hear the word “knowledge” almost immediately we think about our human capacity to learn about the reality that surrounds us, about the laws that regulate nature and the universe, about the academic information we learn in school or through reading. However, the knowledge that comes from the Holy Spirit is not limited to human knowledge. Rather, as Pope Francis notes, “it is a special gift, which leads us to grasp, through creation, the greatness and love of God and his profound relationship with every creature. When our eyes are illumined by the Spirit, they open to contemplate God, in the beauty of nature and in the grandeur of the

cosmos, and they lead us to discover how everything speaks to us about him and his love” (5-21-14).

The first chapter of Genesis emphasizes that God is pleased with his creation; it stresses the beauty and goodness of everything. At the end of each day, God saw that it was good (Gen 1:12, 18, 21, 25). The Spirit’s gift of knowledge allows us to see this beauty, appreciate it, and thank and praise God for it. Then, at the end of creation God fashions humanity, the most beautiful thing; God saw that humans, man and woman, were “very good” (v. 31). This “Spirit-given” treasure of knowledge, Francis notes, “sets us in profound harmony with the Creator and allows us to participate in the clarity of his vision and his judgement.... We accept man and woman as the summit of creation, as the fulfillment of a plan of love that is impressed in each one of us and that allows us to recognize one another as brothers and sisters” (5-21-14).

Francis asserts that this knowledge “is a source of serenity and peace and makes the Christian a joyful witness of God, in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi and so many saints who knew how to praise and laud his love through the contemplation of creation” (5-21-14). Such “contemplative knowledge” helps to avoid thinking that creation is a personal possession or the property of some few individuals. Rather, creation is a gift given by the Lord; it cannot be destroyed or exploited. All creation is a marvelous sign of God’s love!

Knowledge and experience lead to memory, to the “knowledge of the heart, which is a gift of the Spirit. May the Holy Spirit rekindle the Christian memory within all of us.” Mary can validly be called “our Lady of Memory, who from the beginning meditated on all things in her heart” (cf. Lk 2:19, 51). Francis prays: “May she help us on this path of memory” (8-8-14).

Piety. Pope Francis begins his catechesis on piety by noting that this gift of the Spirit “often becomes misconstrued or treated superficially.” This gift “is not to be identified with having compassion for someone, feeling pity on one’s neighbor.” He goes on to assert that as Christians we must avoid “pietism.” Why? “Because some think that to be pious is to close one’s eyes, to pose like a picture, and pretend to

be a saint. In Piedmont we say: to play the *mugna quacia* [literally: the pious or serene nun]. This is not the gift of piety” (6-4-14).

Piety “indicates our belonging to God and our profound relationship with Him, a bond that gives meaning to our life and keeps us sound, in communion with Him, even during the most difficult and tormenting moments.... It is a relationship lived with the heart; it is our friendship with God, granted to us by Jesus, a friendship that changes our life and fills us with passion, with joy.... When the Holy Spirit allows us to perceive the presence of the Lord and all his love for us, it warms the heart and moves us quite naturally to prayer and contemplation. Piety, therefore, is synonymous with the genuine religious spirit, with filial trust in God, with that capacity to pray to him with the love and simplicity that belongs to those who are humble of heart” (6-4-14).

Once we have an intimate relationship with the Lord, we are able to pass this love on to others, recognizing them as our brothers and sisters. This gift of piety means “to be truly capable of rejoicing with those who rejoice, of weeping with those who weep, of being close to those who are lonely or in anguish, of correcting those in error, of consoling the afflicted, of welcoming and helping those in need. The gift of piety is closely tied to gentleness. The gift of piety which the Holy Spirit gives us makes us gentle, makes us calm, patient, at peace with God, at the service of others with gentleness” (6-4-14). Indeed, Francis’ words are a marvelous character description of an authentic evangelizer!

Pope Francis, in his 2017 Pentecost homily, noted that “the Holy Spirit is the fire of love burning in the Church and in our hearts.” He concluded his reflection with a short prayer: “Spirit of God, Lord, who dwell in my heart and in the heart of the Church, guiding and shaping her in diversity, come! Like water, we need you to live. Come down upon us anew, teach us unity, renew our hearts and teach us to love as you love us, to forgive as you forgive us. Amen.”

Fear of the Lord. We come to the seventh gift of the Spirit: Fear of the Lord. Francis explains that this “does not mean being afraid of God;

we know well that God is Father, that he loves us and wants our salvation, and he always forgives, always.... Fear of the Lord, instead, is the gift of the Holy Spirit through whom we are reminded of how small we are before God and of his love and that our good lies in humble, respectful and trusting self-abandonment into his hands.... It is precisely in experiencing our own limitations and our poverty, however, that the Holy Spirit comforts us and lets us perceive that the only important thing is to allow ourselves to be led by Jesus into the Father's arms" (6-11-14).

Why do we need this gift of the Holy Spirit so much? Francis clarifies: "Fear of the Lord allows us to be aware that everything comes from grace.... This is what the Holy Spirit does through the gift of fear of the Lord: he opens hearts. The heart opens so that forgiveness, mercy, goodness and the caress of the Father may come to us, for as children we are infinitely loved.... Then we are led to follow the Lord with humility, docility and obedience.... Fear of the Lord, therefore, does not make us Christians who are shy and submissive, but stirs in us courage and strength" (6-11-14).

This same fear of the Lord, according to Francis, is an "alarm" against a hard, sinful heart. Francis provides several examples. When one lives "only for money, for vanity, or power, or pride, then the holy fear of God sends us a warning: be careful! With all this power, with all this money, with all your pride, with all your vanity, you will not be happy." Francis warns people in authority not to become corrupt. He challenges those who "live off human trafficking or slave labor," asserting that they do not have "love for God in their hearts." He upbraids "those who manufacture weapons for fomenting wars.... These people manufacture death; they are merchants of death and they make death into a piece of merchandise" (6-11-14). Francis prays for their genuine conversion, that the fear of the Lord will open their hard hearts.

In his 2018 Pentecost homily, Francis notes that "the Spirit frees hearts chained by fear." What does it mean to change hearts? God does not magically change one's concrete situation; the

weight of life's problems and challenges remains. What God's transforming Spirit does is to liberate the heart, so that with inner strength one can realistically face actual difficulties. "Particularly when we are downcast, wearied by life's burdens, oppressed by our own weakness, at those times when it is hard to keep going and loving seems impossible, in those moments, we need a powerful 'jolt' of the Holy Spirit, the power of God.... How good it would be for us each day to feel this jolt of life"! Indeed, authentic fear of the Lord opens us to receive again and again the "jolts" coming from the Holy Spirit!

Conclusion. Our reflection on the gifts of the Spirit and mission cannot be easily summarized! Personally, I appreciate two marvelous poetic descriptions of the Holy Spirit's action. One is the sequence of Pentecost Sunday; the other is from Patriarch Athenagoras who has given us a marvelously succinct expression to the special role of the Holy Spirit in salvation, spirituality, and missionary evangelization in most felicitous terms:

WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT:

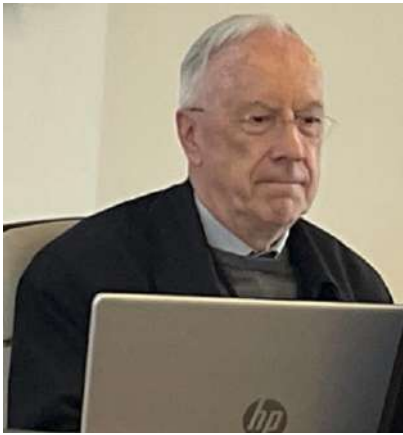
- God is far away,
- Christ stays in the past,
- the Gospel is a dead letter,
- the Church is simply an organization,
- authority a matter of domination,
- mission a matter of propaganda,
- the liturgy no more than an evocation,
- Christian living a slave morality.

BUT IN THE HOLY SPIRIT:

- the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth-pangs of the Kingdom,
- the risen Christ is there,
- the Gospel is the power of life,
- the Church shows forth the life of the Trinity,
- authority is a liberating service,
- mission is a Pentecost,
- the liturgy is both memorial and anticipation,
- human action is deified.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus!

La mission comme défi pour les Religieux aujourd'hui



Introduction

Quand nous parlons de mission aujourd'hui, c'est plus large que le travail des soi-disant missionnaires qui ont principalement voyagé vers le

sud depuis les pays du nord pour évangéliser et y annoncer la Bonne Nouvelle. Bien qu'un décret séparé ait été rédigé au Concile Vatican II sur l'activité missionnaire de l'Église en particulier avec comme titre « Ad gentes », ce décret a également constamment répété que toute l'Église durant son pèlerinage sur terre est missionnaire par nature¹. Dans cette conférence, nous voulons donc discuter à la fois de la mission générale de l'Église et en elle de la place des religieux et de la mission spéciale qu'ils ont en tant que missionnaires au sens strict du mot, et finalement indiquer quelques éléments typiques qui caractérisent notre tâche missionnaire en tant que Frères de la Charité.

1. L'Église est mission

Nous prenons une citation de l'œuvre du cardinal J. De Kesel, écrite en 1993, où il parle de la mission de l'Église en général. La mission générale de l'Église y est très bien expliquée.

« L'Église est mission : sa raison d'être. Elle est proclamation. Dans toutes ses actions, en paroles et en actes, elle est un signe de l'humanité de Dieu et de sa grâce, qu'il a révélée et scellée pour tous et pour toute la création, une fois pour toutes, dans le Christ Jésus. L'Église est le sacrement du salut pour le monde, un signe du salut de Dieu. Elle est « la

ville sur la montagne » (Mt 5, 14) et « la lampe sur le lampadaire » (Mt 5, 15), ainsi que « l'étendard pour les peuples » (Isaïe 11, 10). Elle ne vit pas renfermée, repliée sur elle-même, comme dans un ghetto. Même là où elle se tait ou doit se taire, elle proclame l'évangile de la grâce de Dieu par le fait même qu'elle existe. Une Église qui se referme et se replie sur elle-même perd sa propre substance. Une Église qui n'est plus missionnaire, ne rayonne plus vers l'extérieur et n'attire plus de nouveaux membres, est une Église qui rétrécit aussi intérieurement et finit par mourir. Il n'y a donc aucun doute : l'Église prêchera toujours la mission. Le fait qu'elle peut accueillir de nouveaux chrétiens dans sa communauté sera toujours un signe de sa vitalité et de sa santé. Le seul commentaire que nous voudrions ajouter, est celui-ci : elle ne pourra pas toujours proclamer dans les mêmes circonstances. En effet, ces circonstances sont historiques et donc variables. Nous ne pouvons pas faire concorder la tâche missionnaire de l'Église contemporaine avec la restauration des conditions historiques dans lesquelles elle a pu faire les missions dans le passé. ... L'Église doit être présente comme signe, comme sacrement au milieu de notre monde. Mais elle ne coïncide pas avec ce monde. Il y a une frontière entre elle et le monde que nous devons respecter. Dans la troisième prière eucharistique on dit que l'Église est en exil tant que le monde dure. On ne doit pas l'oublier. Elle vit toujours dans la diaspora, dans la dispersion. ... Il est très important de respecter la frontière entre l'Église et le monde. Non pas pour se fermer au monde, mais justement pour y faire une différence. L'Église n'est pas et ne coïncide pas avec le monde.

L'Église est la communauté qui a déjà abandonné l'ancien monde et qui attend avec impatience cette autre chose, le royaume de Dieu. Au milieu de ce vieux monde, au sein de la communauté qu'ils essaient de construire, les chrétiens expérimentent déjà les premiers signes

¹ Ad gentes, Décret sur l'activité missionnaire de l'Église

du royaume de Dieu à venir. En ce sens, l'Église vit au milieu de ce monde, avec cœur et âme, en solidarité avec les hommes. Et pourtant : elle n'est pas chez elle, elle est en exil. Il y a une unité profonde entre elle et le monde, mais aussi une frontière.

La tâche la plus importante de l'Église et sa mission irremplaçable est de témoigner de la vie chrétienne et d'en attirer d'autres, pour ainsi dire »².

« L'Église comme sacrement du monde » est peut-être la meilleure expression que nous pouvons retenir ici et réfléchir à la manière dont nous, baptisés, pouvons accomplir cette mission. Dans le décret « Ad Gentes », cette tâche est décrite comme suit: « Car tous les fidèles, partout où ils vivent, sont tenus de manifester, par l'exemple de leur vie et le témoignage de leur parole, l'homme nouveau qu'ils ont revêtu par le baptême et la force du Saint-Esprit qui les a fortifiés par la confirmation, afin que les autres, considérant leurs bonnes œuvres, glorifient le Père et perçoivent plus pleinement le sens authentique de la vie humaine et le lien universel de communion entre les hommes »³.

Dans un message aux jeunes à l'occasion de la Journée mondiale de la mission 2018, le Pape François a souligné de manière tout aussi claire trois manières dont on peut être ce sacrement du monde aujourd'hui : en annonçant Jésus-Christ, en répandant la foi jusqu'au bout de la terre et en témoignant de l'amour⁴. « Chaque homme et chaque femme est une mission, et c'est la raison pour laquelle on vit sur la terre. Être attirés et être envoyés sont les deux mouvements que notre cœur, surtout quand on est jeune, sent comme des forces intérieures de l'amour qui promettent un avenir et poussent notre existence en avant.... Nous vous annonçons Jésus Christ. Jésus Christ, mort et ressuscité pour nous, s'offre à notre liberté et la provoque à chercher, à découvrir et à annoncer ce sens véritable et plénier. ... Ensemble nous avons la mission de

porter l'Évangile à tous. Cette transmission de la foi, cœur de la mission de l'Église, arrive donc par la "contagion" de l'amour, où la joie et l'enthousiasme expriment le sens retrouvé et plénier de la vie. La propagation de la foi par attraction exige des cœurs ouverts, dilatés par l'amour. Des milieux humains, culturels et religieux encore étrangers à l'Évangile de Jésus et à la présence sacramentelle de l'Église représentent les périphéries extrêmes, les 'extrêmes confins de la terre', vers lesquels, depuis la Pâque de Jésus, ses disciples missionnaires sont envoyés, dans la certitude d'avoir toujours leur Seigneur avec eux (cf. Mt 28, 20 ; Actes 1, 8). »

Nous apprenons de ces textes et visions que chaque personne baptisée est appelée à proclamer le Christ et sa Bonne Nouvelle. Personne ne peut se sentir exempt de cela. C'est à partir et à l'intérieur de cette mission générale à laquelle chaque baptisé est appelé, que l'on peut plus spécifiquement placer la vocation et la mission du missionnaire religieux au sens plus strict du mot. Nous ne pouvons jamais séparer cela de la mission générale que chaque baptisé doit accomplir et à laquelle l'Église a appelé tous les croyants d'une manière spéciale tout au long du Concile Vatican II.

Au sein de l'Église préconciliaire, une autre distinction était faite entre les religieux qui n'ont rien à voir avec la mission, dont le champ d'action est entièrement et exclusivement situé en Europe ou en Amérique du Nord, zones identifiées comme appartenant à l'Église d'Occident. En outre, il y avait des religieux qui, en plus des activités sur le sol occidental, entreprenaient également un travail missionnaire, et enfin il y avait les institutions purement missionnaires, dont tous les membres étaient destinés à être envoyés. Le concile y a apporté une nette innovation en soulignant d'une part l'universalité du devoir de mission et en échangeant la description géographique traditionnelle du champ de mission contre une définition en termes plus sociologiques. Le Magistère de l'Église considère que l'obligation de coopérer à l'annonce et à la diffusion de l'Évangile incombe à chaque chrétien⁵.

² De Kesel, Jef, Omwille van zijn naam. Tielt, Lannoo, 1993, p 106 e.v.

³ Ad Gentes, n° 11.

⁴ François, Message for World Mission day 2018. Together with young people, let us bring the Gospel to all.

⁵ Neckebrouck, Valeer, Het dubbele rentmeesterschap. Missionaire verkondiging en sociale actie. Leuven, Acco,

Ceci est précisé dans l'exhortation apostolique « *Evangelii Nuntiandi* » (1975) du Pape Paul VI et dans l'encyclique « *Redemptoris Missio* » (1990) du Pape Jean-Paul II.

Dans le décret sur le renouvellement adapté de la vie religieuse, « *Perfectae Caritatis* » il y a un appel à promouvoir davantage l'esprit missionnaire au sein des institutions religieuses, tandis que dans le décret « *Ad Gentes* » il y a même un appel à se concentrer avec une attention renouvelée sur la mission. Nous plaçons les deux textes l'un à côté de l'autre et les considérons comme complémentaires l'un de l'autre.

« Il faut absolument conserver dans les instituts religieux l'esprit missionnaire et, compte tenu du caractère de chacun d'eux, l'adapter aux conditions actuelles pour que l'Évangile soit proclamé plus efficacement parmi tous les peuples »⁶.

« Les instituts de vie active, qu'ils poursuivent ou non une fin strictement missionnaire, doivent se poser sincèrement devant Dieu la question de savoir s'ils peuvent étendre leur activité en vue de l'expansion du règne de Dieu parmi les nations ; s'ils peuvent laisser à d'autres certains ministères, de façon à dépenser leurs forces pour les missions ; s'ils peuvent entreprendre une activité dans les missions, en adaptant, si c'est nécessaire, leurs constitutions, mais cependant selon l'esprit du fondateur ; si leurs membres prennent part selon leurs forces à l'activité missionnaire »⁷.

Tout au long de ces textes, l'activité missionnaire typique des congrégations religieuses est encouragée et même proposée comme nouveau territoire pour ceux qui n'étaient pas encore prêts, tout en demandant en même temps d'être suffisamment flexibles pour faire face et s'adapter aux conditions locales. Ensuite, les mots acculturation et inculturation résonneront souvent. Mais déjà les premiers missionnaires en Chine (Ricci, plus tard également Lebbe) ont laissé des exemples forts jusqu'où on peut aller avec cette acculturation. Ils étaient bien en avance sur leur temps.

1994, p. 46.

⁶ *Perfectae Caritatis*, n° 20.

⁷ *Ad Gentes*, nr ; 40.

Nous ne pouvons nier qu'entre-temps nous sommes entrés dans ce que nous pouvons appeler une sorte de climat « anti-missionnaire ». Cela a grandement influencé l'esprit de mission dans l'Église et a également entravé le travail des missionnaires de plusieurs manières. Le moment où les missionnaires sont sortis pour gagner des âmes et pour convertir et baptiser autant de païens que possible, avec une légère pression si nécessaire, est méprisé avec compassion. Ceci, bien sûr, remonte à l'époque où l'on était convaincu qu'aucun salut n'était à attendre en dehors de l'Église catholique et qu'il était donc nécessaire d'amener les dissidents ou les non-croyants à la seule vraie bergerie. Plus récemment encore, nous sommes confrontés à une image très négative du colonialisme et les missionnaires sont accusés avoir participé à l'exploitation de la population indigène par les puissances coloniales. Tout ce qu'ils ont fait pour aider au développement réel de la population indigène par l'éducation, la prise en charge des malades et la pastorale au sens large du terme est simplement rejeté. Il est compréhensible que pour de nombreux missionnaires et en particulier d'anciens missionnaires qui ont donné le meilleur de leur vie dans le travail missionnaire, cela est plus que douloureux et totalement injustifié.

