



Human Dignity

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SEDOS

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is a forum open to Roman-Catholic Institutes of Consecrated Life,
which commit themselves to deepening their understanding of Global Mission.
It encourages research and disseminates information
through its Bulletin, Website, Seminars and Workshops.*

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Let us know if you are interested.

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Editorial



Dear Readers,

We are nearing the end of 2021. The pandemic keeps limiting our actions but at the same time invites us to discover new ways in reaching out to our SEDOS Members and all those interested – and active – in Mission. In the former SEDOS Bulletin we have shared the summary of the many-fold talks given SEDOS Mission Symposium in which we discerned four topics that typify the current trends in Mission: Synodality – Human Dignity – Christ-connectedness – Wholeness. In this issue, we take up the topic of **Respect for Human Dignity** from different angles.

First, there is the **Message of his Holiness Pope Francis** for the success of the Symposium, and in which he gives his Apostolic Blessing to all our Missionaries in the field. The letter arrived late at our office, but nevertheless remains of great value to us. Interesting in this letter is that he stresses that *we should bring the Gospel message without imposing fixed cultural forms*. This is a clear message against the old colonial way of doing mission by bringing Western culture as the ideal form in which to live one's faith.

The first article of Fr. Christian Tauchner, SVD, conveys in an academic-missiological way the same message. He makes clear that before we can really do mission we have to know the person and his/her culture. Therefore, *mission should go hand in hand with anthropology*. Respect for a person's culture helps in bringing the Gospel values and is part of this respect for Human Dignity.

Further, Sr. Francisca Eniye Agho, SSH, reflects on the difficulty people experience in their home country when they were not successful in emigrating. The *reintegration of returnees is a challenge for the person as well as for the society and the Church*. What seems to be simple, because it is a person's own culture, is not always that simple. It is a

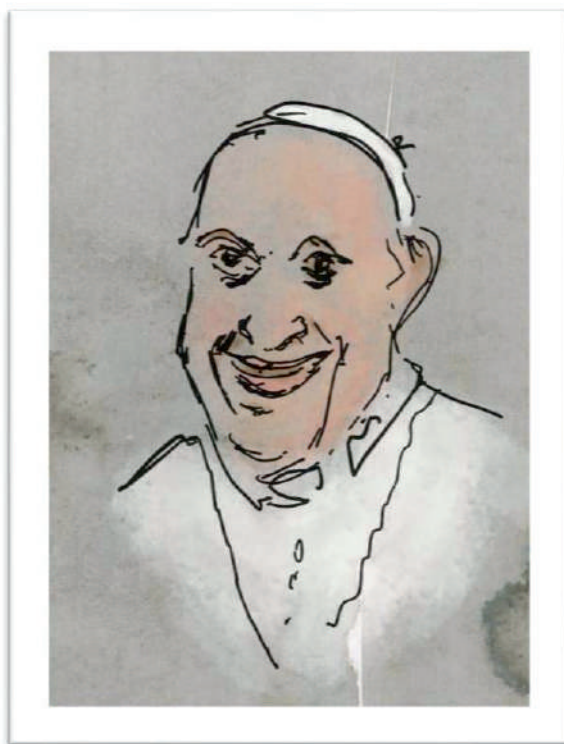
challenge also for the Catholic Church in the place. The author defines some of the difficulties in the case of Benin City in Nigeria, and gives some answers to it.

Another problem caused by the present wave of migration is the *food shortage*. Sr. Soosai Antony Vijilidali explains to us how her Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, DMI, are helping out on this level in South Sudan.

Fr. Samir García Valenca, from the diocese of Istmina - Tadó in Colombia, paints for us the present situation of the Church in Latin-America, a "Church on the Move".

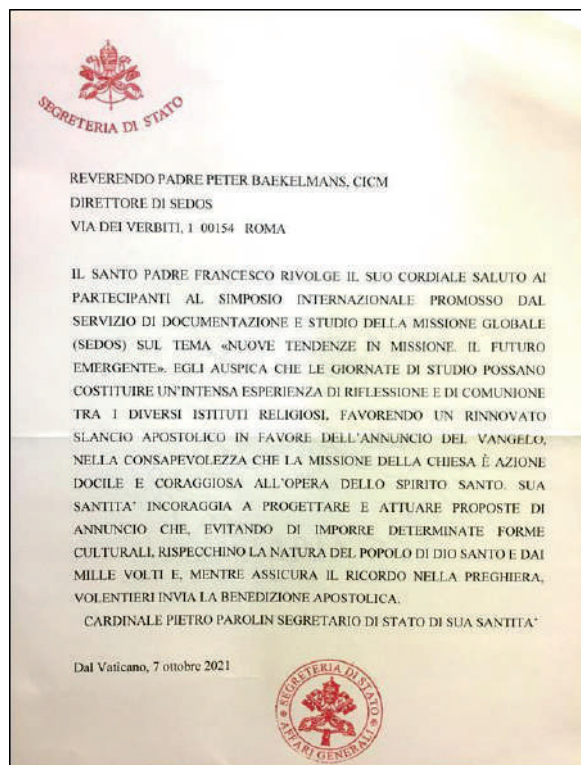
The last two contributions are meditative articles to be read in this Christmas season: one on the *Our Father* in the context of *Fratelli Tutti*, by Fr. Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, and one on the *Magnificat* of Maria, by Fr. James Kroeger, MM.

We add here a joyous representation of *Pope Francis* by Koen Van Loocke, a gifted and devout Belgian artist (Kerknet Vlaanderen).



Merry Christmas and Happy Newyear!

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS



THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS ADDRESSES HIS CORDIAL GREETINGS TO THE PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZED BY THE DOCUMENTATION AND STUDY SERVICE OF THE GLOBAL MISSION (SEDOS) ON THE THEME «NEW TRENDS IN MISSION, THE EMERGING FUTURE». HE HOPES THAT THE STUDY DAYS MAY CONSTITUTE AN INTENSE EXPERIENCE OF REFLECTION AND COMMUNION FOR THE VARIOUS RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES, FAVORING A RENEWED APOSTOLIC IMPULS IN FAVOR OF THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL, IN THE AWARENESS THAT THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IS A DOCILE AND COURAGEOUS ACTION, AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. HIS HOLINESS ENCOURAGES PROPOSALS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION THAT, AVOIDING TO IMPOSE FIXED CULTURAL FORMS, REFLECT THE NATURE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD ALL HOLY WITH A THOUSAND FACES. AND, WHILE ASSURING HIS UNION IN PRAYER, HIS HOLINESS IS PLEASED TO IMPART HIS APOSTOLIC BLESSING.

CARDINAL PIETRO PAROLIN,
SECRETARY OF STATE OF HIS HOLINESS

From the Vatican, 7 October 2021

EL SANTO PADRE FRANCISCO DIRIGE SU CORDIAL SALUD A LOS PARTICIPANTES DEL SIMPOSIO INTERNACIONAL ORGANIZADO POR EL SERVICIO DE DOCUMENTACIÓN Y ESTUDIOS DE LA MISIÓN GLOBAL (SEDOS) SOBRE EL TEMA «NUEVAS TENDENCIAS EN MISIÓN, EL FUTURO EMERGENTE». ESPERA QUE LAS JORNADAS DE ESTUDIO CONSTITUYAN UNA INTENSA EXPERIENCIA DE REFLEXIÓN Y COMUNIÓN PARA LOS DISTINTOS INSTITUTOS RELIGIOSOS, FAVORECIENDO UN MOMENTO APOSTÓLICO RENOVADO A FAVOR DE LA PROCLAMACIÓN DEL EVANGELIO, EN LA CONCIENCIA DE QUE LA COCHE ISLA Y LA MISIÓN DE LA COGIDA, Y LA OBRA DEL ESPÍRITU SANTO. SU SANTIDAD ALIENTA LAS PROPUESTAS Y SU IMPLEMENTACIÓN QUE, EVITANDO IMPONER FORMAS CULTURALES FIJAS, REFLEJEN LA NATURALEZA DEL PUEBLO DE DIOS TODO SANTO CON MIL CARAS. Y, MIENTRAS ASEGURA SU UNIÓN EN ORACIÓN, SU SANTIDAD SE COMPLACE EN PARTIR DE SU BENDICIÓN APOSTÓLICA.

CARDENAL PIETRO PAROLIN,
SECRETARIO DE ESTADO DE SU SANTIDAD

Vaticano, 7 de octubre de 2021

LE SAINT PÈRE FRANÇOIS ADRESSE SES SALUTATIONS CORDIALES AUX PARTICIPANTS AU COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISÉ PAR LE SERVICE DOCUMENTATION ET ÉTUDES DE LA MISSION MONDIALE (SEDOS) SUR LE THÈME « NOUVELLES TENDANCES DE LA MISSION, L'AVENIR ÉMERGENT ». IL ESPÈRE QUE LES JOURNÉES D'ÉTUDE CONSTITUENT UNE INTENSE EXPÉRIENCE DE RÉFLEXION ET DE COMMUNION POUR LES DIFFÉRENTS INSTITUTS RELIGIEUX, FAVORISANT UN RENOUVEL ÉLAN APOSTOLIQUE EN FAVEUR DE LA PROCLAMATION DE L'ÉVANGILE, DANS LA CONSCIENCE QUE LA MISSION DE L'ÉGLISE EST UNE ACTION DOCILES ET COURAGEUSE, ET L'OEUVRE DU SAINT-ESPRIT. SA SAINTETÉ ENCOURAGE LES PROPOSITIONS ET LA MISE EN OEUVRE DES PROPOSITIONS QUI, ÉVITANT D'IMPOSER AUCUNE FORME CULTURELLE FIXE, REFLETENT LA NATURE DU PEUPLE DE DIEU TOUT SAINT AUX MILLE VISAGES. ET, TOUT EN ASSURANT SON UNION DANS LA PRIERE, SA SAINTETÉ OCTROIE VOLONTIERS SA BÉNÉDICTION APOSTOLIQUE.

LE CARDINAL PIETRO PAROLIN,
SECRÉTAIRE D'ÉTAT DE SA SAINTETÉ

Du Vatican, le 7 octobre 2021

Being a Mission on this Earth

Evangelisation has to do less with technical procedures and media but is fundamentally a question of human relationships. Anthropology has the task of analysing cultures and human behaviour and thus lays the ground for a missionary encounter. In colonialistic setting, the missionary endeavour implied a civilizational effort: the others should first be brought to a different cultural level before they might be able to receive the Gospel. The Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) have a long-standing tradition of anthropological research intended to help missionaries in their engagement. Missionary linguistics study some of the complex tasks involved in the translation of messages between different cultures. Communication, as a further central characteristic of the SVD missionary perspective, offers insights for the relation to others. In the last section, Pope Francis' position of thinking mission as a personal calling and vocation is taken up.

Evangelisation constitutes the entire purpose of many congregations like the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) and for all disciples of Jesus, if one takes Pope Francis' perspectives in *Evangelii gaudium* (EG) seriously. There, in a chapter on the spiritual background for evangelisation (EG 269-274), he explains particularly the human attitudes in the disciples of love for the others, and its relationship to God's love for any human person as a basic fact which demands the disciple's response in a positive approach.

This perspective on divine love and the human person constitutes for the SVD their particular articulation of evangelisation and mission, on the one hand, and anthropology and social sciences, on the other. For the symposium in November 2018, this articulation became the focus point of Mariano Delgado's input and the reflections that followed on that day and after.