De ce climat dit « anti-missionnaire », nous voyons aussi deux réactions regrettables de ceux qui continuent à travailler comme missionnaires au sens strict du mot dans le Sud.

D'une part, certains se sont distancés de l'annonce et ont continué à travailler en tant que pure agent de développement. Ils font du bon travail, mais ils sont eux-mêmes devenus allergiques, pour ainsi dire, pour continuer à pratiquer la prédication directe, de peur d'être vus d'un œil tordu.

D'autre part, certains se sont en quelque sorte mis à l'abri de l'annonce de la foi chrétienne en remplaçant le mot mission par dialogue. Le dialogue est en effet devenu un aspect important et a été particulièrement souligné lors du Concile Vatican II, qui a été appelé à juste titre Concile œcuménique où le dialogue interreligieux a été fortement encouragé, notamment dans l'exhortation apostolique « *Evangelii Nuntiandi* » publiée par la suite. Neckebrouck note à cet égard que « *le dialogue*

est mal compris et est maintenant considéré comme la seule forme éthiquement acceptable pour l'Église de communiquer avec les non-chrétiens, considérant toute tentative de présenter l'Évangile comme un message universel, comme une expression d'ethnocentrisme, d'un sentiment dépassé de supériorité culturelle, d'impérialisme culturel. Qu'aux yeux de Dieu, toutes les religions doivent avoir la même valeur et que l'œuvre missionnaire dans le sens de proclamer expressément le Christ avec l'intention d'amener les autres à la foi en Lui, doit maintenant céder la place à la coexistence respectueuse et fraternelle de toutes les familles religieuses. »⁸.

On voit aussi la même chose se produire en Belgique dans les écoles catholiques où un plaidoyer est fait pour la soi-disant « école du dialogue », où l'éducation religieuse chrétienne est remplacée par une présentation dite objective des religions existantes à partir de laquelle l'élève peut alors choisir ce qui lui convient le mieux. On a développé une réticence à proclamer la Bonne Nouvelle du Christ avec ouverture et franchise.

Dans ce climat « anti-missionnaire », cependant, il reste essentiel de ne pas obscurcir le message de base que nous avons tous reçu du Christ même et qui sonne et continue de résonner sans compromis : « Allez ! De toutes les nations faites des disciples : baptisez-les au nom du Père, et du Fils, et du Saint-Esprit, apprenez-leur à observer tout ce que je vous ai commandé. » (Mt 28, 19-20).

2. La mission comme défi pour les religieux aujourd'hui

Après cette introduction quelque peu allongée mais à mon avis nécessaire, nous arrivons au thème sur lequel nous voulons maintenant nous concentrer. Que peut signifier la mission pour les religieux aujourd'hui, comment peuvent-ils lui donner une interprétation solide, sans tomber dans les écueils qui sont principalement causés par le climat « anti-missionnaire » ? Nous reprenons ce qui a été écrit dans Ad Gentes et essayons de l'appliquer aux religieux. « Tous les fidèles, partout où ils vivent, sont tenus de

manifeste, par l'exemple de leur vie et le témoignage de leur parole, l'homme nouveau qu'ils ont revêtu par le baptême et la force du Saint-Esprit qui les a fortifiés par la confirmation, afin que les autres, considérant leurs bonnes œuvres, glorifient le Père et perçoivent plus pleinement le sens authentique de la vie humaine et le lien universel de communion entre les hommes »⁹.

En même temps nous voulons nous orienter vers la manière dont le cardinal Malula voyait le religieux dans le contexte africain comme un signe particulier de présence et en même temps de référence.

« Signe vous l'êtes d'abord par votre vie en communauté. La communauté religieuse est en effet un mystère au sein du mystère du Peuple de Dieu ; toute communauté où règne l'amour et la joie et qui, pauvre et engagée, est au service du peuple de Dieu et de tous les hommes proclame que déjà le Royaume de Dieu a commencé dans l'histoire des hommes.

Signe vous l'êtes encore parce que vous montrez qu'il est possible de choisir radicalement le style de vie du Christ, parce que vous vivez en référence explicite à l'Évangile et à la primauté du Royaume de Dieu. Bref, au sein du peuple de Dieu vous êtes avec votre communauté appelées à être une interprétation fidèle et originale des vérités évangéliques.

Enfin, par votre vie consacrée vous avez aussi créé des liens avec toute la famille humaine. Sans être du monde vous êtes et effet appelées à être ce signe lisible dans une présence au monde. L'Évangile vous apprend une vie profondément humaine et vous rend sensible aux vrais besoins des hommes. L'Évangile de Jésus-Christ ne vous fait pas quitter le monde mais vous veut au contraire en plein dans ce monde, vous religieuses, vous êtes un signe dressé dans le monde¹⁰ ».

Nous indiquons quatre chemins que les religieux devraient suivre en tant que missionnaires aujourd'hui, après quoi nous

⁸ Neckebrouck, op. cit. p. 82.

⁹ Ad Gentes, n° 11.

¹⁰ Luyeye Luboloko, François, Le Cardinal J.A. Malula, un pasteur prophétique. Kinshasa, Ed. Jean XXII, 1999, p. 80.

essayons de donner une interprétation plus concrète.

Tout d'abord le religieux doit rendre un témoignage missionnaire à travers sa façon concrète de vivre ad intra par laquelle il témoigne de l'Évangile. On se met d'abord en mission à travers ce que l'on est, personnellement et en tant que communauté, avant d'évangéliser à travers ce que l'on fait ou dit. Après avoir décrit comment les fidèles de la première communauté chrétienne de Jérusalem s'engageaient fidèlement et d'un commun accord à la prière communautaire, comment ils partageaient et mettaient leurs biens personnels au service de tous selon leurs besoins, prenaient leur nourriture ensemble dans la joie et simplicité de cœur, l'auteur des Actes des Apôtres établit qu'ils connaissaient la sympathie du peuple et que le Seigneur ajoutait chaque jour de nouveaux adeptes au groupe des sauvés (cf. Actes 2, 42-47; 4, 32-35). Le lien entre la mission et la vie intérieure de la communauté chrétienne est exprimé fortement dans l'Évangile de Jean : « À ceci, tous reconnaîtront que vous êtes mes disciples : si vous avez de l'amour les uns pour les autres. » (Jean 13, 35). Toujours dans « Perfectae Caritatis », il est explicitement mentionné « à l'exemple de la primitive Église dans laquelle la multitude des fidèles n'avait qu'un cœur et qu'une âme »¹¹.

Ainsi, en tant que communauté religieuse, nous devons en premier lieu nous demander si l'amour mutuel qu'en tant que membres d'une communauté, nous exprimons les uns envers les autres est d'une telle qualité qu'il se réfère automatiquement à la fontaine surnaturelle dont il provient et qui suscite chez les autres la soif pour boire de la même eau.¹²

Une vie exemplaire, à la fois personnelle et en communauté, est la première exigence qu'un religieux doit remplir s'il veut avoir un rayonnement missionnaire. Quand cela manque, tout le reste disparaîtra. Sénèque enseigna déjà que l'on donne beaucoup si l'on ne donne que le bon exemple.

Si au contraire, les communautés religieuses ont adapté leur organisation et leurs manières à celles du monde environnant, où l'on remarque qu'il existe des désaccords similaires, la

discorde, la jalousie, la rivalité, la cupidité, le despotisme et la soif de pouvoir, alors on donnera un contre-témoignage de ce qu'est l'Évangile. Ou bien, pour le répéter poétiquement, la source d'amour qui jaillit dans la communauté religieuse doit devenir une rivière qui déborde de ses rives et irrigue tout le paysage environnant.

Ceci nous amène à notre deuxième chemin, celui du témoignage ad extra. Le Christ dit expressément que les bonnes œuvres des croyants doivent rayonner comme une lumière devant les yeux des hommes afin qu'ils soient conduits à glorifier le Père (cf. Mt 5, 16). Paul pointe également dans la même direction : « *Faites tout sans récriminer et sans discuter ; ainsi vous serez irréprochables et purs, vous qui êtes des enfants de Dieu sans tache au milieu d'une génération tortueuse et pervertie où vous brillez comme les astres dans l'univers, en tenant ferme la parole de vie.* » (Voir Phil. 2, 14-15). « Faites tout sans récriminer » et « bonnes œuvres » font référence aux défis auxquels nous sommes confrontés en tant que religieux et auxquels nous sommes confrontés aujourd'hui dans notre activité apostolique. Nous ne pouvons fermer les yeux sur les nombreuses formes d'injustice sociale, d'exploitation, de pauvreté, de misère. Nous ne pouvons pas rester insensibles à la discrimination fondée sur des différences ethniques, culturelles ou religieuses. Nous devons être touchés par le grand problème des réfugiés auquel nous sommes confrontés aujourd'hui dans le monde. Il faut donc se demander si, en tant que religieux, nous restons en première ligne pour être proches de ces groupes opprimés et orphelins avec notre aide, avec notre réconfort, avec notre parole et notre action libérateurs. Est-ce que nos congrégations religieuses sont des foyers de dynamisme, où le souci des plus pauvres est palpable et visible et passe comme une contamination bénéfique sur tous ceux qui entrent en contact avec nous ? Avons-nous ici une véritable fonction d'exemple pour notre environnement ? Il est fort que dès 1987, le Pape Jean-Paul II appelait les religieux à faire un effort particulier pour les réfugiés. « *Le témoignage évangélique authentique des religieux est également nécessaire au milieu du nombre toujours croissant de migrants non chrétiens, venant*

¹¹ Perfectae Caritatis, n° 15.

¹² Neckebrouck, op. cit. p. 57.

d'autres continents et à la recherche de meilleures conditions de vie en Europe. Il est très important que ces pauvres trouvent dans le religieux un reflet de l'amour du Christ. C'est une nouvelle façon de continuer le travail que les missionnaires du passé ont accompli »¹³.

Le fait est que chaque communauté religieuse cherche honnêtement ce qu'elle peut faire pour soutenir et promouvoir activement et de toutes ses forces la cause de la justice, de la paix et de l'amour. Non, nous ne sommes pas appelés à effacer la dernière trace de souffrance humaine sur cette terre. Mais nous devons soulager tant de souffrances, corriger tant d'injustices, sécher autant de larmes que nous pouvons.

En passant, nous voulons également mentionner l'importance, depuis notre fonction prophétique en tant que religieux, d'avoir la volonté et le courage d'aller à contre-courant lorsque des tendances sociétales se développent dans lesquelles le message de l'Évangile est complètement réduit au silence et où des valeurs apparentes sont proclamées qui sont contraires au respect absolu de toute vie. Ici les congrégations internationales sont également confrontées à la tâche d'utiliser réellement leurs ressources pour un développement mondial plus poussé de leur prise en charge des pauvres. Enfin, nous pouvons nous demander dans quelle mesure nous, religieux, sommes encore prêts à aller vers la périphérie, à sortir de nos soi-disant zones de confort pour y témoigner véritablement d'une vie missionnaire. Nous pouvons penser ici aux nombreuses personnes qui dans le passé jusqu'à ce jour ont payé ce choix de leur vie et sont morts en martyrs de leur foi. Au cours des siècles l'Église a exprimé sa croyance en la signification missionnaire du martyre dans les paroles célèbres de Tertullien : « *Le sang des martyrs est la semence de nouveaux chrétiens* ». Y a-t-il eu un siècle dans l'histoire avec autant de martyrs que le vingtième siècle ? Aujourd'hui encore, l'Église enseigne que pour diffuser le message de l'Évangile, le chrétien doit même vouloir donner sa vie et ne doit pas être dissuadé par le martyre.

Comme troisième chemin, nous voulons souligner expressément l'importance de la dimension verticale que les religieux doivent rayonner à travers leur vie spirituelle explicite, leur vie de prière et leur vie sacramentelle. Dans « *Lumen Gentium* », il est dit : « *Les religieux doivent tendre de tout leur effort à ce que, par eux, chaque jour de mieux en mieux, l'Église manifeste le Christ aux fidèles comme aux infidèles : soit dans sa contemplation sur la montagne, soit dans son annonce aux foules du Royaume de Dieu, soit encore quand il guérit les malades et les infirmes et convertit les pécheurs à une vie féconde, quand il bénit les enfants et répand sur tout ses bienfaits* »¹⁴. Dans la même veine, le Pape Paul écrit dans « *Evangelii Nuntiandi* » : « *Ce témoignage silencieux de pauvreté et de dépouillement, de pureté et de transparence, d'abandon dans l'obéissance, peut devenir, en même temps qu'un appel adressé au monde et à l'Église elle-même, une éloquente prédication capable de toucher même les non chrétiens de bonne volonté, sensibles à certaines valeurs. Dans une telle perspective, l'on devine le rôle joué dans l'évangélisation par des religieux et religieuses consacrés à la prière, au silence, à la pénitence, au sacrifice* »¹⁵. À l'heure où beaucoup reprennent leur recherche de spiritualité à partir d'un vide existentiel dans lequel ils sont entrés, il est si important qu'ils puissent la trouver auprès des religieux et ne pas avoir à se rendre dans de nouveaux groupes para-religieux et dans des sectes en plein essor. Cela n'aurait-il pas à voir avec le fait que nous sommes devenus trop timides pour vraiment donner de l'oxygène spirituel aux personnes qui le recherchent ? Cela peut aussi être lié au climat « anti-missionnaire » mentionné précédemment, qui infecte également les religieux qui ne se manifestent plus que comme d'excellents aides au développement et se perdent dans un activisme unilatéral mais complètement sec dans le domaine spirituel et qui alors n'ont plus de rayonnement spirituel. Il est donc vital que les religieux restent fidèles à la prière, aux sacrements, à la fois pour leur propre équilibre spirituel et leur santé, mais en même temps pour la fécondité apostolique de leur témoignage. Tout comme les exercices spirituels ne doivent

¹³ Jean Paul II, Call to Pastoral commitment in favour of migrants and refugees. Congregation of Consecrated life, 1987.

¹⁴ Lumen Gentium, n° 46.

¹⁵ Evangelii Nuntiandi, n° 69.

pas être un alibi pour se détacher du monde, le vide spirituel ne doit pas être le prix payé pour l'engagement social. Il est navrant de constater que certains religieux sont loués pour leur combativité dans le domaine social, mais en même temps méprisés pour le manque total de profondeur religieuse. « *Pour l'Église, le témoignage d'une vie authentiquement chrétienne, livrée à Dieu dans une communion que rien ne doit interrompre mais également donnée au prochain avec un zèle sans limite, est le premier moyen d'évangélisation. L'homme contemporain écoute plus volontiers les témoins que les maîtres ou s'il écoute les maîtres, c'est parce qu'ils sont des témoins* »¹⁶.

Ainsi nous arrivons à notre quatrième chemin. Osons-nous encore parler et nous référer au Christ ? Parfois nous oublions la réponse complète de Jésus quand les disciples de Jean-Baptiste lui demandèrent : « *les aveugles retrouvent la vue, les boiteux marchent, les lépreux sont purifiés, les sourds entendent, les morts ressuscitent, les pauvres reçoivent la Bonne Nouvelle* » (Lc 7, 22). Et à un autre endroit, Jésus dit expressément : « *L'Esprit du Seigneur est sur moi parce que le Seigneur m'a consacré par l'onction. Il m'a envoyé porter la Bonne Nouvelle aux pauvres, annoncer aux captifs leur libération, et aux aveugles qu'ils retrouveront la vue, remettre en liberté les opprimés, annoncer une année favorable accordée par le Seigneur* » (Lc 4, 18-19). On a parfois tendance à séparer ces deux mouvements, qui pourtant formaient un tout en Jésus. Pourquoi confronter les uns avec les autres ce qui, d'un point de vue biblique, est complémentaire et inséparable l'un de l'autre ? L'annonce n'est-elle pas la clef de voûte de toute véritable évangélisation ? Sans l'annonce par la parole, aucune véritable évangélisation ne peut avoir lieu. Le Christ a vécu, travaillé et parlé. Bien sûr, il faut savoir quand parler et quand il vaut mieux se taire, comme on le lit dans l'encyclique du Pape Benoît XVI « *Deus caritas est* » : « *Le chrétien sait quand le temps est venu de parler de Dieu et quand il est juste de se taire et de ne laisser parler que l'amour* »¹⁷. Mais cela ne veut pas dire que nous n'avons plus le droit de parler et d'annoncer du tout !

Nous sommes toujours porteurs d'une bonne nouvelle et une nouvelle est toujours là pour être proclamée. Certains se retiennent de proclamer publiquement l'Évangile à cause de l'attention susmentionnée qui est aujourd'hui consacrée au dialogue interconfessionnel. C'est comme si la proclamation directe devait être sacrifiée sur l'autel du dialogue interconfessionnel. Cependant, le meilleur dialogue n'est-il pas mené à partir d'une formulation claire et d'un approfondissement et d'un échange supplémentaires de ses propres convictions, toujours dans le respect de la conviction de l'autre, bien sûr, sans prendre une position supérieure. C'est notre propre supériorité que nous devons rejeter, pas l'annonce !

Quatre chemins : témoigner depuis sa propre vie, témoigner de sa propre vie spirituelle et de sa prière, témoigner par des œuvres de charité et témoigner par l'annonce de la Parole : tels sont les chemins que l'on peut attendre d'un missionnaire religieux.

Tout cela peut et doit bien sûr recevoir la couleur spéciale du propre charisme de l'institut. Par exemple, l'évangélisation d'un Dominicain sera bien sûr différente de l'évangélisation d'un Frère de la Charité. C'est précisément une richesse des différents charismes, qu'ils peuvent se compléter et s'enrichir mutuellement et former ensemble un tapis de fleurs coloré que nous, en tant qu'Église, pouvons offrir au monde.

3. Quelques interprétations concrètes de notre propre expérience en tant que Frères de la Charité en Afrique

Dans une troisième et dernière partie, nous voudrions réfléchir sur un certain nombre d'interprétations concrètes que nous donnons à notre tâche missionnaire en tant que Frères de la Charité en Afrique.

Les Frères de la Charité ont commencé leur travail missionnaire en Afrique en 1911. C'était le Fr. Gabriel Vermeersch qui fut le premier missionnaire et qui, en tant que linguiste et éducateur, a jeté les bases de la propre interprétation de l'esprit missionnaire des Frères de la Charité. Je cite ici sa vision de l'éducation qu'il a transmise à ses confrères, qui a servi de modèle pendant de nombreuses années pour le développement ultérieur de l'œuvre

¹⁶ Evangelii Nuntiandi, n° 41.

¹⁷ Deus Caritas est, n° 31.

missionnaire, et plus spécifiquement dans l'éducation au Congo et au Rwanda.

« *Je suis ici pour donner les âmes à Dieu, et c'est pour cela que je suis appelé par Dieu et à cela que je dois demeurer fidèle.*

- *Je suis un apôtre et dois donc tout attendre de Dieu, collaborer complètement avec Dieu et Lui confier tout. Pour cela, je dois être un homme de prière, d'obéissance et d'amour.*
- *Nulle part ailleurs que dans le tabernacle, Dieu peut être aussi proche de moi. C'est de là que je dois retirer toute ma force ; je dois devenir une âme eucharistique.*
- *La conversion des païens et leur éducation chrétienne, est l'œuvre de Dieu qui m'est confiée. Quel honneur et quelle joie de pouvoir collaborer à cette mission !*
- *Je dois me donner totalement au bien-être des enfants. Je veux parler leur langue, je veux les aimer comme Jésus les aime, je veux prier et souffrir pour eux.*
- *De toutes mes leçons, le cours de religion revêt la plus haute importance. L'éducation à la vie chrétienne selon la doctrine de l'Église doit avoir toute priorité.*
- *Toute autre formation y est subalterne. La profession, la science, l'honneur, l'argent dont ils ont besoin pour vivre, n'est rien lorsque l'éducation religieuse fait défaut. »¹⁸*

La forte orientation religieuse de sa vision avec l'importance d'une vie de prière intense et la place de l'Eucharistie, forment la base de la vie d'un frère missionnaire. La mission est formulée très clairement : la conversion des païens et l'éducation chrétienne des enfants. L'éducation religieuse et l'éducation à la vie chrétienne sont au cœur de tout cela. Enfin, il trouve l'apprentissage de la langue très important pour vraiment entrer en contact avec les élèves et la population autochtone.

On peut mentionner au passage que Fr. Gabriel a compilé le premier dictionnaire de la langue Tsiluba et a développé son propre plan éducatif pour les écoles des Frères de la Charité. Il a

également fait des études ethnographiques. C'était une forme d'inculturation avant la lettre. Dès le départ des efforts ont été faits pour former des responsables locaux. Dans ce qui était Astrida à l'époque, le Groupe scolaire était l'école de formation des dirigeants du Ruanda-Urundi. En même temps fut créée une école normale pour former des enseignants locaux. Cette attention portée à la formation de la population locale afin d'améliorer son niveau de vie se traduira plus tard par l'attention à former des frères locaux au sein de la congrégation, qui pourraient progressivement reprendre le travail des missionnaires étrangers. Aujourd'hui tous les responsables de nos régions d'Afrique et d'Asie sont des frères indigènes qui ont reçu une formation appropriée à cet effet et sont en même temps soutenus dans leurs missions par le Conseil Général.

Il a fallu un certain temps avant de procéder au recrutement de candidats africains pour entrer eux-mêmes dans la Congrégation. Dans les années 1930 les premiers candidats sont acceptés au Congo, mais après quelques années le recrutement est à nouveau arrêté. Pendant un certain temps il était question d'aider à créer une congrégation autochtone pour les frères, jusqu'à ce que dans les années 1950 il soit décidé de recommencer le recrutement et progressivement les rangs se remplissaient de frères autochtones qui nécessitaient un ajustement pour s'intégrer dans des communautés composées de missionnaires européens avec leur propre style de vie très éloigné du style de vie des Africains. Aujourd'hui, l'accent est fortement mis sur la formation de communautés internationales, y compris sur les propres continents. De cette manière la formation des novices se développe au niveau international, de sorte que dès le début on acquiert la mentalité d'appartenir à une congrégation internationale où l'ouverture aux autres cultures est importante. Ainsi c'est aussi plus facile d'envoyer des frères de leur propre continent dans d'autres pays pour y soutenir de nouvelles initiatives. De cette manière, on devient missionnaire dans son propre continent. Forts de leur propre charisme fortement tourné vers la charité et spécialisés dans la prise en charge des malades mentaux et des personnes en situation de handicap, les Frères de la Charité ont été sollicités dans les années 1960 pour

¹⁸ Stockman, Fr. René, Charité en action, 200 ans de Frères de la Charité, Leuven, Brothers of Charity Publications, 2009, p. 302.

organiser la prise en charge des malades mentaux au Congo, au Rwanda et au Burundi. C'était un travail pionnier dans la libération des malades mentaux de prison, réécrivant un morceau d'histoire des premières années de la Congrégation. À partir de ce moment, la Congrégation des Frères de la Charité se profilerait réellement du cœur de son charisme et apporterait une contribution fondamentale à la fois à l'Église et à la société en favorisant le développement d'une plus grande dignité humaine envers les personnes marginalisées en raison d'une maladie mentale ou d'un handicap. Au début on a essayé de transplanter les soins occidentaux existants en Afrique d'une manière assez simplifiée, et ce n'est que plus tard qu'on a commencé à se rendre compte que cela nécessitait un ajustement.

Aujourd'hui, c'est un point d'attention important au sein de l'apostolat pour s'assurer que les soins professionnels partent toujours d'une attitude de base aimante, où la charité fait la différence. À partir de l'encyclique « Deus Caritas est » du Pape Benoît XVI, une distinction essentielle demeure entre philanthropie et charité. La philanthropie consiste à fournir une assistance sans nécessairement avoir in lien avec l'amour ; la charité, c'est l'amour exprimé dans le service et c'est Jésus-Christ même que l'on voit, rencontre et aime dans la personne dont on prend soin. En ce qui concerne l'expertise, la charité demande une attention particulière pour le développement de l'expertise du cœur¹⁹. Ici, une fois de plus, l'importance de la présence de missionnaires religieux est démontrée pour assurer le maintien de cette distinction importante.

En marge, nous pouvons également évoquer ici les problèmes éthiques qui, dans une approche plus globale et aussi sous la pression de certains bailleurs de fonds, peuvent imposer des pratiques totalement incompatibles avec la doctrine de l'Église catholique. Il appartiendra aux missionnaires religieux de garder un œil sur cela et de ne permettre aucun compromis.

Après le génocide au Rwanda, en tant que congrégation nous avons également constaté à

quel point il était important comme communauté d'essayer de surpasser les différences ethniques. Ici je voudrais souligner deux aspects. Un groupe de frères missionnaires a fui ensemble puis s'est installé dans les camps de réfugiés au Congo et en Tanzanie, où ils ont pris en charge les malades mentaux et ont ensuite organisé un enseignement à distance pour les enfants et les jeunes des camps qui n'avaient pas la possibilité de recevoir une éducation. À côté de cela des frères sont revenus pour continuer l'apostolat auprès des malades mentaux et des personnes handicapées, et ont cherché dans les communautés à surpasser toute forme de différence ethnique. Il reste un point d'attention important, aussi dans nos maisons de formation internationales, de lutter contre toute forme de tribalisme et d'accompagner les jeunes à ce sujet.

Conclusion

Dans l'importante encyclique « Populorum progressio » (1967), le Pape Paul a très explicitement mis en avant le développement de tous les peuples comme un point d'attention majeur de l'Église, mais en même temps il a clairement mis en avant une vision chrétienne du développement de l'homme. Dans les tâches laïques auxquelles nous sommes envoyés en tant que frères-missionnaires, il sera toujours important de respecter scrupuleusement ce principe de base dans toute forme de travail de développement, afin d'éviter d'une part de s'engager dans un champ purement social sans laisser résonner la base religieuse, ou que, d'autre part, on est trop entraîné par des principes purement financiers et économiques. Je voudrais donc terminer par cette importante citation de « Populorum progressio » :

« Le développement ne se réduit pas à la simple croissance économique. Pour être authentique, il doit être intégral, c'est-à-dire promouvoir tout homme et tout l'homme. Comme l'a fort justement souligné un éminent expert : « Nous n'acceptons pas de séparer l'économique de l'humain, le développement des civilisations où il s'inscrit. Ce qui compte pour nous, c'est l'homme, chaque homme, chaque groupement d'hommes, jusqu'à l'humanité tout entière »²⁰.

¹⁹ Deus Caritas est, encyclique du Pape Benoît XVI, 2005.

²⁰ Populorum progressio, n° 14.

John Paul Herman, SVD

The Mission of the Church in India New Challenges and Opportunities

As an Indian, from childhood, I always believed when it was said, we all belong to a global family (*Vasudeiva Kutmbakam*) and that we live in peace and harmony with each other. I grew up in a society made up of people of different religions, castes, cultures and languages. On the street where I lived with my parents and siblings ours was the only Christian family. My neighbours were mostly Hindus, a few Muslims and even one Sikh family. We all lived in peace and harmony. We shared our joy at various national and religious festivities and even shared each other's sorrows at the time of loss and together we helped each other in need.

As the years passed, with the boom of technology, population growth and many other reasons, the proximity with our neighbours slowly started diminishing. People gradually isolated themselves. The neighbours became anonymous to each other and doubt and suspicion started creeping in. In terms of progress and development, we moved forward and our life became more comfortable. But in terms of relationship, we moved away from each other. Life narrowed down to isolated individuals. Instead of seeing the similarities we shared, we started seeing the differences. Our communitarian life moved to the individual, 'me' and 'myself'. Besides, there are divisive ideologies and politics that further isolate and divide the people from one another. People are set against each other. Conflicts and riots are on the rise. The great characteristic of India; 'Unity in diversity', has turned into divisive differences. Although technology helps to connect people on-line, in reality, people have gone far from each other.

When we talk about the mission, we understand, it is proclaiming God's Kingdom of peace, justice, equality by the People of God in their own contexts. When faced with crisis, they are inspired and motivated to engage in addressing

the issues, engage through their words, lives and actions as they witness to Christ.

In addressing the topic, 'The Mission of the Church in India: New Challenges and Opportunities', one needs to remember that since Indian culture and traditions are ancient, they are deeply rooted in the lives of the people. No matter what religion, caste or language one belongs to, they are part of the life of every Indian citizen. Historically, it was only after the arrival of foreigners, especially the Moghul invasion and subsequently British rule, Indians felt the need for unity and started asserting themselves. Thus, attempts have been made to define and assert Indian culture, religions and languages. After Independence, the Indian constitution safeguarded the democratic values of liberty, fraternity and equality of all, irrespective of caste, culture, language or religion, giving special privileges to the weaker sections, poor and minorities. At that time, there existed a small right-wing group, that wanted a different India, a different nationalism with its own ideology. As the years passed, this small group has grown and become a political power, that is not in favour of giving special privileges to the minorities.

When we talk about the mission, we need to remember the history of India. In the recent past, in the attempt to define it, this assertion has taken on a rigorous form and resulted in communal disturbances. This is backed by political interests; thus, making the mission of Christ more difficult. This mission is presented as foreign mission to 'convert' (converting from one's religion to Christianity). It is presented negatively as a threat to the nation. The political parties that backed these attempts have come into power and it has become a political tool. Every activity connected to mission; to missionaries, missionary work, charity, helping the poor, working for health, educational and social development, etc. have been considered as a means aimed at

‘conversion’. This has become the biggest hindrance in working for the mission of Christ, which is basically working for the values of the Kingdom of God, i.e. peace, justice and equality for everyone.

There are various factors that influence the mission both positively and negatively. Among the many factors, I have identified the following four, namely; Growing Communalism and Fundamentalism, Right Wing Politics, War and unrest in Bordering countries and the Covid-19 Epidemic. At the end, I have suggested the need for change a in terminology, replacing it with new terms, suited to today’s context. Certain terms such as ‘conversion’, ‘mission’, ‘missionary’, ‘charity’, etc. have taken on a negative meaning today.

Growing Communalism and Fundamentalism

Earlier, in the colonial and post-colonial era, the term ‘communal’ was often used in order to uplift and defend the minorities and weaker sections of the society who did not get adequate opportunities, be it on the basis of gender, class, caste and religion. Since the communal policies were mainly centred around the allocation of jobs; access to education and political positions; a large number of people were unaffected by communalism. But later, it developed into weapon for reactionary social classes and political forces. The communal leaders and political parties allied with them and the vested interests deliberately encouraged them to keep away from the real issues, to gain political mileage. In the present situation, the political parties backed by such elements have come into power and thus such communal and fundamental incidents are growing day by day.

In this situation, to carry out the mission has become extremely difficult. As political parties have made it their agenda (hidden or obvious), the fringe elements have mushroomed in fuelling the fundamentalism and communal tensions. In the name of ‘conversion’, the priests, nuns and the churches have become the target of their attacks. The missionaries are monitored. There are programmes like *Ghar Wapsi* (bringing people back to the religion to which they belonged), where Christians are forced to leave the religion of their choice.

Therefore, the growth of communalism and fundamentalism has seriously affected the mission. At the same time, the Protestant groups add fuel to the fire by boldly preaching and baptising, which aggravates the situation further. Though the Catholic Church has changed its understanding of mission, i.e. from baptising and saving souls to improving the lives of the people and creating a better world of peace, justice and equality, it still has to face the brunt.

Right Wing Politics

As we know the left or right political spectrum likes to classify the political positions, ideologies and parties from the social equality perspective, also used for liberals and conservatives. The Left-wing emphasises on ideas such as freedom, equality, fraternity, rights, progress, reform and internationalism. Whereas the Right-wing ideology places emphasis on authority, hierarchy, order, duty, tradition, reaction and nationalism.

In India, so far, the Congress Party, at the centre, is leading the country with the ideology of the Left-wing, where the minorities and the weaker sections of society have some privileges. They followed the Indian Constitution based on the democratic values of freedom, equality and fraternity. But due to the of growth of fundamentalism and communalism, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena and other like-minded parties have replaced Congress. After nearly eight years in power, the Right-wing usage has been accepted by the BJP party and the ideological forces behind it. They are all out to establish a particular nationalistic country and are imposing their ideology.

In spreading their ideology and forming such their nationalism, the Left-wing policies are a hindrance. For this reason, the minorities such as Christians and Muslims become rivals. So, anything done against them redounds to their advantage. And this explains the increasing attacks on churches and mosques. Therefore, this too makes the mission difficult as there is a growing fear among the missionaries of being attacked at any time. There are new rules to suppress their work and to put them

behind bars easily. Whereas, the rules are lenient towards the attackers.

War and Unrest in Bordering Countries

There has been unrest with the countries bordering on India since past three-four years. On the North-West border, Pakistan has always been a constant disturbance. Especially after the articles 370 and 35A, have been scrapped, the Jammu-Srinagar region has been in turmoil. Terroristic acts and on-going conflicts have increased. This has become a cause of concern for the Muslim communities living in India. On the other hand, though India has a fairly good business relationship with China, the military relationship is not at ease. Besides, India doesn't favour China supporting Pakistan as it is accused of aiding terrorism. The relationship with Myanmar is also a point of concern for India. It has been accused of allegedly training the Naxalites and preparing their own terrorist groups to invade India. There have been proofs of existing training camps on the Indo-Myanmar border. There has not been much trouble from Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, as they are facing their own internal problems. But on the whole, there is a variable amount of unrest with the bordering countries. Besides the unrest the on-going war between Russia and Ukraine has affected the country in various ways, weakening India's financial growth.

Therefore, at this juncture, much of the focus is on financial recovery and containing the rise in the price of commodities. The good values are losing importance. Thus, in this context, the Mission suffers.

Impact of the Covid-19 Epidemic

When the Covid-19 epidemic suddenly burst out, it shook the whole world. Seeing people die one after the other, was the greatest tragedy one could experience. Fear and uncertainty gripped everyone. It is now more than two years and still the world has not come out of it. Though it is diminishing in some places, in others, it is re-emerging. Covid-19 has changed the life of the world. The biggest change it has brought to humanity is, isolation. Living together and participating in the lives of one another is basic to human nature, and this has been challenged by this epidemic. Thanks to technology that

made the virtual reality and kept people in contact. But certainly, its impact on people's livelihood, their health, food systems and the world of work was enormous. We have seen the sudden loss of human life all over the world. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating too. Millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people has grown tremendously and continues to grow.

It is a universal phenomenon and its impact on humanity is inestimable. It has changed the face of the earth and given it a new face called, the *New Normal*. The world is struggling to cope with these new phenomena. To name a few terms the phenomena brought: - work from home, study on-line, lockdown and quarantine, wearing a face mask, public distance and sanitisation.

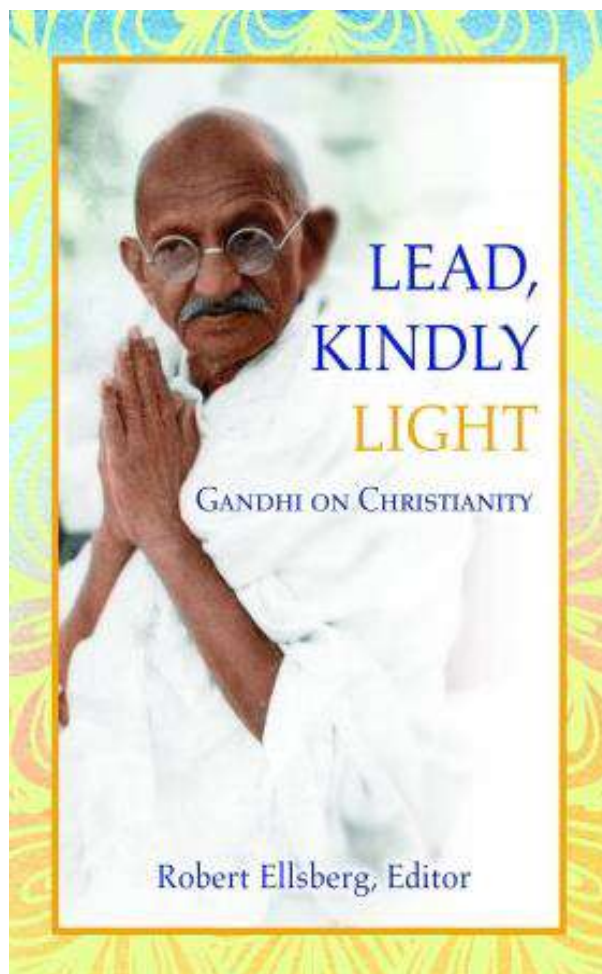
In this situation, the mission also faces new challenges and new opportunities. One has to follow this *new normal* to protect oneself and the others. The Church as the communion of people has been challenged, as the physical contact has been limited and reaching out to others physically, has come to a halt. It's also an opportunity to reach out to the people who are struggling for food, medical assistance, education and many other needs. But at the same time not only the people but also the missionaries and leaders are afraid to come forward. Instead, the on-line churches, on-line masses and other religious gatherings are being held virtually. A much bigger number is able to join in the online programmes. People are connected to one another far and wide. The Church has become more creative, reaching out to the unreachable. This pandemic has brought many negative and positive elements to our lives. Nonetheless, it is up to us to adapt as we face these new challenges. In whatever way we respond, it will surely affect our personal and social life. Indeed, there are many lessons for us to learn to enhance human life and to create a better world. It is for sure that even when this pandemic is over the *new normal* is going to remain. We need to explore new possibilities for the mission.