Evangelisation deals with the relationship between persons and the good news, a sort of message to be conveyed and construed

between the actors. This communicative relationship has been seen under different angles in the course of its reflection, and also today, there are several rather diverse manners to focus on the communicative act of sharing. Technological developments play a major role in it and shape the expectations for the mediated communication.

In this contribution I'd like to take a look at some of the stages in the partly quite conflict-laden relationship of anthropology and missiology and different designs for a missionary encounter with others. The need of translation in the transmission of messages is a vital question of communication and its fascinating modes of coding and decoding. From a communicational point of view, the passing on of a message requires change and modification, if it wants to reach the other and keep its identity. Looking at evangelisation from a communicative perspective will lead in the final section of this article to the appreciation of the personal involvement with all the complexity of "being a mission" and thus understand the person as the carrier and agent of evangelisation.

Mission and Civilisation

In the 19th century, the "missionary century," the church saw itself tasked with the promotion of civilisation. A. Miotk states in his study on *Maximum illud* that for Pope Leo XIII the missionary engagement presented the "foremost aspect of a harmonizing strategy between church and modern society [...]. 'As far as human reason is capable of judging the events – [the pope] wrote in 1894 –, it seems to be evident that God has entrusted Europe with the task to spread the benefits of Christian civilisation in the entire world.'

Generally, the missionaries shared this idea.”¹ In the same line, Gustav Warneck stated: “We plant and promote civilization when we present the Gospel, and we make the nature-peoples human by making them Christians. Christianity is not the bloom but the root; culture is not the root but a bloom of Christianity. [...] The nature-peoples must first be made human, then Christian. They are slowly trained to and through culture, whose highest bloom is Christianity.”²

Missionaries were challenged from the outset to find out more about the people they encountered. While there may not have been a lot of doubt among European missionaries about the high level of Christian content present in European cultures, their anthropological research revealed that supposedly primitive peoples not only had their rich cultures but that their way of living was quite adapted to their environment. A century ago, Martin Gusinde SVD was such a researcher among different peoples in Patagonia and the southmost places of America.³ He was able to register the cultures there and to discover how much they were adapted to the circumstances, not at all a primitive state of infra-human existence but much more a sophisticated world view. Gusinde explained in a retrospective on his life and work that his missionary vocation that brought him to the SVD in the first place consisted in his wish to “dedicate himself to missionary work in order to offer linguistic and anthropological research to the missionaries, in order to support them for a

better evangelisation of non-Christian persons.”⁴

In terms of *communicating* the gospel to other peoples, the emphasis was of course on teaching, instructing, making them understand—quite a unidirectional flow of information. Nevertheless, at the time of Gusinde’s first research trips, even the official teaching of the church insisted already – and not for the first time – on doing this proclamation and mission work in local languages. *Maximum illud* (1919) insisted on language learning for the missionaries:

Among the attainments necessary for the life of a missionary, a place of paramount importance must obviously be granted to the language of the people to whose salvation he will devote himself. He should not be content with a smattering of the language, but should be able to speak it readily and competently. For in this respect he is under an obligation to all those he deals with, the learned and the ignorant alike, and he will soon realize the advantage a command of their language gives him in the task of winning the confidence of the populace. If he is earnest about his work, he will be particularly reluctant to delegate the explanation of Christian doctrine to his catechists. He will insist upon reserving this duty to himself. Since he has been sent to the missions for no other purpose, after all, than to preach the gospel, he will even come to look on these instruction periods as the most important part of his work. There will also be occasions when, in his position as representative and interpreter of our holy Faith, he will have to associate with the dignitaries of the district. Or he may be invited to appear at scholarly gatherings. How will he maintain his dignity under these circumstances if

¹ Andrzej Miotk SVD, *Das Missionsverständnis im historischen Wandel am Beispiel der Enzyklika „Maximum Illud“* (Veröffentlichungen des Missionspriesterseminars St. Augustin bei Bonn 51), Nettetal: Steyler Verlag 1999, 110 (my translation).

² In *Modern Missions and Culture: Their Mutual Relations*. Translated from the German by Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Gemmell 1883), 245 and 242, quoted in J. Bonk, *Economic Development and Christian Mission: A Perspective from History of Mission*, in: Mari-Anna Auvinen-Pöntinen/Jonas Adelin Jørgensen (eds.), *Mission and Money. Christian Mission in the Context of Global Inequalities* (Theology and Mission in World Christianity 1), Leiden: Brill 2016, 145-170, here 145.

³ The diaries of these research trips to Tierra del Fuego are being edited: Marisol Palma Behnke, *Diario del primer viaje de Martín Gusinde a Tierra del Fuego* (1918–1919). Introducción y comentario a la publicación del documento inédito: *Anthropos* 113 (1.2018) 169-193. The subsequent diaries are published in *Anthropos* 113 (2.2018) 543-571 and *Anthropos* 114 (2.2019) 355-372, the second part of the third trip is announced for a forthcoming issue. For overviews of Gusinde’s research see Martin Gusinde, *The Lost Tribes of Tierra del Fuego. Selk’nam, Yamana, Kawésqar*. ed. by Christine Barthe and Xavier Barral, London: Thames & Hudson 2015.

⁴ In a lecture in 1957. See M. Palma Behnke, *Diario del primer viaje*, 170f.

he cannot make himself understood because he does not know the language?⁵

This insistence on language was also given to *Anthropos* in the early days of the Divine Word Missionaries—a research interest the journal and later the Institute have pursued extensively. In the first article of *Anthropos*, Msgr. Alexandre Le Roy, then the Superior General of the Spiritans in Paris, wrote: “It is too obviously necessary that the missionary must know languages... As a matter of fact, this study is not optional but obligatory... No one can be called really a missionary if he is not able to teach the indigenous in their own language.”⁶ For others who work for social progress, the “civilizational contribution of Christianity” is easily understandable, as “the gospel offers the world an ideal” of a higher moral state.⁷ But therefore it is also necessary to get to know each people: “It is quite important to keep in mind that each people has its own civilisation, that is to say, their way of understanding life, to lead it as they understand it, to take advantage of it in the best manner they can understand, to get organised and to govern themselves.”⁸

Anthropology and Mission

The concern for human cultures and the ways of life of different peoples necessarily has been important for missionaries and at times they found support for their tasks in social sciences, particularly anthropology and ethnology. There were particular research interests: In Wilhelm Schmidt SVD, the founder of *Anthropos*, “we find his quite plain apologetic intention to prove that mankind

originally knew of a monotheistic god, the father and creator, and that those peoples who could, historically speaking, be considered to exhibit the oldest or most ancient forms of culture, still adhere to such an idea. And for this purpose he solicited the cooperation of missionaries, guided their search and presented their findings to the scholarly world. The main channels for this kind of work were, next to Schmidt’s books (especially his *Ursprung der Gottesidee*) the journal *Anthropos* and the organization of the *Semaines d’Ethnologie Religieuse*.”⁹ Such ideologically motivated research and the application of insights became suspect in the academic context and the famous Vienna School around the SVD anthropologists lost its influence. At the same time, during the middle of the 20th century in the context of neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist campaigns, also the missionary approach to other peoples was understood as an active enterprise to modernise cultures which had been considered as lagging behind. Therefore, a split and later on a serious controversy about mission became rather outspoken among anthropologists. “Mission” became a synonym for cultural imperialism and the destruction of cultures. In 1973, a conference in Barbados demanded a stop in any missionary activity, as missionaries were accused of interfering with local cultures, while anthropologists claimed to be able to take a neutral and objective stance and therefore be able to observe cultures without influencing them.¹⁰ Meanwhile, this conflict and opposition has cooled down quite a bit to

⁵ *Maximum illud*, 24. The text is available on the Vatican website under Benedict XV’s Apostolic letters [10/2/2020]. – On this topic, see also: Franz-Josef Eilers SVD, *Maximum illud* in Communication Perspective: *Verbum SVD* 60 (1-2.2019) 58-62.

⁶ See Alexandre Le Roy, Le rôle scientifique des missionnaires: *Anthropos* 1 (1906) 3-10, here 9 (my translation). On this topic see also Othmar Gächter SVD, The Encounter between Religions and Cultures. 100 Years of *Anthropos* – International Review of Anthropology and Linguistics: *Verbum SVD* 46 (2.2005) 193-205; and Joachim G. Piepke SVD, The *Anthropos* Institute. The Task of Basic Research in Mission: *Verbum SVD* 46 (2.2005) 179-192.

⁷ Le Roy, Le rôle scientifique des missionnaires, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹ Peter Knecht, Definition of the position of Anthropology in the S.V.D., in: Joachim G. Piepke (ed.), *Anthropology and Mission. SVD International Consultation on Anthropology for Mission* (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 41), Nettetal: Steyler Verlag 1988, 21-38, here 29.

¹⁰ For a critical summary of these controversies and indications of the relationship between ethnographers and missionaries see Timothy Larsen, British Social Anthropologists and Missionaries in the Twentieth Century: *Anthropos* 111 (2.2016) 593-601.

a more rational level. But the possible contribution from anthropology to the missionary endeavour required some explanations. In the context of the centennial celebration of *Anthropos*, the director of the Institute, Joachim Piepke SVD, explained the purpose of the Institute and its work:

The Anthropos Institute is concerned with the study of the cultures, languages and religions of different groups of people. It does this [...] from the particular perspective of the missionary task of the Church to go and announce the gospel to all people. The science which then is tested and improved can be called the science of mission. This deals explicitly with theories of Christian mission and the methods of spreading the gospel to non-Christian peoples. The addition "to non-Christian peoples" is very intentional, to make it clear from the very beginning that the scope of this mission science differs from a scientific study of pastoral care. The science of mission in the sense in which it is understood here is concerned with the so-called "mission to the other outside" of one's own culture and not with the "mission to those within," for example parish missions or the preaching of the gospel in one's own Christian culture region. "Mission to those outside" of necessity means that one must transcend one's own cultural boundaries and is faced, as a result, with the questions involved in preaching the gospel in strange cultures.¹¹

In a major consultation dedicated to the relationship between anthropology and missiology and their mutual contributions, celebrated at Ishvani Kendra (Pune, India) in December of 1986, these questions were debated.¹² The meeting considered "the expectations which the missionary-in-the-field of today has in relation to the science of anthropology and the help he expects from professional SVD anthropologists. In this regard it was evidenced that the missionary aspires to understand the total life situation of the people he serves and, consequently, appreciates being helped to understand culture as a global system of symbols with

integrated parts taking in all forms of social organization. Of direct relevance to mission is the fact that the human being, male and female, is a social and religious being."¹³ The relations between anthropologists and missionaries were perceived as being in an uneasy state of flux because of the criticisms of missionary work made by anthropologists and other social scientists over the previous decades. The anthropologists did not question the biblical and theological foundations of mission but their critique of the social and cultural insensitivities of missionaries in cross-cultural situations did not make them friends either. Furthermore, missionaries-in-the-field perceived the anthropologists involved in researches with little relevance for confronting the day-to-day missionary problems. However, the local missionary often has much more experience of life in the field at the interface of cross-cultural communication than the anthropologist.¹⁴

One of the outcomes of this symposium is the publication of *Anthropology & Mission* twice a year by the Anthropos Institute since 1989. It contains summaries and reviews of anthropological books and articles relevant for those doing mission work and was delivered to formation houses and SVD missionary communities worldwide in order to give hints about anthropologically interesting perspectives.¹⁵

Translating Messages

The evangelising process never has been an easy task, there have always been difficulties and challenges in conveying the gospel and reaching the others in the intended manner. An early Christian example of such difficulties is shown already in the times of the early church with Paul and Barnabas. Acts 14 tells about their preaching in word and deed. The healing of a crippled man in whom Paul saw "that he had faith to be healed," the

¹¹ Piepke, *The Anthropos Institute*, 180.