Review and Change Negative and Confusing Terms

As I have already suggested that there is a need for a change in the terminology which is being used. Many terms have either lost their actual meaning or they convey a negative one. For example, the word 'Mission' is connected to the colonial period and reminds people of the atrocities of that period. The missionaries came to India, to baptise as many as possible, to save souls because the Church held the view that salvation is not possible outside the Church. This understanding still continues within the Church and it is taken as a tool by the fundamentalists to accuse the missionaries of converting their people to Christianity. Due to which, there is an increase in attacks on 'missionaries' and the institutions attached to mission. The term 'conversion' in India, means, converting from other religions, mainly from the Hindu religion. These days, any fundamental group may come and disturb the prayers being held in churches or even in houses, on the pretext of an attempt at conversion. Even the retreats and healing prayers are not spared. They too are interpreted as an enticement to convert. In some States, the Government has even promulgated strict Anti-Conversion laws, which prohibit the mission of Christ. Even worse, the word 'charity' is taken to be negative. Any work of charity, social work for the poor and marginalised is being criticized and prohibited as it is considered to be an allurements for the poor to convert to Christianity. Similarly, there are many terms that either create misunderstanding or have become negative. Therefore, to spread the mission of Christ, there is a grave need to adapt to the context and use the terms that are acceptable. The mission of Christ has to become the mission to all, no matter to which caste, culture and religion one belongs. Let the Kingdom of God rein in the hearts of all.

As India faces its internal problems such as; religious fundamentalism, communalism, ideological and political conflicts, caste exploitation, discrimination based on caste, gender, language, it is also affected by the problems of others; such as Russia and Ukraine on-going war, conflict with bordering nations

and the Covid-19 epidemic. It is believed that the root cause of all these problems is poverty. A few rich amass the maximum property and wealth of the nation and refuse to share them with those who are deprived. Above all, the Government's inability to serve the poor adds to the problem. Unless the Church addresses these issues, to speak about God's mission makes no sense. The Church has to join hands with all the people of goodwill, who are concerned about making this world better. There is a need to join hands with other churches, other religious communities, Government and non-Government agencies and other ideological groups. It is urgent to find new ways of relating to people belonging to the different strata of life.



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Misión en un horizonte divino “Missio Dei” setenta años más tarde



En octubre de 2021, SEDOS organizó un simposio virtual sobre las nuevas tendencias de misión y misionología.¹ Fue un gran éxito y contó con la participación de unas 250 personas durante todas las sesiones. Se trataron temas como la evangelización, los caminos de la

misión, diferentes maneras de practicar la misión y los actores en la misión. Como marco de las reflexiones se partió del énfasis que el papa Francisco pone en las periferias y sus gritos existenciales y se concluyó con una mirada hacia la integridad de la creación, otro tema que el papa pone de relieve a tiempo y destiempo. SEDOS ha organizado varios simposios remarcables sobre la misión, particularmente en 1981,² con un énfasis en el diálogo y la iglesia local como sujeto de la misión.

En este Simposio de 2021 fue muy interesante y agradable observar una gran unanimidad de parte de todos y todas las presentadoras en afirmar que la misión pertenece a Dios, sale de Dios, es un movimiento de Dios que involucra todo el mundo: “Una observación importante fue que la ‘Misión comienza en la mente de Dios’, como la Hna. Rekha Chennattu RA explicó tan vívidamente a partir de su estudio bíblico. Por eso, los cuatro fundamentos [Biblia, experiencia, Espíritu Santo, grito del mundo] tienen que comprenderse como unidad bajo el paraguas de la *missio Dei*, la misión de Dios”.³ O sea, prácticamente nadie hablaba de una perspectiva centrada en la iglesia, como que la iglesia tuviera una exclusividad para llevar adelante la misión, tuviera que llevar el mundo a Dios o Dios al mundo, tuviera que renovarse a sí misma por nuevos miembros o expresiones similares.

En mi observación, este cambio en el énfasis sobre la misión se ha operado recién en las últimas dos décadas, y desde luego no en todos los sectores de la iglesia. Comprender la misión como algo que nos viene de Dios, es entonces algo relativamente nuevo, por lo menos en el discurso referente a la comprensión teológica y una perspectiva de práctica. Hablamos entonces de la “*missio Dei*”. Esto lleva a dos cosas: Por un lado, vale la pena mirar a la historia de este concepto que se remonta a un encuentro sobre la misión justamente hace 70 años en Alemania. Por otro lado, como es una comprensión relativamente nueva, sigue habiendo todavía dificultades para llegar una práctica renovada coherente. Estas dificultades para ubicarse

¹ SEDOS: <https://sedosmission.org> – El simposio se realizó del 11 al 15 de octubre 2021 bajo el título: Nuevas tendencias en la misión – el futuro emergente. Las presentaciones del simposio se acaban de publicar en inglés: Peter Baekelmans, CICM/Marie-Hélène Robert, OLA (eds.), *New Trends in Mission. The Emerging Future*. With a Preface by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books 2022. Para un resumen de las presentaciones del simposio véase: Chris Chaplin, MSC/Marie-Hélène Robert, OLA/Peter Baekelmans, CICM/Rachel Oommen, ICM (Redaction Committee), *The Emerging Future in Mission. Summary of the 2021 SEDOS Mission Symposium Talks*, in *SEDOS Bulletin* 53 (9-10.2021), 44-48.

² Mary Motte, F.M.M./Joseph R. Lang, M.M. (eds.), *Mission in Dialogue. The Sedos Research Seminar on the Future of Mission*. March 8–19, 1981, Rome, Italy, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1982.

³ Chaplin et al, *The Emerging Future*, 44. [one very important remark was that “Mission starts in the Mind of God”, as Sr. Rekha Chennattu, RA, so vividly explained from her study of the Bible. The Four Foundations therefore are to be taken as a unity under the umbrella of missio dei, the mission of God.](#)

correctamente dentro de una perspectiva de *missio Dei* se pueden notar en los verbos que se usan para hablar de ella: practicar, participar, adelantar, integrarse en, llevar adelante.

Ubicarse en el contexto – Misión en el siglo xx

La gran conferencia misionera de Edimburgo 1910 todavía se había planteado la conversión de todo el mundo durante el siglo a venir.⁴ John Mott, uno de los grandes protagonistas de esta conferencia declaró: “Es nuestra esperanza que antes de que cerremos nuestros ojos a la hora de morir, todos los pueblos de la tierra hayan tenido la oportunidad de conocer y esperar a Jesucristo vivo.”⁵ Era una conferencia de mucho optimismo y para nada exento de tonos colonialistas que sin embargo motivó para un gran entusiasmo y esfuerzo a la misión a nivel mundial. La iglesia católica no participó formalmente en Edimburgo, pero compartió el mismo entusiasmo. Dos guerras mundiales pusieron esta proyección en jaque: “¿Cómo se podría justificar una misión cuando el cristianismo occidental se había desacreditado tan fundamentalmente por el colonialismo, imperialismo y particularmente la Primera y Segunda Guerra Mundial? ¿Se había interpretado mal los signos de los tiempos? En 1910, muchos habían tenido la convicción que la humanidad correría hacia la unificación, orientada en la civilización occidental. Obviamente, esta visión se había mostrado falsa. Por lo tanto, la reflexión misionera y teológica se dirigió ahora a tópicos de la interpretación de la historia, con un enfoque sobre la doctrina de las cosas últimas, o sea, la escatología,” resume Wrogemann.⁶ Del lado

católico llegó como una primera reacción en 1919 con la encíclica *Maximum illud*, de Benedicto XV que abandonó la idea de la misión como empresa nacional – ya no podría haber misioneros franceses en contraposición a alemanes, etc. Esto le dolió particularmente a Francia, ya que había funcionado como protectora de la misión global, por ejemplo, también en China. *Maximum illud* declaró a los misioneros que “su misión es embajada de Jesucristo y no legación patriótica.”⁷ De ahí en adelante, la misión de la iglesia se debe orientar hacia el Reino de Dios que, sin embargo, todavía se relacionaba estrechamente con la iglesia.⁸

Del lado evangélico⁹ se estableció un Consejo Internacional de Misión (CMI, 1921) que se

of the times been misinterpreted? In 1910 many had still been convinced that humanity was rushing toward unity, led by Western civilization. But this vision had turned out to be false, had it not? The focus of mission-theological consideration now turned to issues of the interpretation of history with a focus on the doctrine of last things, i.e., eschatology.

⁷ Benedicto XV, *Maximum illud* 48.

Ce n'est pas ainsi que doit être le Missionnaire catholique, digne de ce nom. N'oubliant jamais qu'il n'est pas un envoyé de sa patrie, mais du Christ, il doit se comporter de façon à ce que chacun puisse indéniablement reconnaître en lui un ministre de cette religion qui, embrassant tous les hommes qui adorent Dieu dans un esprit de vérité, n'est étrangère à aucune nation, et « là il n'est plus question de Grec ou de Juif, de circoncision ou d'incirconcision, de Barbare, de Scythe, d'esclave, d'homme libre ; il n'y a que le Christ, qui est tout et en tout »

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/fr/apost-letters/documents/hf_ben-xv_apl_19191130_maximum-illud.html

⁸ Para una valoración de *Maximum illud* véase los documentos de la Congregación para la Evangelización de los Pueblos/Obras Misionales Pontificas, *Bautizados y enviados: La iglesia de Cristo en misión en el mundo. Mes misionero extraordinario, octubre 2019*, Cincello Balsamo (Milano): San Paolo 2019 (disponible en www.october2019.va; acceso 10-06-2022); Pierre Diarra, *Mois missionnaire extraordinaire octobre 2019 en France*, *Spiritus* 238 (61.1, Mars 2020) 116-121.

Congrégation pour l'Évangélisation des Peuples/Œuvres Pontificales Missionnaires, *Baptisés et envoyés. L'Église du Christ en mission dans le monde. Mois missionnaire extraordinaire, Octobre 2019*

⁹ Sobre este desarrollo sigo Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, capítulo 5, “De Edimburgo a Achimota 1910 a 1958”, 59-72. Para un buen resumen véase Eloy Bueno, Consejo mundial de Iglesias, in Eloy Bueno/Roberto Calvo (eds.), *Diccionario de Misionología y Animación*

⁴ Jean-François Zorn, La mission au rythme de l'œcuménisme, in : *Spiritus* 246 (63.1, Mars 2022) 42-52.

⁵ En Henning Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*. Translated by Karl E. Böhmer, Intercultural Theology Vol. Two, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 2018, 30.

there was a tone of tremendous optimism in John Mott's words when he said at the conference: „It is our hope that before we close our eyes in death, all peoples on earth will have had the opportunity to know and await the living Lord Christ:”

⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

„How could Christian mission still be justified when Western Christianity had so thoroughly discredited itself through colonialism, imperialism, and then especially also through the First and Second World Wars? Had the signs

encargó de la organización de conferencias mundiales para orientar la tarea misionera: 1928 en Jerusalén (dedicado al tema de la secularización), 1938 en Tambaram (tema central: las religiones), 1947 en Whitby (sobre asociación y colaboración [“partnership”]), 1952 en Willingen (concepto central: *missio Dei*) y en 1958 Achimota/Accra (tema independencia). En la Conferencia de Nueva Delhi 1961 se integra el CMI en Consejo Mundial de Iglesias y comienza una dinámica diferente.

Con la mirada en Dios

Inmediatamente después de la guerra se realizó una conferencia en Whitby, Canadá, en un marco bien reducido. Se trataba de dar un paso adelante después de la gran tragedia y se comprendió que una misión ya no podía pensarse desde un centro occidental hacia un mundo más allá.

Relativamente poco tiempo después, en 1952, ya se convocó la siguiente conferencia, a Alemania. Esta conferencia de Willingen, un pequeño municipio al norte del estado alemán de Hesse, se convertiría en una de las más fructíferas desde el punto de vista teológico en la historia de las conferencias misioneras mundiales. Participaron unos 180 delegados de todo el mundo. Tomaron cuenta del estado del mundo después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial en un contexto de incertidumbre sobre el futuro: En China, los comunistas habían tomado el poder en 1949 y habían expulsado a todos los misioneros occidentales (el *choque de China*). Constaba el conflicto entre la Unión Soviética y las potencias occidentales en la *Guerra Fría* y el conflicto armado en Corea a partir de 1950. La era colonial estaba llegando a su fin y los antiguos territorios coloniales comenzaron a independizarse: Indonesia en 1945, Filipinas en 1946, el subcontinente indio en 1947, Birmania en 1948. Los estados nacionales que se establecieron, se enfrentaron también a la tarea de tener que establecer una identidad nacional, por lo que se planteó la cuestión sobre bases ideológicas o históricas que se podía integrar. Las iglesias cristianas de estos países fueron vistas como aliadas de las antiguas potencias

coloniales. Entonces los nuevos estados tuvieron que construir sus identidades en relación con la población del lugar y en una difícil relación con las iglesias del régimen anterior.

Eloy Bueno resume este evento en estos términos:

Bajo el tema *Missionary Obligation of the Church* (publicada su conclusión final como *Missions under the Cross*¹⁰) fue escenario del paso de una eclesiología misionera a una teología misionera, de una misión centrada en la Iglesia a una Iglesia centrada en la misión, en la *Missio Dei*: dada la incapacidad de la Iglesia para cumplir su misión había que refundar las misiones desde una raíz teológica más que eclesiológica (en línea con la teología de Barth [...]). La Iglesia no es más que la sierva y el signo de la presencia de Dios. El lenguaje triunfalista es abandonado definitivamente [para] el proyecto misionero, pues se trata de una misión en solidaridad con el Cristo encarnado y crucificado. La Iglesia, ‘Pueblo de Dios en el mundo’, debe dar testimonio de ‘lo que Dios ha hecho, está haciendo y quiere hacer en Cristo’. Esta solidaridad está bajo el signo de la cruz, por lo que no puede ser conformismo sino discernimiento de los signos de los tiempos.¹¹

Esta conferencia en Willingen logra entonces un cambio de perspectiva. Ya no se parte de la iglesia como centro de expansión, de atracción o como actor de un movimiento de conversión, sino que la misma iglesia se ubica e integra dentro de un movimiento más amplio y universal. J. Moltmann resume dos décadas más tarde: “Entender teológicamente la iglesia misionera en el horizonte mundial es entenderla en el horizonte de la *missio Dei*. El *envío* abarca a toda la Iglesia, no sólo a partes de ella, o incluso sólo a los miembros enviados por ella. [...] La misión abarca todas las actividades que

¹⁰ Norman Goodall (ed.), *Missions under the Cross. Addresses delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952*; with Statements issued by the Meeting, London: Edinburgh House Press, published for the International Missionary Council 1953.

¹¹ Bueno, Consejo mundial de Iglesias, 268.

sirven para liberar al hombre de su esclavitud en presencia del Dios que viene, desde la necesidad económica hasta el abandono de Dios. [...] Si la Iglesia entiende su misión en el marco de la misión del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo desde el Padre, entonces también se entiende a sí misma en el marco de la historia de Dios con el mundo y descubre su lugar y su función en esta historia.” La *missio Dei* es un movimiento que sale de Dios pero que va más allá de la Iglesia y alcanza su meta en la culminación de la creación en Dios. De ahí que la Iglesia entienda su misión mundial en la historia trinitaria de Dios con el mundo. No se trata de la expansión de la iglesia sino del Reino de Dios.¹²

Es interesante observar que la palabra “*missio Dei*” no consta en las actas y deliberaciones de Willingen, pero todo el discurso de la conferencia fue pronto resumido en este término propuesto e introducido por los misionólogos Karl Hartenstein y más adelante elaborado sobre todo por G. F. Vicedom.¹³

¹² Jürgen Moltmann, *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes. Ein Beitrag zur messianischen Ekklesiologie*, München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag 1975, 24.

Die missionarische Kirche im Welthorizont theologisch zu begreifen, heißt sie im Horizont der *Missio Dei* zu verstehen. *Sendung* umfaßt das Ganze der Kirche, nicht nur Teile in ihr, oder gar nur von ihr ausgesandte Glieder. *Mission* umfaßt alle Tätigkeiten, die der Befreiung des Menschen aus seiner Knechtschaft in der Gegenwart des kommenden Gottes dienen, von der ökonomischen Not bis zur Gottverlassenheit.

Versteht die Kirche ihre Sendung im Rahmen der Sendung des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes vom Vater, dann versteht sie sich selbst auch im Rahmen der Geschichte Gottes mit der Welt und entdeckt in dieser Geschichte ihren Ort und ihre Funktion. Die neuere katholische und evangelische Missionstheologie spricht darum mit Recht von der *Missio Dei*, einer Bewegung aus Gott, in der die Kirche entsteht und zu ihrer eigenen Bewegung kommt, die aber über die Kirche hinausgreift und in der Vollendung der Schöpfung in Gott zum Ziel kommt. Daraus folgt, daß die Kirche ihre Weltmission in der trinitarischen Geschichte Gottes mit der Welt versteht. Sie ist mit allen ihren Tätigkeiten und Leiden ein Faktor in der Geschichte des Reiches Gottes. Nicht um ihre eigene Ausbreitung, sondern um die Ausbreitung des Reiches geht es.

¹³ Para una investigación exhaustiva sobre esta teología y perspectiva de la *missio Dei* véase John G. Flett, *The Witness of God. The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK., Eerdmans Publishing Company 2010; Georg F. Vicedom, *Missio Dei. Einführung in eine Theologie der Mission*, München: Chr.

Wrogemann ve varios ejes de la comprensión de la misión de Dios por parte de Hartenstein y como ejes de Willingen: (1) *Missio Dei* es *penitencia*. Como Dios mismo lleva adelante la misión, porque en su propio ser es misionario y movimiento – las procesiones, como se llamaba –, la actividad eclesial tiene que dejar de lado aspectos de la misión que no tomen en cuenta este protagonismo divino. (2) *Missio Dei* es *promesa* en su orientación escatológica, más allá de la historia contingente. (3) La iglesia es activa de un modo secundario: integrada e asumida en una dinámica más universal su propia acción. (4) Con la *missio Dei*, definitivamente se acabó con una concepción geográfica de la misión. La misión no es una actividad “allá”, donde los otros, sino que se dirige a todos los aspectos de la vida y cultura de todos los pueblos.¹⁴

La recepción de la perspectiva *missio Dei*

Por más que esta perspectiva de una misión que parte de Dios y atañe toda la creación haya sido muy llamativa, su recepción y aceptación no fue unánime en círculos protestantes. A los 50 años de esta conferencia, Wilhelm Richebächer presentó la trayectoria bajo la disyuntiva: “*Missio Dei*, ¿fundamento o camino equivocado de la teología de la misión?”¹⁵

Kaiser Verlag 1958, reeditado junto su otra obra importante sobre la acción de Dios: id., *Missio Dei. Einführung in eine Theologie der Mission. Actio Dei. Mission und Reich Gottes*. Neu hg. von Klaus W. Müller, mit Beiträgen von Bernd Brandl und Herwig Wagner, edition afem mission classics 4, Nürnberg: VTR 2017. Véase también el capítulo 9 “La misión como anticipación en la misión de Dios Uno y Trino (*Missio Dei*)”, en Stephen B. Bevans/Roger P. Schroeder, *Teología para la misión hoy. Constantes en contexto*, Estella: Verbo Divino 2009, 491-519.

Stephen B. Bevans/Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today*, American Society of Missiology Series N° 30, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis 2004, 286-304.

¹⁴ Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, 68f.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Richebächer, “*Missio Dei*” – Grundlage oder Irrweg der Missionstheologie?, en EMW, *missio Dei heute. Zur Aktualität eines missionstheologischen Schlüsselbegriffs*, Weltmission heute. Studienheft 52, Hamburg: EMW (in Kooperation mit Evangelische Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck) 2003, 184-207. Todo este volumen presenta los documentos de una conferencia conmemorativa de Willingen.

Me concentro más a la recepción católica. Una primera observación es que en un primer momento, Willingen fue totalmente ignorado: La revista de misionología de referencia – *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*¹⁶ – no menciona Willingen por ninguna parte hasta finales de la década. Lo mismo la *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* ni la *Bibliografía misionaria*, editada por la Propaganda Fide en Roma.¹⁷ La revista *Las misiones católicas*, editada por los jesuitas, informa hacia finales de 1953¹⁸ sobre esta conferencia y enfatiza el “llamado a la unidad”: Willingen habría llamado a la unidad interna en torno al Señor de la misión mundial, Jesucristo, por el mandato misionero, pero también de cara a las amenazas del comunismo. Se hace eco de la crítica al cristianismo occidental: “En esta visión aterradora, la gente se reunió ante el Señor de la Iglesia, se sumergió en la indispensabilidad de su Gran Comisión y se dio cuenta de que *no había participación en Cristo sin participación en su misión mundial*. Incluso se dijo: ‘La Iglesia es misión, y la misión es Iglesia’.”¹⁹ Como el gran problema se ve la división interna de las iglesias protestantes sobre todo en África y la proyección de la misión protestante ahora al continente católico de América Latina,²⁰ después de la pérdida de China. El informe

reclama que los protestantes deberían respetar la iglesia católica. Todo el informe no menciona la centralidad de una perspectiva teológica, o sea, de una misión de Dios.

Llama entonces poderosamente la atención que diez años más tarde, el Concilio Vaticano II adopte esta visión como su perspectiva central para la misión:

La Iglesia peregrinante es misionera por su naturaleza, puesto que toma su origen de la misión del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo, según el designio de Dios Padre ... (AG 2).

Como es sabido, el decreto *Ad gentes* alcanzó su formulación final por un camino muy aventurado. Todavía en noviembre de 1964, el borrador fue remitido a la comisión para asegurar un fundamento *teológico* del documento y fueron teólogos de la talla de Joseph Ratzinger e Yves Congar quienes lo “salvaron”.²¹ De ahí resultó una conexión más coherente con la iglesia, lo que a su vez lleva a comprender que “el texto central del Concilio sobre la naturaleza, la tarea y el modo de la misión, que arrastra todos los demás textos sobre la misión del Concilio, incluido el propio Decreto sobre la Misión, y contiene los puntos de partida de la misma, se encuentra en la Constitución sobre la Iglesia [LG], en los números 13-17.”²² La parte teológica de AG sigue la perspectiva de la *missio Dei*, aunque no use el concepto.²³

Después del Concilio, la consciencia sobre la naturaleza misionera de la iglesia se expandía, por un lado. Por otro lado, importantes documentos sobre la misión acentuaron otros

¹⁶ Esta revista fue fundada en 1911 por el padre de la misionología alemana, Joseph Schmidlin, de la universidad Münster, y se sigue publicando hasta ahora, sobre todo en alemán: <https://www.unifr.ch/zmr/de/> (13 de junio 2022).

¹⁷ Esta bibliografía no catalogaba entradas bajo la clave de “*missio Dei*” hasta su última edición en 2014.

¹⁸ Joseph Peters, Ruf nach Einheit, *Die Katholischen Missionen* 72 (5.1953) 148-149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

In dieser erschreckenden Sicht sammelte man sich vor dem Herrn der Kirche, vertiefte sich in die Unabdingbarkeit seines Missionsbefehls und erkannte, daß es keine Teilnahme an Christus ohne Teilnahme an seiner Weltmission gebe. Es fiel sogar das Wort: ‘Kirche ist Mission, und Mission ist Kirche.’

²⁰ Habrá que admitir que en las actas de Willingen (Goodall, *Missions under the Cross*) esta proyección hacia América Latina católica no se encuentra. En cuanto al comunismo las actas mencionan varias veces que “los comunistas” están muy comprometidos en combatir el hambre y en el desarrollo, “tareas tradicionalmente cristianas”, y que por lo tanto, la misión cristiana tendría que comprometer en estas tareas con mucho más razón.

²¹ Véase Yves M.J. Congar, *Theologische Grundlegung* (Nr. 2–9), en: Johannes Schütte (Ed.), *Mission nach dem Konzil*, Mainz: Grünewald 1967, 134-172. [De este libro podrá haber una edición francesa y española]

²² Joseph Ratzinger, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets*, en: Schütte, *Mission nach dem Konzil*, 21-47; 22 (también recogido en la edición de sus obras completas: *Zur Frage der Mission. Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets. Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Formulierung – Vermittlung – Deutung*, en: *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. Gerhard Ludwig Müller et. al., Vol. 7/2, Freiburg: Herder 2012, 917-951).

²³ Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, 172. El capítulo 11 de este tomo ofrece un panorama de la teología misionera de la iglesia católica (165-185).

aspectos, como la evangelización (Pablo VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* 1975) o el Reino de Dios (Juan Pablo II, *Redemptoris missio* 1990). En los años 1990 el concepto de la *missio Dei* no juega un gran papel en la reflexión teológica y misionológica.

Perspectivas

Esto cambia con la entrada del nuevo siglo. Por un lado se dan conmemoraciones de la conferencia de Willingen, por ejemplo a los 50 años, en 2002 que ponen esta perspectiva de relieve.²⁴ Habrá que admitir que esta discusión tal vez haya sido más notable en el ámbito alemán, inclusive en *Spiritus* encontré solo pocas referencias a esta concepción.²⁵

Por otro lado hay congregaciones y comunidades religiosas que adoptan esta visión. Una de ellas es mi congregación (Verbo Divino) que en el Capítulo General del año 2000 se plantea la misión de la siguiente manera: la comunidad practica un discernimiento de los espíritus comunitario (en la declaración del Capítulo #4-7: “discernimiento permanente”) y de esta forma puede enfocar la realidad del contexto (“Nuestro mundo contemporáneo”: #11-23), marcada por la globalización, la urbanización y las migraciones. Pertenecen a este contexto también la situación de la iglesia y la propia congregación. Es la parte de *ver*. La siguiente parte se refiere al *juzgar* y comienza con una expresión de fe: vemos la “misión de Dios, de la primera creación a la nueva

creación” (#35-41) y que Dios lleva el mundo por buen camino con actores dentro y fuera de la iglesia; la referencia de la misión es el mundo entero. La iglesia es “llamada a participar en la misión del Dios trinitario” (#42-45), la SVD es llamada a participar en esta misión eclesial (#46-51). Específicamente con quienes (dentro y fuera de la iglesia) siguen el Espíritu Santo y se distinguen por su obediencia al Espíritu, se establece un *diálogo* (#52-71) en situaciones misioneras – el “diálogo profético” que se ha hecho el lema de la Congregación y que ha sido tratado ampliamente en la misionología.²⁶

Paralelamente ha aumentado la reflexión teológica sobre la misión proveniente de Dios y más amplia que la iglesia. Contribuye enormemente el pontificado de Francisco quien desde *Evangelii gaudium* (2013) enfatiza una visión y práctica de la misión más allá de los parámetros tradicionales:

Si bien esta misión nos reclama una entrega generosa, sería un error entenderla como una heroica tarea personal, ya que la obra es ante todo de Él, más allá de lo que podamos descubrir y entender. [...] En cualquier forma de evangelización el primado es siempre de Dios, que quiso llamarnos a colaborar con Él e impulsarnos con la fuerza de su Espíritu. La verdadera novedad es la que Dios mismo misteriosamente quiere producir, la que Él inspira, la que Él provoca, la que Él orienta y acompaña de mil maneras.²⁷

Francisco lo hace también al empujar a la iglesia hacia otros campos: el cuidado de la casa común (*Laudato si'*), un sistema humano de sociedad (*Fratelli tutti*), la colaboración (con el

²⁴ Véase el tomo de EMW, *missio Dei heute*.

²⁵ Posiblemente se piense en ello en Pierre Kasemuana, Mis primeros pasos en la estepa de Mongolia, en *Spiritus* 39/2 (#151, junio 1998) 37-46; claramente: Michael MacCabe, Misioneros del mañana, *Spiritus* 45/3 (#176, sept de 2004) 39-49; Raymond Rossignol, Los nuevos misioneros de Asia, *Spiritus* 45/3 (#176, sept de 2004) 62-69; Ishvani Kendra, Una visión de la misión para el nuevo milenio. Conclusiones de un Seminario de Investigación, Ishvani Kendra, Pune, India, 9-12 de marzo de 2000, *Spiritus* 41/4 (#161, dic de 2000) 145-157; Carmelo Álvarez, La Missio Dei en un contexto global. Una lectura ecuménica latinoamericana, *Spiritus* 42/4 (#165, dic de 2001) 109-122.

Pierre Kasemuana, Premières pas dans les steppes. En Mongolie, *Spiritus* 39/2 (#151, juin 1998) 145-154; claramente: Michael MacCabe, Missionnaires de demain, *Spiritus* 45/3 (#176, sept de 2004) 332-343; Raymond Rossignol, De nouveaux missionnaires pour l'Asie, *Spiritus* 45/3 (#176, sept de 2004) 356-363

²⁶ La literatura particularmente de misionólogos verbitas se ha hecho muy rica. A modo de ejemplos: Edênio Valle SVD (Org.), *Diálogo profético e Missão*, Campinas: Komedi 2005; Stephen B. Bevans, Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue. Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis 2011; José Antunes da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue. Identity and Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries*. Foreword by Stephen Bevans, Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 119, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2021.

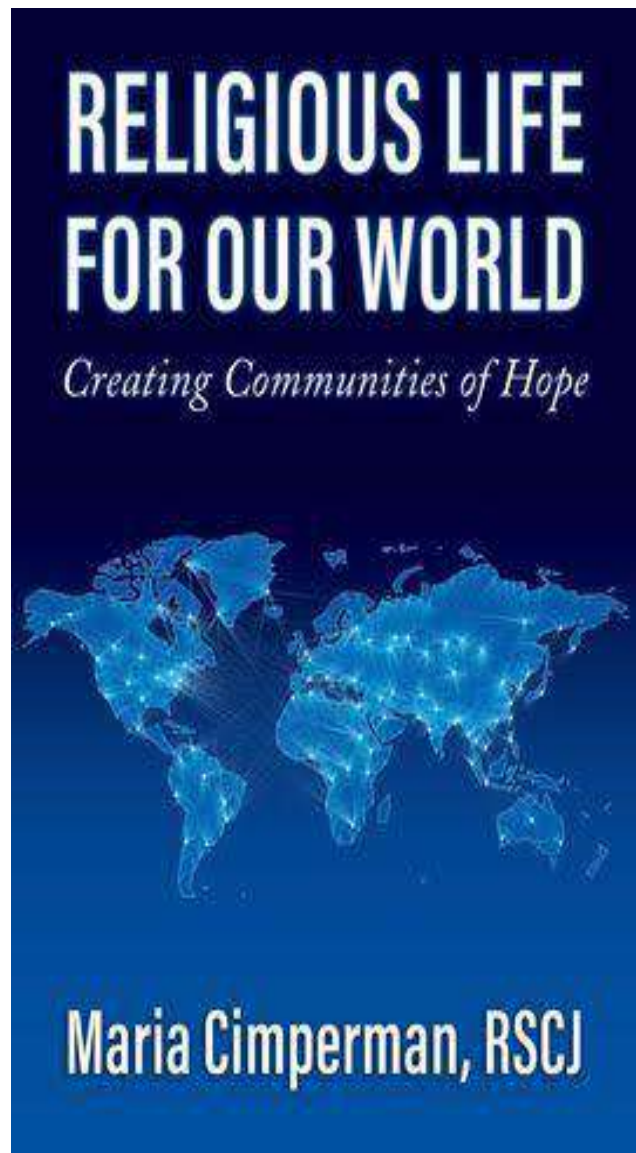
²⁷ Francisco, EG 12, pero también 24 (“olor a oveja”), 110f (evangelización), 180 (Reino de Dios), 230 (unidad pluriforme), 261 (evangelización en el Espíritu), 280 (confianza en el Espíritu y libertad).

camino sinodal, con los primeros pasos en el Sínodo amazónico: *Querida Amazonia*). A través de tales énfasis, la iglesia podría salir de sus preocupaciones consigo mismo. Ya no se trataría de vencer las preocupaciones por la falta (y por ejemplo en Alemania, todavía una abundancia) de vocaciones sacerdotales, la reestructuración de las parroquias, la falta de fondos (igual, este no es un problema real de Alemania – todavía). Más bien se trataría de ver la comunidad de discípulos y discípulas misioneras ponerse al servicio de una humanidad sufriente, como lo manifiesta el segundo capítulo de *Fratelli tutti* (56-86). “Veo a la iglesia como un hospital de campaña después de una batalla. No hay que preguntarle a un hombre gravemente herido por el colesterol o su diabetes. Tienes que curar sus heridas. Hay que empezar por abajo,” explicó Francisco.²⁸

Desde luego, en esta tarea queda mucho por hacer. Entrar en una dinámica en obediencia y seguimiento al Espíritu, ciertamente libera de preocupaciones y el peso de tareas pesadas. Depende también de la práctica comunitaria del discernimiento en el contexto histórico. Por otro, es justamente este alivio porque todo depende finalmente de Dios, lo que permite una liberación mucho más grande y comprometida para seguir el movimiento de Dios. El reconocimiento que Dios está en el origen de nuestra misión en las congregaciones, como se ha manifestado en el simposio de SEDOS que mencioné al inicio, es una orientación principalmente buena. Lo que hace falta todavía es deletrearla y aplicarla en prácticas que vayan más de acuerdo con el Espíritu.

A los 70 años de Willingen, la misión se presenta en una gran pluralidad de maneras de ponerla en práctica, y en algunos sectores de las iglesias, la *missio Dei* como dinámica de Dios mismo en el mundo entero puede orientar a discípulos y discípulas misionas a integrarse en este movimiento, libres en el seguimiento, con la mirada en un mundo en transformación y en el servicio comprometido a quienes se les han hecho prójimos.

²⁸ En una entrevista a revistas jesuitas el 19 de septiembre de 2013.



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“We did not come to demolish the church but to build it up”

Foreign Missionaries in The Netherlands

According to *Ad Gentes* the responsibility for mission work is entrusted to the local church. But as mission of the Catholic, i.e. worldwide Church, mission has a universal dimension. For this reason, new churches should participate in the universal mission of sending missionaries to other parts of the world (*Ad Gentes* 20). This mission started with South - South mission and is now being supplemented with mission to Europe.¹

Previous research shows that foreign missionaries in the Netherlands are mainly working in territorial parishes, among Catholic immigrants and among believers of other faiths, but not among those who do not have faith or who criticize faith.² None of the international religious institutes that send missionaries to The Netherlands focus on what is usually seen as the core business of these institutes, the *missio ad gentes*, or primary evangelization.

According to one of the superior's secularism is a “bridge too far”, as secularism is difficult to understand for insiders and even more so for outsiders. The Netherlands is one of the most de-churched countries in Europe, but also one of the most spiritual.³ Grace Davie describes this as ‘believing without belonging’.⁴ The question

that will be addressed in this chapter is: How do foreign missionaries in The Netherlands deal with secularism?

Controversies and contested claims

Missionary institutes in the Netherlands no longer send missionaries to former mission territories,⁵ but receive foreign missionaries to work in the Dutch society. This welcoming of foreign missionaries has been contested and is considered controversial, both from the perspective of the sending church,⁶ and the receiving church. One of the provincial superiors whom we interviewed said that his invitation to foreign missionaries to work in the Netherlands was contested by his Dutch fellow-priests within his own religious institute who argued that the young churches overseas have themselves a shortage of priests.

This reversed mission of foreign priests is not only contested within the religious institutes, but also in the Dutch church and society at large. Whereas “reversed mission” can be interpreted and justified as an expression of the

¹ M. Ueffing, *Catholic Mission in Europe 1910-2010* in: S. Bevans ed., *A century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, Edinburg 2013, p. 34-43.

² F. Wijsen, *Foreign Priests in The Netherlands. Reversed mission, Mutual Assistance and International outsourcing “Exchange”* 45 (2016) no.1, p. 66-85.

³ Cf. J. de Hart, *Zoekende gelovigen: Oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit*. Amsterdam 2011, p. 2201. According to De Hart, between 32% and 42% of the Dutch population are not members of a church but ‘believe in something’. See also J. de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband. Godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland*, Den Haag 2014, p. 25.

⁴ G. Davies, *Believing without belonging. Is this the future of religion in Britain?* “Social Compass” 37 (1990)

4, p. 455-469.

⁵ There are few exceptions to this rule, particularly among nuns and lay missionaries. Of course, sending of old Dutch missionaries who return to ‘their mission’ after home leave, goes on.

⁶ At a symposium organized by the Nijmegen Institute of Mission Studies about this issue on 23 May 2003, Michael Amaladoss was critical about sending non-Western missionaries to Europe. According to him, missionary institutes should ‘graciously accept that they are dying’ and should not ‘import’ new missionaries as ‘cheap labor’ to ‘fill the gaps’. See M. Amaladoss, *Mission Institutes in the Millennium*, in: F. Dokman (ed.), *The West and the Rest of the World in Theology. Mission and Co-Funding*, Nijmegen 2005, p. 66-89. In their responses to Amaladoss, published in the same booklet, Elsy Varghese and Ben supported the idea of sending non-Western missionaries to Europe.

“mutual missionary assistance of Churches”,⁷ Dutch Catholics ask themselves, what is the “assistance” that foreign priests bring, and in what way is it “mutual”? And, assuming that “reversed mission” can be compared with outsourcing in international businesses, and outsourcing is based on the principle of demand and supply, people ask, what is the demand, or whose demand is it?⁸ Foreign priests are compared with clerics within Muslim communities, brought from Turkey and Morocco, who are estranged from the Dutch situation, and are in need of civic integration courses.⁹

A pamphlet entitled *Church and Ministry* that is popular among progressive Catholics, distributed by the Provincial and Council of the Dutch Province of the Dominicans mentions among others “importing priests from abroad” as a strategy of the “Church authority” to meet the shortage of priests and to reduce the number of “Services of Word and Communion” in the parishes. It notes that “many church communities are, to say the least, unhappy with this situation”.¹⁰

On the one hand Dutch Catholics understand that “reversed mission” is a consequence of a globalizing world and church. On the other hand, they do not accept that their church and country are seen as a “mission territory”, and that they are only at the receiving end, and no longer have something to offer to the world.¹¹

⁷ Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Nuntiandi*

⁸ F. Wijsen, op. cit., p. 66-85.

⁹ See D. Haag, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties 2001; M. Tijsen, Inburgering van geestelijke bedienaren. Een bijzonder doelgroep of gewoon nieuwkomers? in: “Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid”, 5 (2014) no. 3, p. 42-54. *Recently government funding for civic integration courses for clerics was terminated.*

¹⁰ See Bestuur Nederlandse Dominicanen, *Kerk en ambt: Op weg naar een kerk met toekomst*, Nijmegen 2007. A translation in English circulates widely on the internet, for example, on the ecumenical website of resources and reflections on liturgy, spirituality, and worship for individuals and communities, http://www.liturgy.co.nz/worship/matters_assets/Church_and_Ministry.pdf, (2.05.2014). In 2015 this website was closed.