¹² Piepke (ed.), *Anthropology and Mission*.

¹³ Wayne Robins/Peter Knecht/Roger Schroeder, Report and Recommendations, in: Piepke (ed.), *Anthropology and Mission*, 9-20, here 9. – As the

Consultation dealt primarily with the SVD, it is "he," the missionary.

¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵ See the publications at Anthropos: www.anthropos.eu. The recent issues are available (only) online.

Lycaonians interpret as “the gods have come down to us in human form!” (Acts 14:9.11) The people are not willing to leave that divine grace without recognition and take serious action when disappointed and, as a consequence, Paul is stoned and supposed to be dead (14:19).¹⁶ So, misunderstanding in translation can be a deadly affair.

This difficulty results from an evangelisation discourse outside of the cultural field. At the Pune Consultation, Louis Luzbetak stated that “We are really not preaching the Gospel effectively unless we preach in the cultural ‘language’ of the community in question, that is to say, in the local symbolic system.”¹⁷ Therefore, the Consultation dealt a lot with contextualisation and inculturation. In Luzbetak’s understanding, “Contextualization is the process by which a local church integrates its understanding of the Gospel (the ‘text’) with its culture (the ‘context’). Contextualization implies that the local Christian community blends its understanding of the Gospel with actual life. Unlike accommodation, which in practice has usually touched only the surface of a people’s ways and values, contextualization means integrating the whole lifeway to its very depths with the Gospel. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, the Magna Charta of modern mission action, speaks of incarnating the Gospel ‘right to the very roots’ of the culture (no. 20). This must, of course, be done without in any way compromising the Gospel, not an iota of it (Mt 5:18).”¹⁸

This task of not compromising in any way “not even an iota” of the gospel in Luzbetak’s commentary is more easily said than done. He finds himself in the best of company, obviously: “Pope *John Paul II* likes to speak of ‘evangelizing cultures,’ a good synonym for contextualization. It is here that anthropology, ‘the Science of Human Beings,’ makes its greatest contribution to mission. Cultural anthropology is the science that can show what it means to get ‘to the very roots’ of a way of life, how to ‘scratch where it does itch’....”¹⁹ Pope John Paul II liked to insist on both the necessity to contextualise, to enter into dialogue, and to keep the faith pure:

*The process of the Church’s insertion into peoples’ cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation ‘means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.’ The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church’s reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.*²⁰

In practice, the encounter with other peoples requires efforts at translation. Linguistics has branched out into a particular field that studies the translation of texts from “missionary” situations. For “missionary linguistics,” “translation is considered as a transcultural and a translingual activity. As such it is based

¹⁶ Thomas Söding highlights in a recent missiological reading of Acts the fact that such a public “religious” recognition of divine intervention goes far beyond the *religious* attitude of faithful persons but in the cultural context of Acts should be understood also as a particularly *political* reaction: Thomas Söding, *Ein Gott für alle. Der Aufbruch zur Weltmission in der Apostelgeschichte*, Freiburg: Herder 2020, 166-188.

¹⁷ Louis J. Luzbetak, What can Anthropology offer to the Missions?, in: Piepke (ed.), *Anthropology and Mission*, 49-58, here 49.

¹⁸ Ibid., 50. The discourse on contextuality and contextualisation has become fairly commonplace, but it should be noted that at the time of Luzbetak’s remark, Robert Schreiter was about to publish his seminal *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis

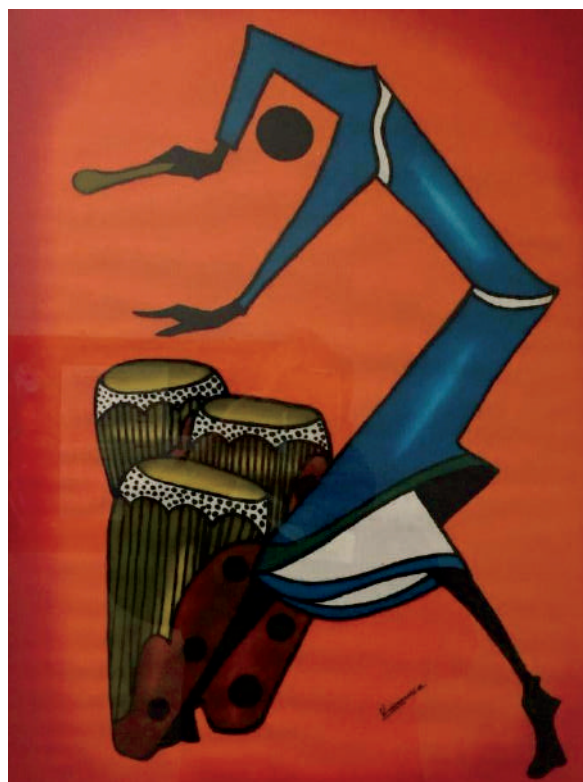
Books 1985), Stephen Bevans SVD was trying to come to terms with the tasks of formulating contextual models (his also seminal *Models of Contextual Theology* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books] was published in 1992, after first drafts since 1976 and an article on the topic in 1984, as he states in the Introduction). See also Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Theology and Mission in World Christianity 12), Leiden: Brill 2018.

¹⁹ Luzbetak, What can Anthropology offer to the Missions?, 51.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio* 52 [1990]. Similarly, whenever speaking of the importance of dialogue for the transmission of truth and the gospel, he would insist on such integrity and completeness of the Christian message.

on intercultural encounters between European missionaries and the speakers of the various indigenous languages and cultures of America, Asia and Africa. It entails the cognitive appropriation of the indigenous languages and cultures and the practical aim to colonize or, at least, influence the culture of the (indigenous) ‘other.’ In a wider sense, the appropriation, documentation and translation of the indigenous languages by the missionaries are results of interlinguistic perception, i.e., the perception of one language through the vision of another, and a cognitive process which encompasses (auditory) sensation of new linguistic information and its cognitive interpretation on the (contrastive) basis of old information, i.e., the more general or even specialized theoretical and language knowledge of the missionaries.”²¹

Studies of the concrete manners how fundamental concepts of Christian heritage are translated into other cultural contexts produce quite fascinating results, or at least insights. While one might imagine the translation of cultural content in the context of religion “as a rather straightforward enterprise that implies a uni-directional process undertaken to transfer a message into a different (kind of) language, providing explanations and interpretations of diverse content and form. Our studies show that these processes can be bi-directional or even multiple because all works studied give evidence of how the authors resorted to different cultural traditions and languages and interrelated them.”²²



In the process of translating, missionaries went through different phases of understanding the other languages into which they translated. At times, later editions of their works incorporated better adapted concepts or had to cope with the decisions of authorities regarding the correct use of concepts—the solution of the Chinese rites controversy with the imposition of *tiānzhǔ* in place of *tiān* and *shàngdì* is a disastrous example in history. But often, the translators and missionaries encountered difficulties in their options; as an example, Graciela Chamorro analyses that in a Jesuit translation into Guaraní the idea of “Jesus Christ son of God” had to decide for the correct word for /son/, as the concepts for it in the *Tupí* root are different if being a son refers to the father – *ta’yra* – or to the mother

²¹ Otto Zwartjes/Klaus Zimmermann/Martina Schrader-Kniffki (eds.), *Missionary Linguistics V/Lingüística Misionera V. Translation Theories and Practices. Selected Papers from the Seventh International Conference on Missionary Linguistics, Bremen, 28 February – 2 March 2012* (Studies in the History of the Language Sciences. Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science – Series III, 122), Amsterdam: John Benjamins 2014, viii. – This is the somehow arbitrary delimitation of the field by one of its most prominent experts. Nevertheless, similar translation processes have

happened also within the European context of Christianity along the historical development of basic concepts like “person” within Trinitarian theology. They are also taking place with other than European actors outside of Europe and not only in colonial times.
²² Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (ed.), *Translating Wor(l)ds. Christianity Across Cultural Boundaries* (Collectanea Instituti Anthropos 51), Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag 2019, 7.

– *membyra*. “As in the understanding of the doctrine on the Holy Trinity the male power as the basis for the articulation of society was prevalent, the Jesuit translator chooses *ta'ýra* in order to express that Jesus was the male son of a male god, thus taking care that in the trinitarian expression Jesus be not understood as son of a woman, *membyra*.”²³ Many of the translation studies show the difficulties in finding appropriate equivalences in other languages.²⁴

For the search of appropriate equivalent meanings, obviously the analysis of the other culture was most important. In many cases, the missionaries found such meanings, but often they also had doubts of the precise meaning. They found it better to avoid confusion with the previous (“pagan”) religion.²⁵ Others tried translations and adopted concepts from the other language, but at times for some reason, their conceptualisation was abandoned later on.²⁶

There are different motivations at work when it comes to the question of translating texts. There is of course the interest and indeed need to get a firm basis for the content of Christian faith. As the presentation of the actual *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “A catechism should faithfully and

systematically present the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and the authentic Magisterium, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Fathers and the Church’s saints, to allow for a better knowledge of the Christian mystery and for enlivening the faith of the People of God.”²⁷ Particularly with the reformation and the subsequent controversies, the 16th century became the “great century of catechisms.”²⁸ The Tridentine Council ordered the composition of a catechism (*Catechismus Romanus*, 1566), which was to become the general norm for the instruction of the faithful. However, in the missions, different forms of such compendia were elaborated, depending on a colonial context—that is, within the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in America and Asia—or outside of such dominion—like Matteo Ricci’s situation in China. In a comparative study, Franz Helm looks at the Jesuits José de Acosta (Peru) and Matteo Ricci (China) and their respective presentations of the Christian faith. “Both missionaries left their native countries to save the souls of the pagans from hell. So, Acosta procures the ‘salvation for the Indians’ and Ricci wants to ‘introduce the Christian faith in China’”²⁹ – to take up the title of Acosta’s

²³ Graciela Chamorro, La traducción del lenguaje cristiano al guaraní jesuítico, in: Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (ed.), *La transmisión de conceptos cristianos a las lenguas amerindias: Estudios sobre textos y conceptos de la época colonial* (Collectanea Instituti Anthropos 48), Sankt Augustin: Anthropos Institut/Academia Verlag 2016, 247-267, here 253 (my translation).

²⁴ See Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (ed.), *Translating Wor(l)ds*; Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (ed.), *La transmisión de conceptos cristianos*; see also Philip E. Stine (ed.), *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church. The Last 200 Years* (Studies in Christian Mission 2), Leiden: Brill 1990; Lars Kirkhusmo Pharo, *Concepts of Conversion. The Politics of Missionary Scriptural Translations* (Religion and Society 70), Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2018.

²⁵ Cristina Monzón reports and analyses the case of a Tarasco text and the problem of “soul,” which for the Tarascos, apparently, was considered a body limb and a better equivalent for /alma/ could not be found: Cristina Monzón, *En torno al alma: Una visión en documentos y diccionarios tarascos del siglo XVI*, in:

Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (ed.), *La transmisión de conceptos cristianos*, 153-167.