¹¹ Already in their preliminary report for their 1993 *Ad Limina* visit to the Pope, the Dutch bishops suggested

Simply reversing the “one-way street” sign is not “mutual” either. Also, other studies which were conducted in countries including Germany and the United States,¹² show that there is an ambiguity or uneasiness in the relation between foreign priests and the receiving churches.¹³

There is also an ambiguity and uneasiness on the side of the foreign missionaries. Some of them came to the Netherlands to convert Dutch people, e.g. to bring back the gospel to those who forgot about the gospel. They are well aware of the paradox, that it was often Dutch missionaries who brought the gospel to them,¹⁴ e.g. to the “young Churches” in the southern hemisphere for which they are very grateful.

that The Netherlands had become mission country. Some of the progressive Catholics discussed the use of the term ‘mission’. Among others, see E. Borgman, *De missionaire opdracht van de Nederlandse kerken*, “De Bazuin”, 12 maart 1993; R. van Rossum, *Over welke missie gaat het bij ‘Nederland Missieland’?* “Trouw”, 21 januari 1993.

¹² For the German study, see K. Gabriel, S. Leibold, R. Ackermann, *Die Situation ausländischer Priester in Deutschland*, Ostfildern 2011; K. Gabriel, *Ausländische Priester in der deutschen Kirche: Zwischen Notlösung und welt-kirchlicher Avantgarde, Lebendige Seelsorge*, “Zeitschrift für praktisch-theologisches Handeln” 65/1 (2014), p. 2-7. For the American study, see D.R. Hoge, A. Okure, *International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities*, Minnesota 2006; D.R. Hoge, A. Okure, *International Priests in America. Two Coming Issues*, “New Theology Review” 2006, May issue, p. 14-22.

¹³ See J. van Butselaar, *An Uneasy Relationship: ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Churches in Western Europe*, in: K. Bediako (ed.), *A New Day Dawning: African Christians Living the Gospel*, “Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum” (2004), p. 179-192. This article deals with immigrant communities within the Netherlands Protestant Church, but the ‘uneasiness’ applies also to the reversed mission of foreign priests in the Catholic Church.

¹⁴ As is shown below, the Dutch Church had an overwhelming number of missionaries working in mission territories between the First World War and the Second Vatican Council. Three factors explain this historical fact. Whereas traditional missionary countries such as France and Germany had to restore their economies after the First World War, the Netherlands did not have this problem as it had remained neutral during the First World War. Moreover, due to a new constitution that guaranteed equal treatment of religions, the Catholic community was emancipating itself from the Protestant domination at that time, and world-wide mission boosted the Catholic identity. Last but not least, the then Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* was Dutch.

Once they are here they discover that many Dutch people are no longer members of the church or know about the gospel, but that they are deeply spiritual and do a lot of charity work.¹⁵ It goes without saying that the group of foreign missionaries is not homogeneous. They come from different religious institutions and different countries, and their views of church and mission vary accordingly.

Quantitative data

Between the First World War and the Second Vatican Council missionary institutes in the Netherlands sent an overwhelming number of missionaries to the mission territories. In 1950, 1 out of 550 Dutch Catholics was working as a missionary overseas, and 1 out of 9 Catholic missionaries in the world was Dutch.¹⁶ But, since the beginning of the 21st century, this mission has been reversed. The number of foreign missionaries working in The Netherlands has more than doubled over the past seven years,¹⁷ as the following table shows.

	2006	2013	2014	2016
Priests	45	101	109	95
Brothers	10	19	18	17
Active Nuns	109	292	288	263
Contemplative	21	61	74	66
Total	185	473	489	441

In 2014, 8,83% of the total number of members of religious institutes (N=5538) was “foreign”, in 2016 9,3% of the total number (N=4717) of

¹⁵ See A. Kunnekkadan, *Nederlanders zijn diep in hun hart spiritueel*, “Informatiedienst. Woord en Wederwoord”, juni 2011, p. 6.

¹⁶ See A. Camps, V. Poels, J. Willemsen, Dutch Missionary Activities. *Nijmegen 2005. In 1968 there were about 10,000 Dutch missionaries working overseas. Among others, this history has been described by J. Roes, Hetgrote missieuro 1915-1940: Op zoek naar de missiemotivatie van de Nederlandse katholieken, Bilthoven: Ambo 1974; J. Derix, Brengers van de Boodschap: Geschiedenis van de katholieke missionering vanuit Nederland van voc tot Vaticanum ii, Nijmegen 2009.*

¹⁷ ‘Foreign’ is defined here as ‘born outside The Netherlands’.

members of religious institutes was “foreign”. The database of the Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes does not distinguish between European and extra-European foreigners, but it is estimated that two thirds of the foreigners are extra-European. The enormous growth over the past years can partly be explained by the fact that some provinces of Netherlands religious institutes merged with other European provinces which caused mobility within these provinces. About one fifth of the foreign missionaries are involved in the administration of their religious institutes. And again, one fifth of the foreign missionaries belong to new religious institutes that were founded outside the Netherlands.¹⁸ These statistics are not complete because not all new religious institutes are members of the Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes, and their foreign missionaries are not included in the database. Also, foreign priests and nuns working in dioceses are not included in these statistics.

If we look at individual religious institutes, the Dutch Province of the Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) has 47 members in the Netherlands of which 9 are from Asia and 1 from Latin America. The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) has 59 members in the Netherlands - Belgium Province out of which 18 are from Asia and Africa.¹⁹ The Congregation of the Holy Ghost (CSSp) has 60 members in The Netherlands; 44 of them are Dutch and 16 are African.

At the European level, the Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) has 754 members in Europe from which 79 members are non-Europeans, that is 10.5 percent.²⁰ Out of 79 members mentioned above

¹⁸ See further G. Moorman, *Learning What it Means to be Part of the Multicultural Body of Christ, “Exchange” A* (2012) no. 1, p. 71-73.

¹⁹ Worldssps, *Personnel Distribution*, 31 December 2016, <https://www.worldssps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Slide2.jpg> (12.10.2017). Erica Op’T Hoog, “De SVD werkt aan de toekomst: In gesprek met de oude en de nieuwe Provinciaal,” *KNR bulletin*, 5 March 2017, 5.

²⁰ *Worldssps, Personnel Distribution, 31 December 2016, https://www.worldssps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Slide2.jpg* (12.10.2017).

62 are from Asia.²¹ The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) has 250 foreign missionaries working in Europe out of a total of 1126 SVD missionaries in Europe.

Qualitative data

How do the foreign missionaries themselves experience and understand mission in Europe? Here I refer to three of them in an exemplary way, namely Sr. Melina Polo SSpS from the Philippines, Fr. Avin Kunnekkadan SVD from India, and Fr. Charles Eba'a CSSp from Cameroon.

Sr. Melina Polo came to the Netherlands in 1991. She had a preference to be sent to Papua New Guinea, but she was appointed to the Netherlands. "After such an appointment we may think about it for two weeks. I was unsure, afraid for the unknown. Of course, The Netherlands is different from Papua New Guinea. Europe is more difficult. We had heard about secularization, but what was it? That people find it more difficult to speak about God. But how? That was the idea that I came with. Now I experience it myself, now I know what secularization is". After she came to the Netherlands she started to study theology so she could have a better understanding of what the situation was, and what to do as a missionary sister. "In my own country, the task was rather easy to find: catechesis, recollection. In the Netherlands this could not be done in the same way". When she started with a bible group, the interest was not that big. "People wished to read the bible, but in a different manner: they prefer bible study above bible sharing". And she continued, "In the Netherlands we do not like vagueness. A pastor must be down to earth. Dutch people want to keep the faith for themselves; it must not be too expressive". In a bible group she experienced that people preferred bible study rather than bible sharing. It shows that people prefer intellectual discussions above showing the bible text and how it relates to their life. When asked how she looks at mission in Europe, she says: "Those who go as

missionaries to Europe don't need to bring money ... Not action is central that much, but accompanying people, be with them, and walk with them on their paths". She specifies further, "You are challenged to share your faith, not only with people who still go to church, but also with others. The Dutch experience their faith by helping people, not that much by going to church. And of those who do go to Church, you cannot always say that they are social-minded". Asked whether she has changed as a religious sister living in the Netherlands she says, "I have got a broader horizon ... I appreciate the openness of Dutch people. I learned not to judge the life of others. The intention of mission cannot lie in putting up structures which are not yet present. And to conclude she says. "I don't need to talk about God always and everywhere. I may not force others to share my faith. This cannot be. Every person has his relation to God. I have to appreciate it. And sometimes, I experienced, I can learn from this."²²

Fr. Avin Kunnekkadan came to the Netherlands in 2005. He describes his initial experience as follows. "In India I had my regular job, a certain status as a religious missionary which I lost here in the beginning. I was used to working in a fixed structure within the institutionalized church. I had my own identity. As it was lost it was very painful ... I was helpless and had to begin anew like a child ... The emptiness within and the loneliness and helplessness made me sad". According to Fr. Kunnekkadan, the situation in Europe calls for a new way of doing mission, "to be a religious missionary in Europe is to be closer to the people, particularly the poor and strangers and faith seekers. To belong to them, to the seeking people, and listen, share their concerns and give them some hope in life was the new way." Although he defines himself as a missionary, he understands his task "not to convert" people, because in his view, "the Dutch are Christian enough. There is a lot of neighbor love and charity. People help each other and collect money for philanthropic aims", but to bring everyone together as a

²¹ A. Brand, *Address to the Euro-Assembly of Provincials/Regionals and Formators*, in Official communications 210 (Rome: General Administration Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit, 2003), p. 3.

²² Liever bijbelstudie dan 'bible sharing', interview with T. Boesten, *Kerk Wereldwijd*, 2016, p. 14-16; Van de mensen leerde ik wat ik met hen aan goeds kan doen, in: *Mensen met een Missie, Op Vaste Grond*, Week Nederlandse Missionarissen, 2002, p. 61-68.

family. Asked to describe his missionary priesthood in the Netherlands he says, “building bridges is an important part of it.... I find building bridges important... building bridges between people diverse people and cultures and forms of spirituality, encourages us to creativity”.²³ What he admires of the Dutch is their openness. “If you are gay or prostitute you do not need to keep it secret, like in India”. Asked about gay marriage he says it is “up to the Bishops to decide”, but in his parish gay are welcome. They are also “Children of God. They belong to the Catholic family”. Asked about other liberal values in the Netherlands, such as euthanasia, he says “Difficult issue. If you suffered from cancer for many years ... Not long ago a parishioner who was severely ill came to me to talk about euthanasia. I talked with the whole family. As a pastor I said to them: support and accompany each other. Pain and suffering are also part of life.

Fr. Charles Eba’a came to The Netherlands in 2006. After his study of philosophy in Gabon and theology in Nigeria, he wanted to work in Brazil or Belgium, because he already knew French, but he was sent to The Netherlands. “What I knew about the Netherlands was that it was the land of euthanasia and other strange things, legalized prostitution, a lot of water and cold weather. And I knew that there were many Muslims in The Netherlands”. Asked about his first experiences he says, “The lack of spontaneity and joy in the Church is big in The Netherlands. There is quite some piety, but this exists in quiet modesty. This will not last long”. Asked what his answer to this would be he says, “Bring back joy to the church”. “Christianity that was brought to Africa from Europe is fading away. As African you ask yourself whether this was fake, whether they [Europeans] now reject what they [Europeans] brought to Africa. But you can also look at in a

different way. Now the African Church is blossoming. She [the African Church] can help Europe in its turn to make sure that the faith bears fruit here”. In the past, the older generation has criticized the church, and they left the church behind them. They let the ecclesial structures collapse. Now the youngsters remain with empty hands. “I want to bring back the faith in a way that fits the present time”. But, “this is not only a task for priests”, says Fr. Eba’a. “The church in Europe must learn that being Church does not depend on the presence of clerics. If you gather with few people as Christians - with two or three in his Name - you can be Church. Just do it together”. In the beginning it was not easy for him. “I found it difficult to accept how children spoke to their parents, at the same level, without respect. And in the church, I could not get used to women who were leading liturgical services in the church. This was really shocking”. However, his experience in the parish made him open-minded. “Now I appreciate if I am present when a woman leads the service ... the stage of tolerance is past. Now it is acceptance”. Asked how the Netherlands’ culture changed him he says, “I am now more open to the world. If I am back in Cameroon, I have more difficulty with the hierarchy and how homosexuals and lesbians are there looked at”. His missionary life is nurtured through interaction with young people and visiting families. “I think that it is important that the church goes where the people are, to places where the action; then people can discover in you what the church is”.²⁴

Presence, Project and Diakonia

From the 1970’s onwards, religious institutes in the Netherlands developed an approach that could be described as “Christian presence” in harmony with the spirituality of Charles de Foucault.²⁵ So, when these institutes invited foreign missionaries to the Netherlands they

²³ A. Kunnekkadan, *HIRCOS: A Roscommon Experiment*, in: M. Ueffing (ed.) *Inter-culturality*, Sankt Augustin 2013; “Deze niet-westerse voorgangers komen ons het geloof brengen,” interview with Willem Pekelder in *Trouw* October 14, 2017, p. 11; *Missionair in de parochie*, in: *Kerk aan de Waterweg*, “Magazine van de Parochie De Goede Herder”, najaar 2014, p. 12; *Missieproeftuin en bet religieuze leven*, in: S. Kuppens e.a., *15 jaar Missionair Project*, Den Haag.

²⁴ Thuis geraakt, Jan Franken in gesprek met Charles Eba’a, in *VPWinfo*, December 2016, p. 6-7; Zaaien op een plek waar het vuur van het geloof bijna uitgaat. Interview van Dick Vos met Charles Eba’a. In *Spinet. Spiritijns Nederlands Tijdschrift*, November 2017, p. 9-12.

²⁵ Cf. R. van Rossum et al., *Op zoek naar sporen van God*, vol. 2, The Hague: CMBR 2004; G. Moorman (ed.), *Charles de Foucault: Missionairepresentatie toen, nu en in de toekomst*, Nijmegen 2006.

wanted them not “to do many things”, but simply “to be there”.²⁶ The foreign missionaries, however, came from churches that are mainly project-oriented. Coming from so-called developing countries, many of them saw mission primarily in terms of offering social services to people in need.²⁷

Sr. Polo says that “foreign missionaries don’t need to bring money”. But, “the dimension of social justice is included in it [presence]. Also, in the Netherlands there is much to do in this field”. And, “The Netherlands may be a rich country with a well-organized social system. But also, in the Netherlands there are poor people. People who have to struggle for life ... For those people I want to be present”.²⁸ By offering social services to people in need it is seen as a way to make present the gospel values in peoples’ lives. The missionaries are always ready to answer anyone who asks them to explain the hope they have in them (1 Peter 3:35). The foreign missionaries, however, do not make the distinction between “sacramental” and “social” ministry. Coming from non-Western cultures, they tend to think in more holistic terms. They speak about “integral development”, in which material and spiritual development, development of body and soul, go together.

In a well-fare state, material needs are catered for by the government. Due to neo-liberal politics, the state’s social services are minimized, and churches fill in the gaps. The tragedy is that Dutch priests think that immigrants and people at the underside of the society need social ministry, but these people increasingly go to the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches where their spiritual needs are taken seriously.²⁹

²⁶ One of the foreign missionaries, however, noted a paradox. The foreign or ‘new’ missionaries have become the ‘project’ of the old Dutch missionaries.

²⁷ One of the ‘old’ missionaries noted that there is no contradiction between presence and project. Presence (or insertion into the local situation) is a necessary stage in developing a project. New missionaries argue that this stage is repeated again and again by new foreign missionaries, so there seems little continuity and stability.

²⁸ See Liever Bijbelstudie dan ‘bible sharing’, 16; Van de mensen leerde ik, 65.

²⁹ See J.Maaskant, *Afrikaan en Katboliek in Rotterdam*:

Parish, Mission, Missionary Parish

Because of the emphasis on “presence”, until recently it was common practice in the Netherlands, members of religious institutes did not take responsibility for parishes. Many Dutch missionaries — who returned home after serving as missionaries overseas - did not see it as their primary task to “fill in the gaps” in parishes, but to perform extra-ordinary ministries in addition to parishes. In many cases they set up a parallel structure.

However, most foreign male missionaries are trained in their seminaries to be parish priests.³⁰ They do not see a conflict between parish and mission, but tend to think in terms of missionary parishes, or pastoral mission, in accordance with the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*.³¹

In their view, if parishes were run by missionaries they would simply duplicate the existing parishes, indeed they would not add anything to traditional parish structures. But foreign missionaries want to show alternatives and add their own voices to the plurality of voices in the church.

In contrast to the diocesan priests, who tend to focus on herding the “church-goers”, foreign missionaries focus more on the “lost sheep”, or “spiritual seekers”³² Fr. Kunnekkadan concludes, “We can use the parish structure to be present ... By being present in parishes we are more visible and we can be more open”.³³

Spirituality and community life

Apart from being one of the most secularized countries in the world, the Netherlands is also

Waar kerkje dan, Nijmegen 1999, p. 98.

³⁰ In one case a foreign missionary narrated that his superior failed to organize a courtesy visit to the local bishop. So, he organized it himself.

³¹ See John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate Redemptoris Missio*, no. 34.

³² Cf. J. de Hart, *Zoekendegelovigen...*, op. cit., p. 2201. According to De Hart, between 32% and 42% of the Dutch population are not members of a church but ‘believe in something’. See also J. de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband...*, op. cit.

³³ See: De SVD werkt aan de toekomst.

one of the most de-institutionalized societies in the world. Coming from an era in which the Netherlands was extremely church-centred, divided into neatly separated “pillars” (Catholic, Protestant, socialist) in which life was collective, the Dutch nation has become highly individualized.

Coming mostly from non-Western societies which are perceived as more communitarian, new missionaries want to show in the Dutch context that community life is valuable. “In the Netherlands there is a lot of loneliness”, says Fr. Kunnekkadan. Therefore, they stress the value of family and family ministry.