²⁶ Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz, Recontextualising the Sacraments: Diego González Holguín’s Construction of Christian Vocabulary in Colonial Peru, in: ead. (ed.), *Translating Wor(l)ds*, 156-198; Roxana Sarion, Matías Ruiz Blanco’s Reconceptualisation of Carib Practices and Traditions in his *Conversion de Piritv de indios cvmanagotos, palenqves, y otros* (1690), in: Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (ed.), *Translating Wor(l)ds*, 199-229.

²⁷ John Paul II, *Fidei depositum*, III (1992): Apostolic Constitution on the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

²⁸ For this section on catechisms, see Franz Helm SVD, *La misión católica durante los siglos XVI-XVII: Contexto y Texto. El condicionamiento contextual de la misión, analizado por la comparación de los catecismos de José de Acosta, SJ (Lima, 1584) y de Matteo Ricci, SJ (Beijing, 1603)* (Misión y Diálogo 4), Cochabamba: UCB/Verbo Divino/Guadalupe 2002, 213-240, here 218 (my translation).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 350.

programmatic work *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* and Ricci's mission history – tiny shifts in words showing rather different positions towards the others.

The decision to study and to take on concepts from the other's world depends on the strategic view of their culture: Since the Indians in Peru were considered of a lower cultural level, Acosta did not bother much in searching equivalences. This was quite different for Ricci who worked outside of the colonial powers and in relation to a culture considered high. Acosta's catechism "did not make any effort at finding a starting point with the Indians, to whom the faith is announced. Since there is no salvation outside of the church³⁰ and she is in possession of the only truth and the exclusive way to salvation, there can be no question about the integral acceptance of all of her dogmas, customs and rites coming from the European Christianity."³¹ Therefore, Acosta introduces Spanish or Latin concepts into the Quechua (and Aymara) of his catechism without looking for equivalences: God, Holy Spirit, holy, grace, angel, spirit, person, virgin, sacrament, theological virtues, Sunday, confess, take communion, fasting are some of the central concepts introduced.³² On the other side of the globe, Ricci accommodates to his politically powerless situation: "Like the Chinese students who aspire to a public office, also [Ricci] has to comply with the careful study of the classical texts. This

knowledge opens for him the way into the intellectual elite. While Acosta—and with him the missionaries in Peru—reject the 'indigenous school' based on the retelling of the myths, Ricci—and with him the missionaries in China—has no other choice than to respect the Chinese educational system and comply with it. While Acosta writes and teaches in Spanish, the language of the invader and the foreign empire, Ricci can write only in the indigenous language of the local empire. While the missionaries in Peru appropriate the indigenous languages and master them, Ricci is a student who deciphers and by and by translates the great literary works of antiquity with their archaic Chinese and tries to discover contents compatible with Christianity which might serve as a starting point for his catechesis."³³

Communication

Within the SVD, communication is supposed to be one of the characteristic dimensions of the missionary approach. From times even before the foundation of the Congregation itself, media were already prominent in Arnold Janssen's missionary perspective and for a long time, the SVD has been related to printing and magazines.³⁴ Over the last 50 years, the emphasis has shifted from the media and the technical aspects to an attitude of communicating—a perspective largely misunderstood and underestimated by most SVD members.³⁵ Particularly with the

³⁰ The famous "extra ecclesiam nulla salus" was defined at the Florence Council in 1442: "Firmiter credit, profitetur et praedicat, 'nullos extra catholicam Ecclesiam existentes [...], non solum paganos', sed nec Iudaeos aut haereticos atque schismaticos, aeternae vitae fieri posse participes": DH 1351.

³¹ Helm SVD, *La misión católica durante los siglos XVI-XVII*, 351.

³² For this list and the treatment of the concepts see *ibid.*, 291-293.

³³ *Ibid.*, 371.

³⁴ Franz-Josef Eilers/Heinz Helf, *Arnold Janssen 1837–1909. A Pictorial Biography. Photographs and Documentation from His Life*, Nettetal/Manila: Steyler Verlag Wort und Werk/Divine Word Publications 1987; Franz-Josef Eilers, *Arnold Janssen als Publizist: Ein*

Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Missionspublizistik: Communicatio Socialis 8 (4.1975) 301-323; Joachim G. Piepke SVD, Arnold Janssen—An Inspiration for Today: *Verbum SVD* 59 (3.2018) 305-316.

³⁵ Franz-Josef Eilers SVD has dedicated a lot of his work to the promotion and reflection on communication in the SVD. See particularly his *Communicating in Community. An Introduction to Social Communication*, fourth updated edition, Manila: Logos Publications 2009. For an excellent review of the communication dimension of the SVD see Heike Sturm, *Medien als ethische Herausforderung an eine personale Kommunikation*, in: *Jahrbuch der Philosophisch-Theologischen Hochschule SVD St. Augustin* 1, Sankt Augustin: Steyler Verlag 2013, 55-71.

appearance and technological progress of social media, there is a new fascination with gadgets and technicalities. The *SVD Constitutions* relate communication to mission and evangelisation:

Communication at its most profound level is the giving of self in love and consequently a basic attitude necessary for us Divine Word Missionaries. Strengthened by this Word we work toward that final unity where God will be all in all (see 1 Co 15:28).

*Our founder saw in the printed word a powerful means to realize this goal. In the different means of communication, we recognize indispensable, effective ways of bringing the faith to all peoples and deepening it, of keeping the whole Church aware of its missionary obligation, and of strengthening that love which is the expression and source of all community.*³⁶

This rule anchors mission in the Trinitarian communion of Godself, a perspective that was also emphasised in the General Chapter of the year 2000 with the centrality of *missio Dei* and the subsequent option for dialogue in a communicative (as well as biblical, animation and justice-and-peace) way.³⁷ In the background, there is, among other things, the important insight of Vatican II that revelation is not so much the arrival of a message but actually a *communication* process: "By divine Revelation God wished to *manifest and communicate* both himself and the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of mankind: He wished, in other words, 'to share with us divine benefits which entirely surpass the powers of the human mind to understand.'" ³⁸ In a 1967 commentary,

Joseph Ratzinger explains that this "last section of [Dei Verbum] repeats in summarised form the first sections of the chapter 'De revelatione' of Vaticanum I (DS 3004f). The novelty with respect to that text consists in the replacement of the word *revelare* by the two verbs *manifestare ac communicare*. Thus, once again the character of reality of revelation is underlined that surpasses the purely doctrinal aspect which does not simply convey 'divine resolutions.' Rather, it is the dialogue of salvation, which is the communication taking place in the word from person to person." This revision results from the perspective of Vatican II which does not start from a natural knowledge of God to proceed to a supernatural revelation, but to the contrary, "unfolds revelation out of its Christological centre and then underlines the unreducible responsibility of human rationality as one dimension of the whole."³⁹

The word and concept of communication set interesting conditions for mission. Communication derives from the Latin *munus* which refers to the mutual obligations and donations from and in favour of the community⁴⁰ and also seems to mean originally a common field where the citizens kept their cattle. It is in such a field that through revelation God enters and becomes a member. In Christian terms, this mystery is termed Incarnation. As in any communication process, this mystery implies change on both sides. In early analytical presentations, the communication process was seen somehow linear in the passage of a message from a

³⁶ *SVD Constitutions* 115.

³⁷ See Generalate SVD, Documents of the XV General Chapter SVD 2000, *In Dialogue with the Word* #1, Sept. 2000, Rome: Curia Generalizia SVD 2000. In the articulation of that General Chapter, mission is the participation in the *missio Dei*, together with all other subjects involved in this divine dynamic. Therefore, dialogue is the logical relationship with those others who obey God's inspirations. This dialogue should be realised in four "characteristic dimensions" of the SVD charisma: Communication, Bible, Mission Animation and JPIC (Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation).

³⁸ Vatican II, *Dei verbum* 6 (my emphasis): "Divina revelatione Deus Seipsum atque aeterna voluntatis suae

decreta circa hominum salutem manifestare ac communicare voluit, 'ad participanda scilicet bona divina, quae humanae mentis intelligentiam omnino superant'."

³⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung. Einleitung und Kommentar zum Prooemium, I. und II. Kapitel, in: *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Dokumente und Kommentare, Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, zweite, völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage, Vol. 2, Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 1967, 498-528, here 514f.

⁴⁰ See "munus" in: *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Neue Bearbeitung, Stuttgart: Alfred Druckenmüller 1933, Vol. 31, col. 644ff.

sender to a receiver. Harold Lasswell's and Paul Lazarsfeld's research in the middle of the 20th century tried to secure such transmission, based on mathematical considerations⁴¹ – quite understandable in the context of the military and the requirement of flawless communication there. But soon, other factors came into focus and showed that communication processes are not unidirectional and depend on multiple factors and influences. This meant a shift from a unidirectional information flow to actual communicative processes. Cultural aspects belong to the determining factors which were analysed first within the North American and Western society – for example, in Lazarsfeld's two-step flow of communication model.⁴² With other cultures from other contexts, more elements had to be incorporated into the models. It became visible that messages are construed in shared processes through multiple turns in interpreting each other,⁴³ and therefore, the communication process implies *participants* rather than a *sender/receiver*.

Among the communication models that go beyond the sender/receiver perspective are the

digitalised media technologies. Supposedly, due to the technological possibilities, the one-way perspectives of evangelisation are overcome, there is no longer a *producer* vs. a *consumer* of messages, rather there are *prosumers* all taking part in the construction of meaning. Digitalisation seems to be the password into a brave new world of many idealistic promises for an easy life but also with many strings attached of silenced and even ignored or ideologically veiled interests and consequences.⁴⁴ The worries about surveillance and the loss of employment in digitalised societies are well documented. At times, there are concerns about the loss of capacities for public discussion, as social media are limiting the access to the opinions and arguments of the others; marketing considerations and algorithms tend to reinforce one's own line of argument and eclipse adverse opinions.⁴⁵ There is, of course, any amount of success promises for those who take to social media in their evangelising efforts. However, it looks like there are more promises and possibilities than actual innovations and new practices in these proposals.⁴⁶ I am aware that there are many

⁴¹ C. Shannon/W. Weaver (eds.), *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press 1949.

⁴² For these theories and their development into complexity see Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory. An Introduction*, London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage³1994.

⁴³ Franz-Josef Eilers SVD very soon got involved in such communication studies and set up courses on communication between different cultures, with a particular interest in helping missionaries to avoid pitfalls in their evangelising efforts. See for example his *Communicating between Cultures. An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*, Manila: Divine Word Publications 1987.

⁴⁴ For an excellent summary of the implications of the digital revolution for employment, society, religion and faith see Hanna Fülling/Gernot Meier (eds.), *Die digitale Revolution und ihre Kinder. Brennpunkte digitaler Ethik* (EZW-Texte 264), Berlin: Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen 2019; see also Christian Tauchner, SVD, Digitalization, in: Lazar T. Stanislaus, SVD/vanThanh Nguyen, SVD (eds.), *Missionary Discipleship in Glocal Contexts* (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 112), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2018, 29-58.

⁴⁵ Andreas Bernard, *Das Diktat des Hashtags. Über ein Prinzip der aktuellen Debattenbildung*, Frankfurt: Fischer 2018; Jaron Lanier, *Zehn Gründe, warum du deine Social Media Accounts sofort löschen musst*, Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe 2018.