Moreover, the new missionaries who have lived in the Netherlands for a longer period of time understand that most Dutch people are not secularists, atheists or even agnostics, but “spiritual seekers”. As Fr. Kunnekkadan says, “deep in their heart the Dutch are spiritual”.³⁴ What is lacking in the Church is happiness and a sense of humour. “In Cameroon faith was a feast ... This is lacking in The Netherlands”, says Fr. Eba’a. “Not without reason evangelical Churches in The Netherlands attract more people”.³⁵

Epilogue

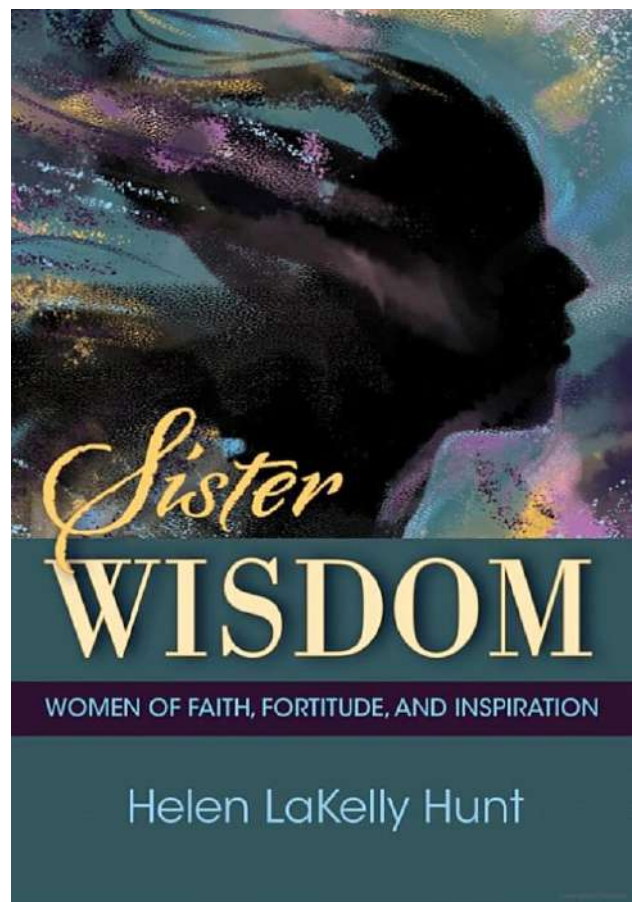
Bishops who invite religious institutes and foreign missionaries to work in their dioceses expect a revitalization of the local church. The little evidence that we have got suggests that this has not happened. A critique is that the foreign missionaries are not so visible in the Church.³⁶

The question that was addressed in this chapter was: How do foreign missionaries in The Netherlands deal with secularism? First, secularism is not easy to be defined, and most foreign missionaries experienced that

secularism does not necessarily signify unbelief. Many Dutch are spiritual and support charity works. Foreign missionaries are not encouraged to address the issue of secularism by their religious superiors. According to them it is almost impossible for foreign missionaries to get accustomed to secularization. It is a bridge too far.

The foreign missionaries themselves say that they are used to non-Christian environments, coming from India, where Christians are a minority, or China, where religious expression was restricted until recently. And, according to them, when Dutch missionaries went to their mission territories, they also had to get accustomed to the surroundings that were different from the ones they came from. The same applies to foreign missionaries coming to the Netherlands.

(Ref: *European Mission Studies*, No.2, 2020, pp.153 - 165)



(Gift from Orbis Books to SEDOS Library)

³⁴ See Kunnekkadan, *Nederlanders zijn diep in hun hart spiritueel*.

³⁵ See Zaaen op een plek, 10-11.

³⁶ See J.C. Guerra, *Niet voor kerkgebouwen maar voor*

de mensen. Een onderzoek naar de inzet van nieuwe missionarissen in het missionair-diaconaal pastoraat in de Schilderswijk, Nijmegen 2018, p. 37.

Nuovi scenari dell'Evangelizzazione per la Vita Consacrata in un contesto sinodale-interculturale



Grazie per l'invito di fare questa presentazione che tocca una parte di miei peccati: tra altri peccati ben più gravi. Sono contento di condividere con voi questo tema che oggi è molto attuale in questi tempi di difficoltà; precisamente si aprono nuovi scenari per l'evangelizzazione e per la Vita Consacrata in un contesto, quello d'oggi, che è il contesto sinodale — interculturale. Dunque, un argomento molto importante che noi consacrati dobbiamo affrontare con lo spirito primitivo, affrontare nuovi scenari, probabilmente abbandonarne altri, cambiare di mentalità e vivere questa situazione, che è di crisi, da tanti punti di vista con la prospettiva della novità dello Spirito che ci sta aprendo appunto questi nuovi scenari, e nuove realtà. E là dove c'è la novità di spirito, c'è per noi la fatica di imparare cose nuove. Una fatica notevole perché siamo tutti attaccati a quello che abbiamo imparato, e facciamo. E quello che facciamo da sempre, diciamo sono le sante tradizioni. Né vorremo staccarci. Invece c'è una novità. Dio apre sempre strade nuove anche con piena spiritualità oggi. Il Signore ci chiama ad una vocazione nuova, ogni giorno. Eternamente chiama Colui che non fa altro che chiamarci: in italiano **'chiamare è il verbo amare'**. Dunque ogni giorno Dio ci chiama senza ripetersi, perché l'amore non si ripete. Ogni giorno ci chiama a qualche cosa di nuovo. Questa prospettiva

spirituale è alla base di tutto, tutto quello che so fare.

Per la premessa ho preparato questo PowerPoint che spero vi possa aiutare a capire la fatica dei Santi Cirenei, come traduttori. Ma quando parlo veloce, di solito mi ripeto. Dunque non vi preoccupate.

Il focus di riferimento di questa riflessione sono quattro:

1. La natura e storia della Vita Consacrata che è la maestra dell'evangelizzazione

La Vita Consacrata è nata per evangelizzare, dunque non può non continuare ad essere esperta di queste nuove vie.

2. Il sinodo ecclesiale è in corso, dove si dà la parola a tutti

Nel passato i sinodi erano tutti celebrati nell'Aula Sinodale dove convengono alcuni eletti delegati della Chiesa per discutere. Questo Sinodo invece è già nato e già celebrato in tutte le chiese. Naturalmente più e meno. In genere, e celebrato nella parrocchia, attraverso varie commissioni, riunioni, condivisioni. E un Sinodo che è nato dalla parola di tutti. Nel nuovo scenario tutti intervengono. Tutti hanno la parola. Tutti devono dare, tutti devono ascoltare quello che dice l'altro nella Chiesa.

3. Il rinnovamento nella missione, non è più uni-direzionale

Qui parleremo di ciò che possa generare, nello specifico, il rinnovamento, perché la missione oggi non è più concepito come unidirezionale. Cioè un Maestro che insegna agli altri. Un evangelizzatore che evangelizza altri. Non è più così.

4. Il tema della interculturalità va ben oltre la multiculturalità

Il tema della interculturalità non è solo quella della multiculturalità, oramai i nostri istituti

religiosi oggi sono tutti internazionali, non è una novità. Ci sono molte culture, ma dire *multiculturalità* non vuol dire interculturalità. Capite la differenza? Multiculturalità vuol dire semplicemente che veniamo da diverse nazioni e culture. *Interculturalità* vuol dire che queste culture stanno comunicando tra di loro. Non farò una analisi d'ognuno di questi punti, ma mi limiterò a riflettere su un punto solo. Cioè il rapporto tra acculturazione e inculturazione. Che differenze c'è? È la stessa cosa? No. Questi due termini sono spesso usati con lo stesso significato, invece dicono una realtà distinta espressa in queste tre cose:

- D'un cammino comunitario, sinodale. Sinodale vuol dire che tutti intervengano in senso attivo e passivo. Tutti sono soggetti di evangelizzazione e oggetti, appunto destinatari, dell'evangelizzazione. Questo cammino comunitario sinodale ci costringe a fare la differenza tra acculturazione e inculturazione.
- I due termini usati assieme con significati diversi sono l'espressione, il senso preciso della missione, e la vedremo. Cercheremo di vedere questo.
- La prospettiva nella quale si pone la formazione iniziale e anche quella permanente. Perché oggi è un vero problema, la formazione permanente. La formazione iniziale, sempre monitorata, oggetto di attenzione, è anche criticata; appunto l'abuso sessuale — da tanti anni la colpa è stata data alla formazione iniziale. Non sono formati abbastanza nell'ambito affettivo spirituale passivo, è come sparare sulla Croce Rossa. E il problema dell'abuso sessuale oggi tocca la formazione permanente perché la formazione iniziale era formata nell'ambito sociale. La vocazione permanente c'è perché la formazione iniziale esiste. Ma la formazione permanente, dove sta? Chi l'ha vista? Io sono molto interessato a vedere dove è nata. Parliamo molto di formazione permanente. Ma quanto ne facciamo realmente? Non la formazione permanente da conferenze ogni tanto: la formazione permanente può essere straordinaria ma deve essere ordinaria ogni

giorno nella tua comunità e con tuoi confratelli, tue consorelle, la gente che incontri, fai formazione permanente, ogni giorno cercheremo di avverarla.

1. Acculturazione

Cosa vuol dire il tentativo di avverarla? Tentativo appunto d'acculturazione. Tentativo di pensare anzitutto come ri-esprimere il Vangelo o la propria spiritualità nella cultura di chi vi ascolta? Nei termini più semplici della lingua e il dialetto locale, è questa l'acculturazione. Il Vangelo di questa mattina, per esempio, ha espresso sia il mio carisma, la mia spiritualità, sia la mia esperienza di Dio, e ciò va ridetta nei termini di colui/di colei che mi ascolta nella sua lingua, nel suo dialetto e nella sua cultura. Cultura vuol dire tre cose:

- Mentalità: valori, ideali, e convinzione di fondo, il modo di leggere la vita.

- Cultura vuol dire sensibilità, mentalità intellettuale. La sensibilità invece è frutto di un'esperienza.

soggettiva, ciò che una persona sente nella sua vita; il senso della bellezza; ciò che è bello, ciò che dà gioia, fare entrare questo vocabolo nella sensibilità della gente. Per fare capire il Vangelo, racconta una bella notizia, una bellezza della vita. Dire che il vangelo è bello, vuol dire che è bello per questa persona, per chi vive in questa cultura distinta dalla mia? Devo parlare della bellezza del Vangelo secondo la sua ideale.

- Cultura vuol dire modo di vivere: la cultura ha tre cose. Mentalità, sensibilità, prassi, o stile di vita. Acculturazione esprime la sapienza, l'umiltà, e l'amore puro di una persona verso l'altra. Un gesto non intellettuale, è un gesto dal cuore, della mente di tutte le persone. In Latino si chiama *ad-culturam Altrui – ad culturazionum*.

Io lascio la mia posizione e vengo incontro a te. Non ripeto semplicemente il Vangelo, si capisce con un gesto d'amore. Perché le cose belle vanno offerte, la bellezza va condivisa, non posso tenerla per me. Allora devo trovare un termine per dire che il Vangelo è una bella

notizia. E lo dico allora, secondo la tua mentalità e sensibilità. E vedendo la realtà con i tuoi occhi, con gli occhi della gente, di chi ascolta, fino ad usare le stesse parole di chi mi ascolta. Le stesse parabole; la cultura sta nelle parabole, ecco perché Gesù ha detto le parabole. Gesù è stato il primo che ha fatto l'acculturazione. Tutto il Vangelo e tutte le acculturazioni, il mistero di Dio, fu detto secondo la cultura Giudaica. Cerchiamo quello che Gesù ha fatto mirabilmente. Le parabole sono un modo molto concreto, vivo, esistenziali, a colori luminosi, per far capire i misteri del Regno dei Cieli.

Le parabole sono simboli, immagini, esempi, colori, sentimenti, attese, parametri valutativi, criteri, dell'altro, di chi ascolta. Quando io evangelizzo chi ha la priorità? Io evangelizzo una persona che poi evangelizza. La priorità c'è la, la persona alla quale faccio l'Annuncio. Voglio dire che io tengo a comunicare con il cuore; per lodare devo dare la priorità e la precedenza a chi mi ascolta, l'Annuncio va dato nei termini di chi mi ascolta.

2. Condizioni e attenzioni nella formazione

Per entrare in questo spirito è da tenere presente la formazione iniziale e quella permanente.

Prima condizione non s'improvvisa l'acculturazione. L'acculturazione è frutto di una ascesi – è un termine vecchio – ascesi – proviamo i contenuti nuovi. L'ascesi è imparare un'altra lingua. Prima condizione, auto decentramento, pone l'altro al centro.

La maturità relazionale che la prima vittima dell'abuso, l'incapacità di vivere una relazione. Metto l'altro al centro della mia attenzione. L'altro ha il diritto di sentire parlare nella propria lingua. Dunque l'attenzione verso l'altro alla sua storia, alla sua cultura, perché l'altro è degno di questo. Prestare attenzione alla sua diversità, la sua vita, la diversità nel cammino sinodale. Avere attenzione particolarmente delicata verso la diversità degli altri mi chiede il Vangelo. Mi chiede un modo diverso, mi provoca, che è molto utile per me. Se ripeto sempre lo stesso Vangelo, con stesse parole, stesso Messaggio, non c'è nessuna provocazione; ma dirlo in un modo nuovo è un esercizio molto solidale.

Seconda condizione — è ascesi nell'apprendimento di una nuova lingua. Molti di voi sono missionari/e. Quando vai in un'altra nazione s'impara la lingua. Il che non è però solo imparare le parole, è molto di più di imparare la lingua, il dialetto locale, esprimersi secondo la loro sensibilità, si tratta d'imparare nuove lingue per il Vangelo secondo questa o quella cultura. Ad esempio, non pensate solo alle singole culture dei posti, dove siate stati, ma a l'esperienza. Oggi c'è una lingua in tutto il mondo che ci crea molti problemi. Che lingua è? Quella della secolarizzazione. La secolarizzazione è ciò che riduce tutti i valori trascendentali a realtà così terrene, perché serve per questa vita felicità e stare bene. Qua giù ci sono i beni materiali e una cultura che appare distante dal Vangelo. Noi dobbiamo imparare a tradurre il Vangelo nella lingua secolare. Basta con lamentarci della secolarizzazione. Invece di lamentarci di questa cultura, impariamo a parlare del Vangelo in termini accessibile, che possono essere compresi da chi vive in una cultura della secolarizzazione. Dobbiamo imparare questa lingua, è un po' complicata e difficile perché è una lingua particolarmente difficile. Ieri una persona mi ha consegnato un mio libro tradotto in Arabo. Io non sono neanche capace di leggerlo! Io non sono tanto intelligente per imparare questa nuova lingua.

- **Secondo punto**, abbandonare la cultura religiosa tradizionale, non temete, non avere paura d'abbandonare la nostra cultura religiosa tradizionale. Che a noi è familiare ma che ha un piccolo difetto oggi. Quale difetto? Che è una lingua morta, perché nessuno oggi più la parla — la lingua religiosa tradizionale. In una grande parte dal mondo, nessuno la parla, nessuna l'intende più, dunque per parlare una lingua accessibile oggi non possiamo accontentarci di ripetere quello che dicessero la madre o nostro padre, neanche, quelli che amano tanto la tradizione. Senza nessuna nostalgia d'un certo passato. Noi possiamo essere certo dunque che il passato dei grandi istituti, delle tante vocazioni, delle tante comunità, delle tante costruzioni sempre più grandi, questo passato non tornerà mai più. Né siamo certi, e non solo non tornerà più, è un bene che non tornerà più. Questi non percepiscono una storia. La storia sta

camminando, e non possiamo avere paura della storia che cammina. Certo questa storia è aperta. Dobbiamo abbandonare un certo tipo di mentalità per entrare nei nuovi scenari, in questi nuovi scenari bisogna leggere sempre lo spirito dell'origine: lo Spirito Santo. Il quale ci suggerirà come capirlo, senza nessuna nostalgia del passato. bene che non tornerà.

3. Sfida

La sfida qui è come tradurla, non è affatto intellettuale perché si può tradurla in un'altra lingua o altra cultura.

- So quanto la propria lingua è una passione. Io posso tradurre solo ciò di cui sono appassionato, solo ciò che amo profondamente. Troverò le parole solamente per ciò che io sento profondamente. Allora troverò le parole per tradurla nella lingua/dialetto locale. Se non sei innamorato della spiritualità del Vangelo non lo potrai mai tradurlo per gli altri.
- Si potrà tradurre solo se tu hai conoscenza le altre lingue, perché ognuna ha i suoi valori. Perché ogni lingua, ogni cultura, delle tribù più dispersa nel cuore nell'Africa, o dell'India o dell'America Latina, ha i suoi valori. Non tradurle nella propria lingua. Nella spiritualità, del Vangelo d'oggi si deve conoscere bene l'altra lingua e i suoi valori.
- Deve avere nel cuore, la felicità, il bene dell'altro. Sono interessato al suo bene. Per questo ti racconto una bella storia, la storia di Gesù Cristo.

4. Principio e Motivo

Perché? Qual è il principio o il motivo dell'acculturazione? Ci sono tre punti, come formazione molto gesuitica:

- Se nessuna cultura può comunicare tutta la ricchezza del Vangelo ci siamo d'accordo, incarnare il Vangelo. Nessuna cultura è in grado di dire tutto la ricchezza del Vangelo, ma,
- Ogni cultura anche può svelarne aspetti particolari e nuovi. Ogni cultura, anche quella

delle tribù disperse in fondo al mondo. Ogni cultura può svelare aspetti nuovi del Vangelo.

- Solo tutte assieme, queste culture e lingue del mondo, riescono a fare risplendere il Vangelo in tutta la sua bellezza, sapienza. Nessuno cultura può dire tutte le ricchezze del mondo. Ogni cultura del mondo possa sinodalmente svelare e fare risplendere il Vangelo in tutta la sua bellezza, e sua sapienza. Frutti e conseguenze: qual è il frutto di questo lavoro d'acculturazione?

5. Frutti e Conseguenza

Il futuro della Vita Consacrata, e d'ogni Istituto, è legato alla sua capacità d'acculturazione. Come sforzo d'adattamento intelligente e creativo della nostra spiritualità ad abbracciare la cultura circostante. Un carisma che viene tradotto, acculturato, resta vivo nell'acculturazione e a ciò che dà vita a un carisma. Vogliamo che i nostri carismi restino vivi? Bene, non è vero, che è l'unica strada di vocazione? Ci possono essere vocazioni e carisma che stanno morendo. La vita d'un istituto e suo carisma si adatta alla vita se è ancora viva oggi. Come fare per essere vivo? Evidentemente leggendolo nella cultura del tempo. Arricchisci nel futuro nuova e vera cultura dell'acculturazione. Se nostri carismi muoiono. Senza fare nulla di fraterna nel cuore di gioia. Dice Papa Francisco, 'Diventiamo custode del museo', e ha ragione. L'acculturazione ci fa vivere nell'evangelizzazione e spirito di servizio. Senza imporre nulla. Creare fraternità, collaboratori nella gioia, perché offriamo qualche cosa di fresco, come pane di giornata. Senza accontentarci di ripetere le facciamo, delle grandi maggioranze della vita. In quanti istituti c'è sempre le stesse situazioni dei Fondatori, delle Fondatrici. E pigri e passivi noi, senza fantasia creativa, forse con poca fede, o povera spiritualità, e scarsa passione missionaria. Ma se accettiamo di comunicare la nostra fede e spiritualità secondo la mentalità, e sensibilità di chi ci ascolta, ci arricchiremo entrambe. Quando fai la fatica di spiegare la tua fede in termini accessibile a chi ti ascolta, è la tua fede che cresce, tu ti arricchisci perché hai scoperto un modo nuovo di dire; aspetti nuovi del Vangelo dei nostri carismi è saremo beati. Non è solo una questione di lingua, di parole,

chiaramente. Per sapere trasmettere il Vangelo come proposta per tutti il senso della felicità. Cosa cerche l'uomo, anche l'uomo nella secolarizzazione? Ogni essere umano ha bisogno di dare un senso alla vita, ha bisogno di verità, anche se non lo sa.