⁴⁶ In a monographical issue of the Spanish missiological journal *Misiones extranjerías* (#283, March/April 2018), some aspects of the digital era are articulated. There is first of all a fascination with the possibilities and the indication that also the church has entered the field (Tony Neves, *Medios y misión. Dar „noticias buenas“ en la era de las redes*, 161-181), but then, soon the discourse blends into marketing perspectives of selling content (Inaku K. Egere, *La Nueva Evangelización en la era digital. Redes sociales y misión desde una perspectiva basada en marketing*, 206-220). – The implementation and realisation of new technological possibilities is still largely unexplored, and maybe not that new: what makes a bible sharing group on Skype different from the traditional meeting, and would it be really that better? See Marcell Saß, *Neue Welten entdecken: Digitalisierung – Theologie – Kirche*, in: Fülling/Meier (eds.), *Die digitale Revolution und ihre Kinder*, 67-76.

churches with a lot of such new media use not only for the organisational tasks but also for their proper evangelisational fields, mostly among charismatic and (neo)Pentecostal churches, with strong emphases on the event character and on emotions. Social change or option for the poor along perspectives of God's kingdom remain largely eclipsed.

I think the implications of participative communication models for the missionary encounter and evangelisation may turn out quite radical. If revelation is really to be understood as communication, a substantial contribution should be expected from what used to be thought of as the receiving side. What could that mean for God and the Spirit? And what should that mean for someone in any human setting and culture? Is there actually something new to be expected to the evangelising content and to revelation from any culture? When mission is understood as dialogue, it might be possible to take that human side of revelation seriously.⁴⁷ It follows quite obviously that the missionary is not any more supposed to bring God to any people – God has been there a long time before, as the saying goes.⁴⁸ But that also implies that it might be quite difficult to ensure that “not an iota” be compromised, in Luzbetak's expression above. The problem lies in the challenge to accept and recognise a field – *munus* – of shared meaning, and that goes quite a lot beyond the iotas. I like quite a lot the expression of a missionary who affirms in his old age looking back at his life: “The most important principle is that any cultural

group I meet will be as intelligent and honest as myself. If I see something that for me does not make sense or that for me is unethical it will be a sign that I miss something relevant; that I need to keep observing and reflecting.”⁴⁹ A step beyond the recognition of equality would consist in going native and in taking on other life styles, values and indeed revelation itself. Maybe this is the intention of the much-promoted *intercultural* approach to mission, which is still articulated much within our missionary congregation and its members from different cultures.⁵⁰

A consideration of the communicational process is related to this need for an openness to new contents even in revelation. As any speaker organises his discourse in relation to an intended listener, there results a certain dependence on the “listener” (and the prosumer perspective does not prevent from such a dependency, as also the prosumer places him/herself in the process of content production at some stage on a receiving side). It is impossible—at least it does not make sense—to express something that should go beyond the “receiver's” fundamental possibility of understanding, the moments of coding and decoding establish a mutual dependency on coming to terms and negotiating a new meaning. The evangelising discourse about a new good news shows how missionaries approached the other cultures: The first pronouncements were rather simple

⁴⁷ In the wake of the SVD General Chapter 2000 and its emphasis on *missio Dei*, Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder have dedicated substantial research to these questions in terms of missiology. See for example their *Prophetic Dialogue. Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2011.

⁴⁸ However, a significant number of churches do not accept such a perspective and see “mission” as the task to bring all humans into the church and a certain form of religion, as John A. Chau's case tragically shows: It was commented world-wide when this evangelical missionary got himself killed in the attempt to tell a secluded tribe on an Andaman island about Jesus' love for them, in November 2018. The immediate result of

his mission consisted in getting a number of fishermen arrested for taking him to that prohibited place.

⁴⁹ Ennio Mantovani SVD, *Sixty Years of Priestly and Missionary Life. The History of a Journey* (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 113), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2019, 129.

⁵⁰ See the manifold contributions in Lazar T. Stanislaus SVD/Martin Ueffing SVD (eds.), *Intercultural Living*, Vol. 1, Sankt Augustin/Delhi: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut/ISPCK 2015; and id., *Intercultural Mission*, Vol. 2, Sankt Augustin/Delhi: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut/ISPCK 2015 (also published as *Intercultural Living. Explorations in Missiology*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2018).

summaries about the new religion.⁵¹ Because of this dependency, it is impossible to announce absolute truths to anyone, as the construction of meaning always puts meaning in the relationship and truth becomes relational: The other is in reality the condition of my discourse.⁵²

This dependency on the other for my own possibilities to elaborate my discourse may lead to the idea that the other has to become first like myself and then I could convey my message. The civilizational mission is an option for this: Only after the others have undergone a formation and accepted the cultural contents of my own world will they be in condition to receive and understand the gospel. Programmes for seminaries and the formation of clergy show such an outline, there does not seem to be a way outside of the Hellenistic philosophy and culture to access the Christian revelation,⁵³ theology students worldwide have to study Latin, Greek and European philosophy in order to access theology, alternative approaches through a more thorough dedication to Indian thought systems (in India) or more practice oriented apprenticeships (in Brazil or Ecuador, to mention only a few) had to be abolished or at least were not pursued to any large extent.⁵⁴ The alternative approach would have to recognise in the others equally valid points of view and the same nearness to revelation, on the basis of belonging to the same creation. It

would open for more possibilities to learn from the others and their understanding of God. I wonder about the implications of assigning a *normative* character with regard to revelation also to other cultures. The recent emphasis on creation theology and spirituality related to ecology might offer helpful insights.⁵⁵

Being a Mission

The construction of meaning and the communication of the good news might be understood as tasks and work. And in fact, this is true: It takes a lot of effort to “make sense,” to build new perspectives together and to contribute to the discourse on meaning for life. Evangelisation is part of the building of such discourses.

In *Evangelii gaudium*, this engagement is understood in terms of love. That is also the elementary experience of any missionary: Without love for the people there is no point in anything related to evangelisation or social engagement. This is, by the way, the everyday experience when at times missionaries may be highly regarded by the people around them, in spite of their poor command of other languages or little incidence in building mission stations, hospitals or schools etc., just because it becomes credible that they love the

⁵¹ St Paul’s discourses set out like that: in the Areopagus episode (Acts 17:16-34), he takes long preliminaries that keep the Athenians with their interest in the “latest ideas” (17:21) happy and talks about what they might know already. Only when he comes to the core message of Jesus and resurrection (v. 31), his failure becomes visible. See Christian Tauchner, *Lokalaugenschein auf dem Areopag*, in: Michael Sievernich/Klaus Vellguth (eds.), *Christentum in der Neuzeit. Geschichte, Religion, Mission, Mystik*, Freiburg: Herder 2020, 510-524. Similarly, the first discourses of the Franciscans with Hernán Cortés in Mexico 500 years ago or Vicente de Valverde in Pizarro’s episode with Atahualpa in Cajamarca in 1532 show such rudimentary exposures.

⁵² Christian Tauchner, *El otro. La condición de mi palabra: Spiritus* [Quito, Ecuador] 43 (#169, 4.2002) 26-31.

⁵³ See Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict’s arguments for the *normative* character of the Hellenistic mediation of revelation.

⁵⁴ Joachim Piepke SVD published an extensive study about a liberating God: Joachim G. Piepke, *Ein befreiender Gott ist anders. Für Menschen, die an der Kirche verzweifeln*, St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag 2017. There, he intends to set out from urgent questions people have, and not from the “highly hypothetical answer” of “God.” In his work, the question of salvation and evil comprises the first chapter, the last chapter on God tries to come to terms with the hope of answers.

⁵⁵ Pope Francis’ *Laudato si’*, the establishment of a “world day of creation spirituality” in early September and the developments in the context of the Amazon Synod show this new interest in setting out from creation and prevent too immediate an approach to redemption and salvation.

people and dedicate their lives to them.⁵⁶ And “missionary” in this context does not mean exotic places and strange cultures, though there, it may become more visible and more easily understandable. Actually, without love, any social contact might turn into a boring administrative act or worse. Pope Francis sets out from God – as he does usually – and stresses the spiritual side of approaching the others: “Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary” (EG 272).

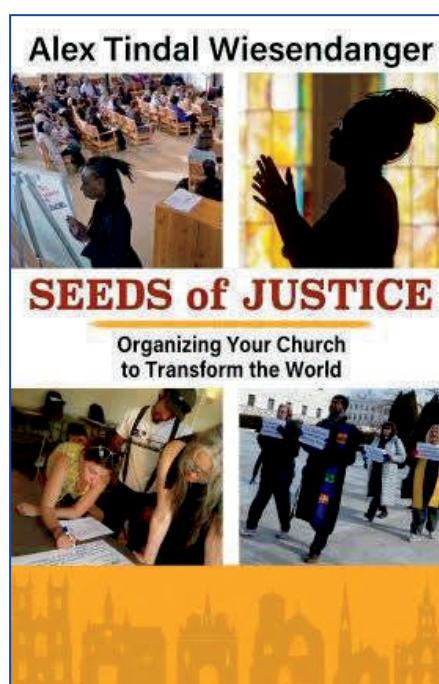
Thus, the missionary commitment becomes related to *being* a disciple, more than practicing a certain set of activities, attitudes and actions. The relation to the others is characterised by that way of being a fellow human and it is this way of being which enters the shared space – the “*munus*” – in evangelisation. In the words of EG:

My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing (EG 273; my emphasis).

Certainly, “being” does not mean an essentialist state of immutable identity. Rather, in a more dialectic approach, being and identity exist in the processes of change through the encounter with others. Again, this experience of change belongs to the basic assets of missionaries who realise in hindsight how much they have changed in their lives through the exposure to others, and often it is a happy realisation to see all that has changed – divine grace has been at work. When placing one’s own person and *being* in the changing relations to others, the difficulties and troubles of anthropological and dogmatic confrontation lines might be dissolved and overcome in the sharing with others, or at

least, to stick with dialectics, they may be sublated (*aufgehoben*) into fraternal relationships of mutual enrichment.

In the world of newfangled social media the tools for such encounters may not be sufficiently complex when the linguistic competence seems to rely on the simpler choices of a “like” button or the selection from a couple of dozen emojis. Being human and the all-encompassing attitudes of love in dealing with others always have been more creative than such simple signs. Thus, it is the human person in its entire complexity that will also in the future be the real and fruitful carrier and agent of evangelisation. Mariano Delgado’s reflection on this topic (see the first article in this section) and his stress on calling, humility and spirituality rightly refers to an anthropology that builds on creation and particularly on the human person as God’s own likeness. Such an evangelisation and missionary encounter have revealed a divine and human interplay and will also in the changing contexts of modernity appeal to people.



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⁵⁶ Toribio de Benavente OFM, “Motolinía,” is an example among the early Franciscan missionaries in Mexico five centuries ago. He became known as

“Motolinía,” “one who is poor” in Nahuatl, because of his closeness to the poor in the ruins of Tenochtitlán where he had arrived in 1524.

Reintegration of Returnees

A Challenge to the Mission of the Catholic Church in Benin City, Nigeria

Introduction

Migration, generally, has gained attention from different thoughts of schools as the inflow of people does not only precipitate conflicts and controversies such that it affects not only the migrants but as well as the receiving communities, which is thus making migration an increasingly volatile and contentious be it political or religious issue. In the face of accelerating immigration vis-à-vis rapid changes in immigration policies, which tend to demonstrate an uncertain future for migrants, it is predictable that the increase of returnees will grow exceedingly as a result of economic crisis in most parts of European countries, the upsurge of xenophobic within African countries and anti-migrant discourses and practices. The return and reintegration of returnees thus becomes very timely, since it is more than the explicit belief that reintegration does not require much attention since the returnees are simply returning to their country which does not require a specific process being their usual culture and home of origin.