- Ha bisogno di felicità per trasmettere questo Annuncio. Bisogna dare felicità, vivezza e piacere non solo nell'escatologia, ma già ora in questa vita.

6. Pedagogia degli ultimi.

Dare all'acculturazione, e alla sua pedagogia, un'autentica spiritualità.

- Deve essere accessibile a tutti. Un'autentica spiritualità deve poter essere predicata com'è, non solo come un termine delle categorie delle persone, capite quelle degli altri – una autentica spiritualità – se è autentica lo è per tutti? Dev'essere detta in parole semplici, così diventa pedagogia, stile di vita, altrimenti non è vera spiritualità. Quando diciamo queste cose di spiritualità, del carisma, le possiamo comprendere soltanto noi. Noi lavoriamo per gli altri, le scuole sono il centro essenziale, facciamo del bene ai poveri. E la spiritualità la vediamo solo noi e per conseguenza, non è vero, non è corretta; il primo bene dobbiamo darlo agli altri, dare loro la nostra spiritualità nel modo semplice sicché possano capire. Mantenere questo tipo di mistero velato, in accessibile non va bene. Un'autentica spiritualità deve essere detta con semplicità in modo che tutti ne possano capire e ne godere. Per questo, l'evangelizzatore se da vero vuole comunicare a tutti, deve adattare il suo discorso a chi più stenta a capirlo.
- L'acculturazione non è un segno particolare per l'intellettuale, ma di una persona che si piega al livello dell'ultimo. Io parlo ha un gruppo di cinquanta persone, al livello più basso di comprensione. Alla persona più bassa dell'Ovest, del più basso capacità di comprendere. Io devo parlare al livello più intellettualmente povera, allora parlo a tutti. Ecco il prezioso principio, la scelta della acculturazione che privilegia la pedagogia

degli ultimi, che è la pedagogia tipicamente evangelica. Il parlare di Gesù era accessibile a tutti. Anche i poveri capivano, dicevano ah... lui parla come uno che ha autorità non come gli scribi. Questo volevo dire. Uno che tocca il cuore, al quale di noi conosciamo. Allora l'altro principio per fare quest'opera è mettersi a faticare tutti insieme.

7. Fatica di Tutti.

Il processo dell'acculturazione non può essere gestito da uno solo, ma è un lavoro da fare assieme in comunità, ecco la *sinodalità*. È meglio essere sinodale perché non è facile. Anzi mettersi insieme diventa un altro modo di vivere nella comunità, senza questa condivisione c'è il rischio che la maggior parte dei nostri contenuti carismatici non siano mai stati "tradotti" in lingua moderna secolare, né nei diversi luoghi ove siamo.

Dunque mai lasciano sprigionare tutta la loro ricchezza. Mi spiego, questo è una cosa terribile. Praticamente molti contenuti spirituali legati ai carismi dei nostri Istituti d'origine, non gli abbiamo mai tradotti in lingua secolare. Sono nell'archivi oh... custodisci gelosamente, nella nostra archivi della Casa Generalizia nell'Istituto storico, conosci tutta la legge della Fondatrice e Fondatore che lingue non ha mai detto? E lì non è mai stato tradotto? Noi siamo responsabile. Il Signore chiedeva, "Che cosa hai fatto con tutto il bene che hai, il bene spirituale?" Quello che noi non traduciamo per gli altri vuol dire che non l'abbiamo capito neanche noi. E abbiamo piantato il modello che oggi conta per coloro, cioè l'acculturazione. Quale modello di Teologico per eccellenza dell'acculturazione? È il Verbo. È l'incarnazione, che cosa è l'incarnazione? L'incarnazione è un processo di acculturazione. Un modo molto semplicemente per dire il mistero teologico e questo: la Divinità, tradotta in umanità. L'incarnazione uguale traduzione.

Il Logos, tradotto in parole, è il mistero della vita nel volto, nel sorriso, nelle mani che toccano Gesù che carezza. Tuttavia Gesù che tocca i lebbrosi, è l'acculturazione dell'essere divino misterioso, che diventa gesto, parola, sguardo, atteggiamento, il modo di parlare, il modo di raccontare la vita. In tutta la sua vita

Gesù è così. Modello straordinario d'acculturazione, è il modello che dobbiamo imitare. È una *kenosis*. Ma chi sente la sensibilità divina è da tradursi in sensibilità umana. Non dimentichiamoci, noi che crediamo in Dio, che tutto ciò che è sensibile è Dio, chi è molto vicino all'umanità. Dio che ascolta il genito dei prigionieri, ne conta le lacrime, voglio dire gli presta facilmente attenzione umana. Non è umiliazione ma rivelazione. Così come ogni nostra carisma rivela un aspetto della sensibilità divino. Ogni carisma sottolinea un aspetto della sensibilità di Dio.

8. Sensibilità Culturale.

Cos'è questa sensibilità culturale? Vuol dire formare i giovani. Quanto parlo di formazione iniziale intendo anche quella permanente. Avere 'rispetto dell'altro', non soltanto rispetto, ma come educazione all'alterità, non avere paura dell'altro perché è diverso da te, non avere paura di chi non crede, non prendere paura dell'acculturazione, non avere paura di persone che contestano chi è d'un'altra parte, non prendere paura del mondo. Questo mondo lo dobbiamo proprio accogliere nel profondo del cuore, perché in questo mondo siamo stati inviati. In più quella sensibilità culturale ci fa accogliere anche gli aspetti positivi della cultura altrui. Essere cosciente che la vita consacrata non ha la perfezione propria. Ne siamo noi i destinatari dei nostri carismi. I destinatari dei nostri carismi, sono il mondo e la Chiesa. Noi siamo solo destinatari provvisori, gli incaricati di portare l'Annuncio. Tutto nostro interesse sta in questo dialogo culturale. È tutto il nostro interesse ne è nato dalla carità, non è una degnazione. Mi spiego, dalla mia posizione superiore, per venirvi incontro non è vero, perché è l'unico modo per capire meglio il dono che ci è stato dato. Noi possiamo capire solamente ciò che annunciamo agli altri: solamente ciò che abbiamo avuto modo di annunciare agli altri.

Il resto è un'illusione, per questo già in comunità, si può e si deve imparare, ognuno, la lingua dell'altra persona. Lingua nel senso metaforico solo dal lato storico, siccome nel Noviziato c'è chi viene dall'Africa, allora ogni tanto parlano Inglese. No, non è solo questione di parole, ma d'accoglienza del modo diverso di

vivere la fede, la spiritualità, il Vangelo, interpretare il Cristo. Anche questo è sinodalità, quella attuale. La propongo perché per me è sempre particolarmente espressiva: un esempio attuale dell'acculturazione. Si potrebbe vedere tantissime cose in questo grande personaggio il modello teologico, cioè l'incarnazione del Verbo. Di modello umano c'è ne sono tanti credo, che tutti voi ne conoscete di persona con loro che vivono questo che suscitano il modello abbastanza luminoso. Ci sono due passioni: *La passione dell'Annuncio di Gesù*, E l'altra passione: *La Passione per il bene delle persone* che vivono in quel luogo, quel territorio del deserto del Sahara. Là si entra con tutto sé stesso, nel mondo attuale è sì fonde con livello del Beduino, si mette l'altro al centro. Così s'inizia con la pedagogia degli ultimi.

Piccolo fratello — piccolo da vero — dà la priorità appena arrivi ad imparare la lingua e la cultura locale per aiutare, al livello della grammatica coloro che automaticamente verranno dopo di sé. Ha pensato con libertà del cuore — prepara i testi che aiuteranno i futuri missionari che verranno. Cerco una ventina d'Istituti che rifanno lo spirito di e che la persona libera del cuore.

Terzo, parla solo con il suo essere, mantieni uno stile di vita estremamente povera, un sorriso fa tanto per difendere la vita; divisi erano sempre oggetto di attacchi, fu una moria. Non mira a raccogliere vocazioni n'anche convertire, però annuncia a tutti, con il suo stile di vita, la Buona Novella, bella e buona, e luminosa. **Secondo passaggio** — l'inculturazione e l'acculturazione, qual è la differenza? dove sta la differenza? Cosa vuol dire l'acculturazione?

L'acculturazione è molto semplice. Ciò comporta parlare la lingua di chi mi ascolta, tradurre il dialetto locale in termini semplice. L'inculturazione che cosa è?

Inculturazione

1. Definizione:

L'inculturazione è la risposta data da chi ascolta il mio messaggio di fede d'evangelizzatore. Che cosa evangelizzo per il dono dello Spirito, evidentemente è lui, è lo Spirito è lo do a tutti. Perché nell'Atto degli Apostoli lo spirito è dato a tutti, e non fa differenza tra "Giudei e Greci",

ora colui annuncia il Vangelo, grazie al dono dello Spirito, a tutti. Chi la riceve può ridire il Vangelo a secondo la sua cultura, e sensibilità, seconda la sua esperienza di vita a Dio e la vita. A questo punto una nuova traduzione sarà ancora più nuova. Perché fatto da lui. Io cercato da sempre appartenere ad un'altra cultura, è nato in quella cultura e potrà ridire il Vangelo che ha già ascoltato — lo potrà ridire nuovamente a sua volta, ancora di più, quella novità per la sua cultura. Due termini diversi. **Acculturazione** vuol dire, io vado verso la cultura dell'altro. **Inculturazione** vuol dire, "io, indigeno che appartengo a quella tribù, ho ricevuto l'Annuncio del Vangelo da un missionario. Adesso, io indigeno, ridico il messaggio che ho ricevuto secondo la mia lingua. Ognuno di noi parla un'altra lingua diversa che ha studiata. Io cerco di parlare Italiano; non so parla né inglese né lo spagnolo. Ci sono due fasi: quando l'acculturazione funziona bene? L'acculturazione funziona bene quando provoca inculturazione, se no, non provoca inculturazione vuol dire che tu evangelizzatore, non hai fatto tanta fatica. Dunque non hai suscitato nulla. L'acculturazione suscita l'inculturazione, provocata dalla parola. Il vero missionario è colui che non solo ridice con parole suoi il Vangelo, ma è colui che dà la Parola. C'è la prova adesso in due parole: da Indigeno, secondo la mia lingua madre, la mia esperienza di vita, traduco il Vangelo che ho ricevuto.

2. Frutto:

Il frutto perfetto di qualcosa di assolutamente nuova, inedito. Come solo chi è nato della cultura con la sua lingua madre realizzarlo. Ecco dove i carismi restano vivi, perché sono sorti dall'acculturazione provocata, così l'inculturazione è viva. Un carisma non guarda solo indietro e allo spirito dato dalla Fondatrice o dal Fondatore. Guarda continuamente indietro e avanti, sono livelli dell'artrosi sempre viene del dietro per guardare risuscitare. Questa è la vita d'Istituto, non dire mai "non abbiamo più vocazione", questo tipo di lamento ai secolari: i numeri gli constatiamo dal di dentro.

3. Inversione dei ruoli:

L'inversione dei ruoli nell'evangelizzazione ha un doppio senso. Perché a questo punto

l'evangelizzato evangelizza, mentre l'evangelizzatore si ritrova a essere evangelizzato. Dovrei dire, beato l'evangelizzatore che ci lascia evangelizzare. Dobbiamo dare ai nostri giovani questo stesso spirito non solo ai giovani, ma anche a mezz'età.

4. Reciprocità e condivisione

Questa condivisione sinodale indica la piena libertà del consacrato che non s'attacca al ruolo che gli è stato affidato. Cioè non presume di essere lui il maestro, suo ruolo è solo di insegnare. Il missionario insegna soltanto. Un tempo, a chi imparava si diceva, esser '*docibilis*'. Ho scoperto questo termine usato nell'antica Roma detta *docibilitas*. C'è molto di più di *docibilitas*. *Docibilitas* vuol dire alla persona che impara, d'imparare da tutti sempre, e in ogni età della vita. Bellissimo essere docile. Mi lascio formare dalla vita. Questo principio è fondamentale nella formazione permanente. Mi lascio formare dalla vita, da coloro che hanno portato l'Annuncio del Vangelo. Mi lascio evangelizzare dai poveri, e dai lontani.

5. Circolarità del carisma e suo svelamento progressivo

Primo punto, il carisma si rinnova propria grazie a questa condivisione e lettura incrociata, si lascia provocare della storia perché torna così alla sua naturale destinatario, l'uomo qualsiasi. E questa, vedete, è la circolarità dell'Annuncio. Il Vangelo ritorna, ci rende sempre più fedeli, è ricevuto, a questo punto possiamo evangelizzare il Vangelo. Ancora meglio sarebbe una parola che ci evangelizza.

Secondo punto, un carisma muore se resta sempre nelle stesse cose, il carisma ha bisogno di spazi nuovi e dell'aria fresca. Ha bisogno di geografia ampia, se resta sempre nello stesso posto non c'è soffio, non c'è niente da dire.

Questa è l'autentica formazione permanente che viene trasmessa dall'Apostolato. L'Annuncio avviene attraverso le relazioni e grazie all'altro, (anche dal pagano). Anche il pagano puoi evangelizzare la nostra perseveranza nella fede. Sapete la differenza fra l'essere perseverante è l'essere fedele? E concludo, l'essere perseverante è uno che resta nell'espressione che non viene meno, dà voce e alla parola ha dato a dovere, e diciamo che non dispiace

questa esperienza. Una persona perseverante è qualcuno che dice, “Signore, donaci la santa perseveranza”, ma la perseveranza non è più della fedeltà. La fedeltà indica sempre una persona che resta nel suo progetto vocazionale, ma non semplicemente ripetendo ciò sia un perseverante. Il perseverante è chi ripete, “Signore, dammi l’entusiasmo della prima volta, quando ho fatto i voti la prima volta, dammi la passione che avevo”. Il fedele non è così. Diventa una persona nuova, colui che è fedele, colui che rimotiva la sua consacrazione. Ogni giorno trova motivi nuovi, e perché fa questo? Il Signore eternamente chiama. Ogni giorno mi chiama e non si ripete. Ogni giorno il Signore ci chiama, ci propone qualcosa di nuovo. Ecco dove nasce la fedeltà. La Fedeltà è la risposta data ogni giorno per un dono sempre nuovo. Non basta la perseveranza, occorre essere fedele, alla fedeltà si aggiunge un aggettivo. Creativa, detto *la fedeltà creativa* — di per sé — creativa. *La perseveranza è ripetitiva, la fedeltà è creativa.*

6. Comunità-laboratorio

(o stile comunicativo- relazionale)

La comunità potrebbe, dovrebbe essere un laboratorio, ha questo stile d’acculturazione, d’inculturazione e di condivisione dare la parola ascoltare delle altre frasi formare l’altro, dovrà diventare anche stile della vita comune, della vita fraterna. Ciò implica, come abbiamo detto, una formazione iniziale e permanente del singolo, del gruppo, che evochi questo stile di evangelizzazione attraverso un corrispondente stile comunicativo relazionale da vivere in comunità. La comunità laboratorio che si prepara a questo tipo di evangelizzazione. Nessuno, infatti, può improvvisare fuori dall’Apostolato quello che non ha imparato a fare lì dentro.

Tale stile comunicativo-relazionale rende la comunità un “luogo di formazione” e allo stesso tempo un “laboratorio”. Nella fede ci sono gli strumenti d’integrazione del bene e del male.

A) Strumenti d’integrazione del bene

Il calazio, la condivisione della parola di Dio, il discernimento comunitario, strumento formidabile per imparare a camminare assieme, a scegliere assieme, a scrutare assieme quello

che a Dio è gradito. La libertà di dire il tuo parere è meglio del mio.

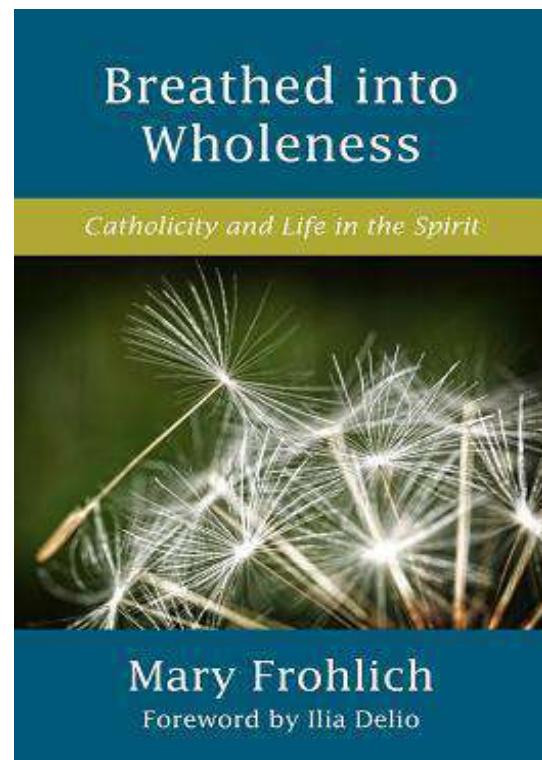
L’obbedienza fraterna, è un’idea di San Benedetto. I monaci, egli diceva, devono *obediant*, obbedire, *ob-audire* — si ascoltino l’un l’altro. I monaci obbedirono, e non soltanto l’obbedienza, la quale non è una virtù. semplicemente che riguarda l’autorità dei superiori subiti. L’obbedienza riguarda tutta la vita. Ogni momento non solo l’epoca di trasferimenti.

Strumenti d’integrazione del male

Strumenti d’integrazione dal male anche s’impara a crescere, la correzione fraterna. Il perdono — non impariamo la revisione di vita e tutti strumenti che possono essere molto buoni se messi in atto; che educano alla relazione, e consento di passare dalla comunicazione alla comunione e rendono capace di adottare un corrispondente stile di dialogo e condivisione evangelizzante e già in comunità, per realizzarlo poi dell’Annuncio.

Grazie per l’ascoltato.

(Ref: The audio text from Fr. Amedeo Cencini, from the SEDOS Residential Seminar 2023.)



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SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR ON MONDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER 2023

At UISG Piazza di Ponte Sant'Angelo, 28, 00186, Rome

PROGRAM

Monday, 13th November

Theme: Mission as Synodality - *On the experience of living synodality*

- 8:45 Registration
- 9:00 Prayer
- 9:15 Welcome and Introduction by
Fr. Alain Mayama, CSSp
- 9:30 Introduction of Participants
- 10:15 Tea Break
- 10:45 1st Talk by Sr. Mary Barron, OLA
(Superior General of Our Lady of the Apostles)
2nd Talk by Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse MCCJ
(Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries)
3rd Talk by Bro. Mark Hilton
- 13:00 LUNCH BREAK
- 14:30 Sharing and celebrating Synodality
Moderated by Sr. Geni Santos Camargo, SFB and
Fr. André Simonart, MAfr
- 16:50 Closing (Vote of thanks)
-



SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR

Monday, 13 NOVEMBER 2023

At UISG Piazza di Ponte Sant'Angelo, 28, 00186, Rome

Next Event

SEDOS ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY & CHRISTMAS PARTY

On Thursday, 14 December, 2023 at SVD Generalate
(Via dei Verbiti, 1)
From 4 PM to 9 PM