On the Issue of Return Migration

It is quite laudable that the field of migration studies, particularly on the missiological studies in recent years has included a specific number of works with focus such as the theological aspect of migration, the relationship between migration and mission, the remarkable role of religion identifying with migrants helping them to assimilate into a new civil environment. However most of the focus has been in the area of welcoming and caring for migrants in their receiving countries while little or nothing is channeled to the returned migrants or returnees in their home of origin.

Clinging on this fact, it is seen in the article of Russell King titled “Generalizations from the History of Return Migration”; it states that *Return Migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration*. Return is usually the process of returning home while reintegration or rehabilitation is generally a process or story of what is yet to happen to the returnees. The issue of returnees have actually not been given utmost and keen attention as the focus is mostly on immediate measure to ease the sudden needs of returnees. The reintegration of returnees into the mainstream of the society to enable them function independently and engage in gainfully activities that will deter the returnees from youth restiveness and other contemporary issues in the society is deficient.

Examining Return Migration in Benin City

In Nigeria, there are basically no convincing data on the number and characteristics of Nigerians who return to the country after some years of sojourn abroad. However, return migration is common especially among Nigerians. Benin City is a City in Southern Nigeria, which is a famous hub for both intending migrants and returnees. It is a modern metropolis of over one million people. It was constructed on the ruins of Great Benin, one of the wealthiest settlements in Africa before a British-led massacre in 1897 razed the city. Despite the absolute decline following the British conquest of Benin in 1897, the creation of the Midwest State in 1963, whose administrative seat was in Benin helped in restoring in some way the administrative functions of the City. Presently, Benin City is the regional capital of Edo state, and is one of the major urban

centres in Nigeria. It is a pre-colonial City and its urban history dates back seven centuries. More than 50% of Nigerian migrants in the European Union (EU) come from Benin City. Although there might seem to be only a few peculiarities about Benin City, it is a City where most families have a family member in Europe. For a better understanding of Benin City as a dependence of irregular migration to Europe, history traced back to the 1980s during the period Italian businesses were being established in Edo State. Most of these Italian businessmen got married to women from Benin City who eventually moved back to Italy with their spouses and started conducting business such as trade in textiles, lace and leather, gold and jewellery etc. As their businesses expand they began to consider bringing fellow women to Italy, through a legal means since Italian agriculture needs labourers to pick tomatoes and grapes in their farms. The drastic change of movement however came when plunging oil prices brought the Nigerian economy to a virtual standstill at the end of the 1980s, and this has a great effect on these businesswomen who went bankrupt. This effect also extended to the women working in the Italian farms as their jobs were transferred to the eastern European labourers. Majority of these women had no alternative than to resort to prostitution, which seem to be more lucrative than working in the farms. Many others however who could not cope with the change were faced with forced return back to Nigeria either through voluntary return or deportation. Hence the Genesis of the phenomenon of returnees in the Benin City.

Some Challenges of Returnees in Benin City

There is no gainsaying that the efforts of the IOM and various organization in the management of migration movements worldwide has been invaluable, especially offering incentives to returnees. However, life after such a return typically generates a different set of challenges. The enormous realities upon return can be quite worrisome

with huge debt to pay back, job opportunities, coupled with inhuman treatments they received from their traffickers as such a lot go into depression, confused on how to begin life afresh. These enormous realities are not farfetched from that which returnees in Benin City experience. Hence returnees in Benin City are continuously faced with some of the challenges below:

Lack of identification documents

The non-availability of obtaining official identification documents is an immediate challenge for most of the returnees as lack of such documents may act as obstacle to access of basic rights and services. Examples are repatriated migrants who may lack identification documents such as international passport, Voters card and National identity cards most often are withheld either by their sponsors, traffickers or persons who receive them. Most traffickers deceive the returnees that travelling documents will be processed, and this gives the returnees conviction before departure or while they were at their destination to hand their means of Identification to these traffickers.

Lack of data of returnees and their patterns of reintegration

In countries of origin generally, there are usually register of outflows of departing migrants while little or nothing is put in place to monitor the flows of returnees or to maintain their database. This absence of registered information makes it difficult to provide targeted services or interventions regarding the returnee's profile and their geographical spread. Returnees are received with hasty programmes initiated and hurriedly executed by government and other non-governmental agencies to ease immediate tension or trauma; this is sometimes not a long-term remedy to situation of these returnees.

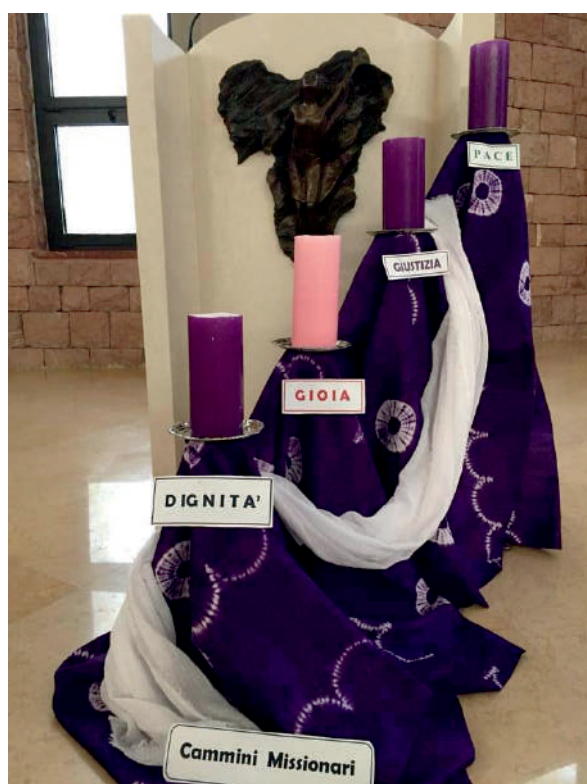
Health Challenges

Diverse health issues are inherent in some of these returnees, caused by adverse weather conditions such as high intensity of scorching

sun, cold and frost, unhealthy sexual activities, malnutrition and starvation. Emotional and psychological imbalances are also core health challenges of some returnees.

High expectations from Family members and friends

For some of the returnees, their suffering is worsened by family members who ostracize them because they returned without money. The news of somebody leaving the shores of his country to other country for greener pastures is welcomed with warm relief by the hearers, there are high expectations of poverty defeat and financial success. Sojourners are crowned with success stories by family members and friends, even before getting to their destinations. The envisaged wealthy status of these persons may be brought abrupt which emanate from repatriation, loss of job, deceit and change of destination. When high expectations from these returnees are not actualized, worst still, when they return to their country, some become subject of ridicule and mistreat.



Stigmatization

Returnees are sometimes labeled as failures and irresponsible persons because of their failed success stories. Some of the men are coined as thieves, gangsters and drug addicts while most of the women are coined as international prostitute. This stigmatization and unhealthy treatment give some returnees increases low self-esteem frustration. Stigmatization of returnees affects their social life, coping skills and decision-making. Majority of returnees face series of stigma and discrimination both within their immediate families and communities because of their failed migration experience.

Suicidal thoughts

A vital aspect among so many other challenges, is suicidal thought conceived by some returnees as a result of poor reintegration process. In some homes in Benin City, there exist parents and guardians who mount undue pressure on some of these returnees, which may cause an abrupt end of the lives of some returnees resorting to suicide. Suicidal thoughts emanate from frustration, depression, maladjustment and incessant mockery of one's status whether before or present. Returnees who suffer from the aforementioned may engaging in Suicidal thoughts as an option to resolve their challenge.

Pastoral Missionary Response an Antidote to the Challenges of Returnees

Missionaries are being challenged to ask themselves what this trend means for the spread of the gospel as they cannot afford to ignore this worldwide phenomenon. The issue of return migration has become one of the most important aspects of world-unprecedented speed and with such far-reaching consequences that a constant reappraisal of missionary strategy is required. In addition, if the gears of missions are not shifted to keep up with this social change, Jesus' mandate to go into the world and make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19) will be lost. The conception of mission today

has greatly changed. In spite of the fierce and unforeseen torture posed by extreme weather and heartless individuals, which returnees encounter during their voyage, they are still anxious to sail through. However, those whose immigration ventures stumbled for one reason or the other are often grouped under the category of returned migrants or returnees and thus should be helped to pick up the pieces of their lives again. The question now is: what kind of pastoral response can the church give based on the trend?

Church and State Working Together for a Better Reintegration of Returnees

Overtime, resources and institutions designated to manage the affairs of returnees are sometimes solely manned by state based on constituents (government personnel) not minding the essence of the role of the church in reforming or revamping human behaviors geared towards relatively permanent change in behavior. Individuals in the church with the requisite knowledge, skills and orientation needed to actualize the objectives and goals of reintegrating returnees should be sought for and given active role or even allowed to function as a supportive linchpin. Below therefore are some of the strategies the Church and State can embrace for a proper reintegration of returnees from their expedition:

Establishment of Functioning Reception Centers

The State in collaboration with the Church should establish organized reception centres that will receive and revamp returnees that are being maltreated and discriminated against by family and friends who most often see them as failures. They are to be kept for a period of time to receive good health care, spiritual and psychological counselling. These reception centers are to ensure functional engagement programs such as reorientation programs, skills acquisition programs, affordable education, ministry of reconciliation and healing, pursuit for justice through her role as the voice for the voiceless against inhuman

treatments of returnees. The duration of their stay will further be determined accordingly.

Formation of Pastoral workers and government officials

A nexus between the Church and the State is sacrosanct prior to and during the planning and implementation of programs and policies tailored to address the challenges of returnees. The essence of this is to share ideas and offer solutions to the challenges of returnees. While planning and implementing programs to savage the challenges of returnees, members of the state and the Church should be actively involved. This group of persons should be well formed in areas of both psychology and counseling, as well as possessing good interactive skills and good morals and values.

Justice Development and Peace Commission

This commission (JDPC) is a non-governmental organization (NGO). They are the structures through which the Church responds to the social issues of men and women created in the image and likeness of God, and so emerged as part of the mission of the Church towards holistic salvation for mankind. These social issues include: Human rights, Prison ministry, Agricultural development, Political awareness, Women empowerment, youth empowerment, granting of low interest loan, and Human trafficking/migration issues. Based on its mission statement, the Church in Benin City through this commission (JDPC) should help organize returnees locally. This could involve having a data of them and setting up Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) for them or organizing the furthering and funding of their education as the case maybe. The synergy between the government and the Church should be established to allow a functional and productive educational system that truly emphasizes the essence of engaging in activities that enhances self-sufficiency.

Job Availability

The Church today appears to be a huge employer of labor more than government,

though not in terms of the number she can employ but for the less bureaucratic and transparent process of employment. The State can help the Church by providing institutions the Church can run for them where these returnees can work; for example, the government can give some schools back to the Church. Migrants who came back armed with knowledge of foreign languages can be useful to these schools and a lot of non-academic staff can be got there off.

Grassroot Evangelization in discontinuing Stigmatization

The Church being very effective in its grassroot evangelization can help the government to track returnees' families, some of whose parents might even be parishioners of the various churches in the rural areas. This is to ensure discontinued stigmatization and mockery of returnees through sensitization, bearing the dangers of stigmatization and mockery of returnees. Religious organizations and government agencies should educate parents and guardians on the need to truly absorb returnees into their families; having in mind that the returnees are still useful if engaged meaningfully in a productive system.

Ministry of Reconciliation and Healing

This is another important and very sensitive aspect that requires maximum application of wisdom both by the State and Church. Migration most often is the consequence of forceful uprooted from one's own home of origin, violently or involuntarily. Hence, the ministry of reconciliation and healing becomes a key element. Memories need to be healed as a result of horrific experiences of migrants especially the returnees, such as scars of violence, abuse, feeling of anguish, loss of years of one's life, of value, honour and human dignity associated with forced deportation from host countries which has even led to many of the immigrants choosing to die in their host country than to return to

home country as in the case of Nigeria where the environment has remained largely indifferent and even hostile to them.

Active Involvement of More Pastoral Workers

...the local Churches must rethink pastoral care, programming it to help the faithful live their faith authentically in today's new multicultural and pluri-religious context. With the help of social and pastoral workers, the local population should be made aware of the complex problems of migration and the need to oppose baseless suspicions and offensive prejudices against foreigners.¹

There should be active involvement of more pastoral workers; bishops, priests, consecrated men and women as well as the laity with the willingness or zeal collaborate with the State at different levels in assisting the returnees.

Conclusion

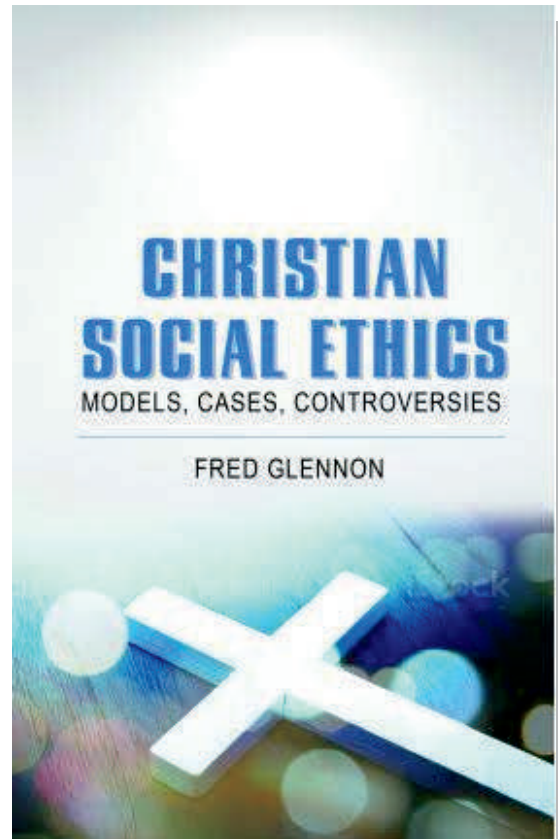
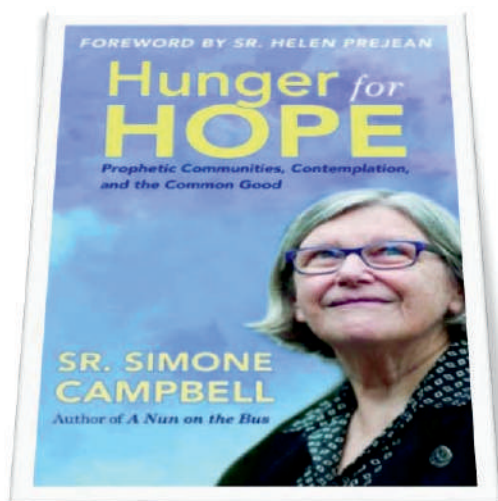
In his article on *Pope Francis's Missiology of Attraction*, Stephen Bevans re-echoed Francis's repeated phrase regarding a church that must be *poor for the poor*, which he emphasised as the attractiveness of the Church. It should be a church not just of equality where everyone is respected or heard, rather more of equity whereby resources are distributed to citizens of a society based on their needs. The ultimate foundation of a pastoral missionary perspective of the Church is the recognition of the dignity of the human person called to an intimate communion with God. In this context, for a better reintegration of returnees, the Church is called through dialogue, to collaborate with the State, other agencies and people of good will in promoting and defending the dignity of returnees. It is a privileged way to realize and proclaim the salvation offered to all mankind by God in Jesus Christ. The Church thus becomes an organic extension of this mission of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit, which manifest the salvific plan that springs from the love of God the Father. In this sense, the missionary activity

¹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE,

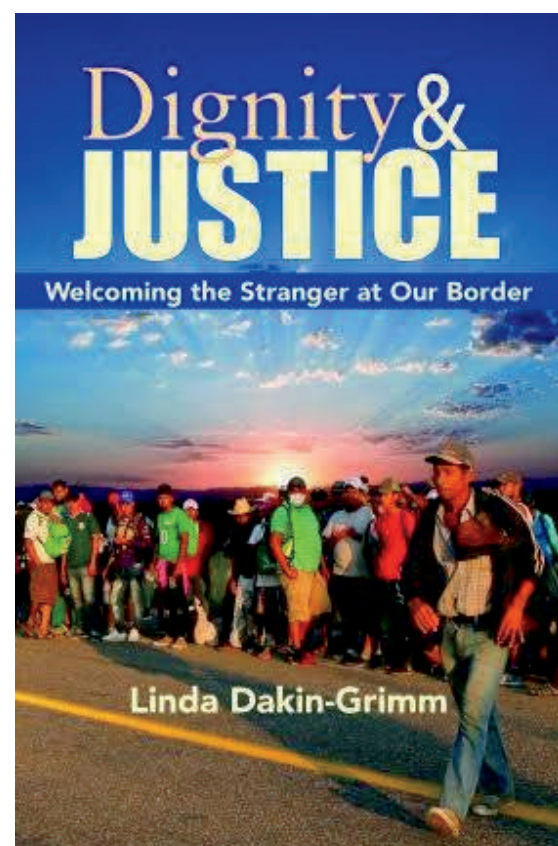
Instruction *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (1.5. 2004) n. 41.

of the Church finds its foundation in the missionary mandate communicated by Jesus Christ, to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. This attention to the poor is an occasion for the church to show the world her priority on her interest and concern for the least in the society; the poor, immigrants, abandoned etc. who are not just *objects* of the church' mission but active participants in her missionary work of salvation.

The Church in Benin City, be it the mainstream traditional or Orthodox and even the new generation churches must work in synergy to reduce the trend of illegal migration beyond the shores of Nigeria with greater effort made to properly reintegrate these unfortunate returnees. The big question still begging for answer is why the upsurge in modern slavery known migration? Could it be there is a global collaboration between these traffickers who promote illegal migration and the western world? For effective collaboration in reintegration process the State has not put in enough political will to stop it while the Church as the body of Christ need to go beyond the pulpit and now domesticate the gospel in the streets by being more proactive on practical ways to partner with the State in tackling the challenges in order to reduce the willingness or zeal to re-emigrate.



BOOKS RECEIVED FROM ORBIS BOOKS



Promoting household food security

Leading to peace

Introduction

The country is at the bottom of the Human Development Index (HDI) at 186 out of 189 countries¹. Out of 11.2 million population- (estimated by Worldometer², 2020) about 85% are involved in agriculture and 65% owns cattle. The formation of the unity government on 22nd February 2020 paves the way for the reintegration of 1.5 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and 2.2 million refugees. The prolonged conflicts on ethnic lines eroded trust and community mechanisms in addressing conflict and in promoting peace.

South Sudan is one of the three most-food insecure countries despite its favourable conditions (good rainfall, perennial rivers, fertile lands, etc.) for agriculture. Currently less than 5% of the total land area of the country is under cultivation. The farming communities lack the skills and knowledge to produce more food. Majority of farmers are not aware of improved agriculture practices. In 2012 SDMIC launched its development programs focusing on rebuilding the post-conflict affected communities by enabling household food security and in nurturing peace. SDMIC operates development program in Juba, Yirol, Wau and Malakal areas. Despite various challenges and threats, SDMIC is continuing its development initiatives with the commitment to bring lasting changes in the lives of people.

Helping people to help themselves

SDMIC believes in the community empowerment process. Facilitation enables

the local community to make decisions and act on those decisions. It is more worthwhile to teach someone to do something (for themselves) than to do it for them (on an ongoing basis) “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”.

Knowing the community and actively listening to their rich experiences and respecting the diverse viewpoints are fundamental ingredients to engage and facilitating change. Regular training, discourses and consistent engagement contribute to change in mind-set and openness for the new learning. The help starts from the present situation of the community, the facilitator sees the community situation without any judgement and without imposing upon his/her ideas. Ensure all processes at the community level nurture community towards independent functioning.

SDMIC over the last nine years enables in promoting community institutions – farmers associations at all the food security program villages in order to empower them to address their problem. The guiding principles SDMIC follows in promoting community institution are the following:

1. Participants and communities move from dependency to self-sufficiency.
2. Participants and communities define their problem and state the change they want for themselves and their community.
3. Community managed institutions continue to provide services beyond project term.

¹Human Development Report 2019

² Worldometer (www.Worldometers.info) Elaboration of data by United Nations, Department of Economic

and Social Affairs, Population Division. [World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision](#).

4. Engage with the government and international organizations for scaling – up of successful development models for wider impact.

Coming together to solve problem and learn

Bringing farmers together at each village help them to find a long-term solution to their problem tremendously. SDMIC facilitates farmers to form farmer's associations at 20 villages. They come together to discuss agriculture issues, learn sustainable farming methods and resolve community conflicts. Besides they commenced saving and lending practices.

So far, 182 farmers' associations are formed. These associations have 5,543 members with 3,054 females and 2,489 males. Each farmers' association has the structure- having a chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary, deputy secretary, one treasurer, and one box keeper. In the leadership structure, women represent 60 % and men 40%.

Farmers associations members represent different ethnic groups. By bringing diverse ethnic members SDMIC nurture peace and help members to understand and accept diversity. The farmers' association platform also helps them to resolve conflicts between farmers and pastoralist communities and nurture peaceful coexistence.

Increase production and facilitate self-sufficiency

Short and long term training for farmers on sustainable farming methods enabled them to adopt new farming techniques. Farmers associations through continuous negotiation with village chiefs were able to obtain 2,954 feddens of land for cultivation. Agriculture inputs – quality seeds, tools and tractors helped them to expand the cultivation areas and increase production and ensured 5543 households food security. The training and agriculture demo sites facilitated farmers to learn and adopt the best farming techniques in

their field. House backyard vegetable cultivation and planting of fruit saplings improved their household nutritional security. Farmers are able to market the surplus – crops, vegetables and fruits in the local market and SDMIC promoted community market outlets in the Juba town. Now they are able to spend money for their children's education and in meeting the health needs of their family members.



Conclusion

The joint effort with various key stakeholders facilitated lasting change in the lives of marginalized farmers. Durable peace is nurtured by enrolling members in the farmers' association from a different tribe. Through our efforts, we are able to enhance the self-esteem of farmers and they are not only able to have food all throughout the year but also able to expand in supporting other smallholder farmers by replicating this model in their neighbouring villages. As this movement keep expanding this would decrease the country dependency on importing food items from the neighbouring countries and depending on international aid organizations.

América Latina, Una Iglesia en Marcha!

Introducción

El presente artículo responde a la inquietud de conocer la Iglesia que camina en América Latina. El autor, sacerdote perteneciente a la diócesis de Istmina – Tadó, en Colombia, en su experiencia pastoral ha tenido la oportunidad de conocer las diversas regiones de gran parte del continente, ha participado en congresos y reflexiones en el ámbito misionero y en su propia diócesis ha confrontando la realidad de pobreza, violencia y marginación de las comunidades que habitan el territorio. Fruto de esta experiencia, reflexiona acerca del camino que la Iglesia en América Latina ha venido construyendo e insiste en la invitación que desde 1968, durante la 2º Conferencia del Episcopado Latinoamericano celebrada en Medellín, se viene haciendo para las comunidades de esta región: **una Iglesia pobre para los pobres.**

El texto inicia indicando un breve contexto histórico desde la época de la “colonización”, seguidamente da a conocer el proceso de evangelización que la Iglesia ha continuado desde 1955, impulsado por el organismo del CELAM que ha posibilitado unidad y fuerza a las comunidades cristianas católicas de esta región de América, se detiene para valorar los procesos de formación iniciados por el CELAM, aborda brevemente su recorrido histórico y da espacio especial a uno de los grandes logros de este trabajo de la Iglesia denominado CEBITEPAL, finalmente enfatiza en la virtud de la esperanza como

signo importante de la experiencia de vida cristiana de la que los pueblos presentes en América Latina son un auténtico ejemplo.

El camino metodológico que se ha llevado a cabo responde a la técnica *analítica – sintética*, porque los contenidos abordados son tomados de las apreciaciones de textos y personajes ilustres que se integran a la intuición fundamental del autor, tomando parte también de la propia experiencia.

Contexto

América Latina con 653 millones de habitantes¹ es un pueblo con características propias en el concierto global; como tantos otros, sus culturas, su cosmovisión, las diversas y especiales formas de relación con la trascendencia, la fastuosa biodiversidad presente sobre todo en la Amazonía, la sabiduría de los pueblos indígenas unida a la experiencia de vida, a la alegría y a las espléndidas representaciones artísticas de los pueblos afros, junto con la calidez, el empuje y el tesón de los blancos y mestizos, y sobre todo la fuerza arrolladora de la virtud de la esperanza, rasgo propio de la personalidad de toda su gente que como el “ave fénix” tienen la capacidad de resurgir siempre, entre otras más, hacen de ella un auténtico paraíso y una tierra soñadora y visionaria.

Tampoco se podrían desconocer las situaciones adversas en el marco de la historia trasegada por los latinoamericanos, pues los habitantes de esta perla del continente americano desde aquel 12 de octubre de 1492 –fecha de la llegada de Cristóbal Colón y su tripulación a la Isla *Guanahani*² – hasta

¹ Cf. CELADE (Centro Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Demografía). División de Población de la CEPAL. Revisión 2019 y Naciones Unidas, Departamento de Asuntos Económicos y Sociales, División de Población (2019). World Population Prospects 2019. Recuperado de: [https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/-proyecciones-](https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/-proyecciones-demograficas/estimaciones-proyecciones-poblacion-total-urbana-rural-economicamente-activa)

[demograficas/estimaciones-proyecciones-poblacion-total-urbana-rural-economicamente-activa](https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/-proyecciones-demograficas/estimaciones-proyecciones-poblacion-total-urbana-rural-economicamente-activa) (04-07-20).

² Cf. ANTONIO MARIA MANRIQUE, *Guanahani: investigaciones histórico-geográficas sobre el derrotero de Cristóbal Colón por las Bahamas y costa de Cuba que comprenden la situación exacta de la primera tierra descubierta del Nuevo Mundo*. Arrecife:

nuestros días, han tenido que debatirse entre las paradojas de vida y muerte, riqueza y pobreza, entre la consolidación de su identidad y al mismo tiempo el riesgo de olvidar sus raíces ancestrales y culturales, entre la vivencia de sus valores de libertad, responsabilidad y honestidad y el abatimiento que ha producido la corrupción, el saqueo, la injerencia de gobiernos externos, entre el deseo y la búsqueda de la paz y los conflictos internos ininterrumpidos, entre el trabajo de unidad y la reciedumbre de sus habitantes frente a la división y las dificultades para llegar a acuerdos comunes regionales.

La Iglesia y su protagonismo en América Latina

En este panorama de paradojas y desafíos, la Iglesia no ha sido sólo espectadora, ella se ha comprometido con la realidad y ha impulsado procesos de renovación y de cambio que han motivado a su gente a construir; sobre todo, ha involucrado a las comunidades creyentes en Cristo para ser agentes de transformación en su propio contexto. Precisamente, el Papa Francisco, en su visita al pueblo colombiano, citando al escritor Gabriel García Márquez, ha invitado a sus habitantes a ser arquitectos de una nueva realidad, les motivó a buscar la unidad y la paz, a soñar con una tierra nueva, así lo ha expresado el pontífice:

Señoras y señores, tienen delante de sí una hermosa y noble misión, que es al mismo tiempo una difícil tarea. Resuena en el corazón de cada colombiano el aliento del gran compatriota Gabriel García Márquez: «Sin embargo, frente a la opresión, el saqueo y el abandono, nuestra respuesta es la vida. Ni los diluvios ni las pestes, ni las hambrunas ni los cataclismos, ni siquiera las guerras eternas a través de los siglos y los siglos han conseguido reducir la ventaja tenaz de la vida sobre la muerte. Una ventaja que aumenta

y se acelera». Es posible entonces, continúa el escritor, «una nueva y arrasadora utopía de la vida, donde nadie pueda decidir por otros hasta la forma de morir, donde de veras sea cierto el amor y sea posible la felicidad, y donde las estirpes condenadas a cien años de soledad tengan por fin y para siempre una segunda oportunidad sobre la tierra».³

Esta motivación del Papa Francisco se pudiera también dirigir a todas las naciones que conforman América Latina, porque los pueblos que caminan en este espacio continental tienen una misión por delante, están invitados a continuar su labor de renovación, de defensa de sus territorios, de búsqueda de mejores condiciones de vida, es un pueblo que puede y tiene como lograrlo. De hecho, el Papa Pío XII desde hace 65 años atrás también animaba y alentaba a la Iglesia de Cristo que hace presencia en este continente a comprometerse, a continuar fortaleciendo la tarea misionera con el legado de Jesucristo, en la misiva enviada a los obispos participantes de la primera Conferencia del Episcopado Latinoamericano indicaba:

Para conseguir el cumplimiento de estos votos nuestros es preciso, sin embargo, obrar con prontitud, con generoso valor, con energía; no echando a perder preciosas energías, sino coordinándolas de manera que resulten casi multiplicadas; recurriendo, si es necesario, a nuevas formas y nuevos métodos de apostolado que, aun dentro de la fidelidad a la tradición eclesial, respondan mejor a las necesidades de los tiempos y aprovechen los medios del moderno progreso que, si desgraciadamente a menudo sirven para el mal, pueden también y deben ser en manos de los buenos, instrumento para obrar valientemente por el triunfo de la virtud y la difusión de la verdad.⁴

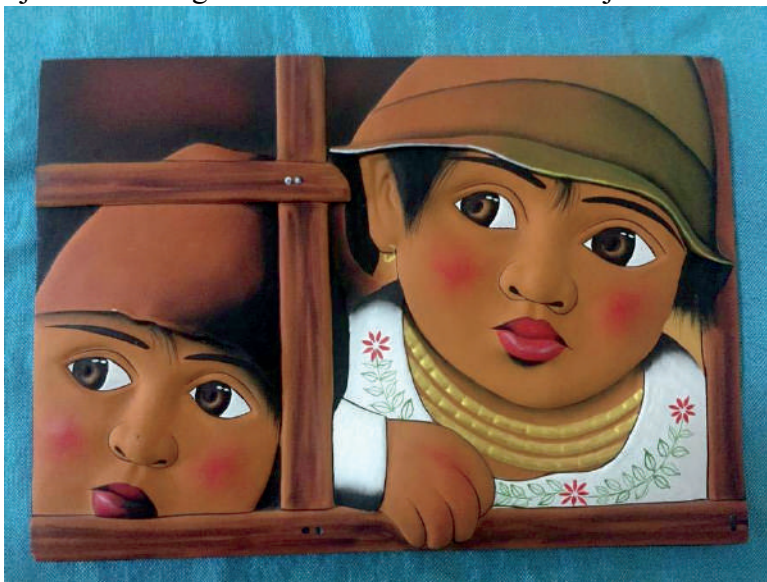
Galindo y C^a. 1890. Recuperado de: [http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/guanahani-investigaciones-historicogeograficas-sobre-el-derrotero-de-cristobal-colon-por-las-bahamas-y-costa-de-cuba-que-comprenden-la-situacion-exacta-de-la-primera-tierra-descubierta-del-nuevo-mundo--0/ \(06-07-20\)](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/guanahani-investigaciones-historicogeograficas-sobre-el-derrotero-de-cristobal-colon-por-las-bahamas-y-costa-de-cuba-que-comprenden-la-situacion-exacta-de-la-primera-tierra-descubierta-del-nuevo-mundo--0/ (06-07-20))

³ FRANCISCO. Discurso durante su visita a Colombia, en su encuentro con el Señor presidente de la República, miembros del gobierno y el cuerpo diplomático, las autoridades y algunos representantes de la sociedad civil. 7 de septiembre de 2017. Bogotá; AAS 109 (2017), pp. 1030-1031.

⁴ PIO XII. Carta Apostólica *Ad Ecclesiam Christi*. 29 de junio de 1955; AAS 47 (1955), p. 541.

Con esta carta enviada por Pío XII a los obispos se daba apertura a la primera Conferencia del Episcopado Latinoamericano, celebrada en Río de Janeiro (Brasil) del 25 de julio al 4 de agosto de 1955.

La Conferencia se ocupó en reflexionar sobre su propia realidad cultural, la escasez de sacerdotes, la invitación a sacerdotes, religiosos y laicos a una mayor acción apostólica, la



preocupación por la justicia y la equidad social, entre otros temas de interés para el continente. Sobre todo, se dio inicio al Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano⁵, el cual será desde ese momento hasta nuestros días no sólo un organismo sino también un camino de comunión eclesial que ha motivado y mantenido viva la experiencia de la evangelización en la Iglesia que camina en los pueblos de América Latina y el Caribe.

Así, pues, se podría indicar este acontecimiento CELAM, vivido en 1955, como una inspiración de Dios que fortaleció a los cristianos-católicos que caminaban en estos pueblos de América y les ayudó a dar el primer paso en la consolidación de una tarea de comunión, reflexión, colaboración y servicio al Evangelio que continúa hasta hoy. Ciertamente, como a Israel (cf. Ex 3, 7-8), también Dios ha mirado con amor y misericordia a su pueblo latinoamericano, ha escuchado el clamor ante sus opresores y conoce muy bien sus alegrías y esperanzas, tristezas y angustias⁶, y Él ha bajado; porque

Dios nunca ha dejado de estar entre su pueblo, mucho antes que se anunciara explícitamente el Evangelio, el Creador ya estaba presente amando, cuidando, fortaleciendo la esperanza de sus hijos latinoamericanos. En

consecuencia, ante el encuentro con Jesucristo, aunque haya sido mediado por factores humanos en ocasiones difícilmente aceptables, este pueblo ha tenido la oportunidad de “ver el rostro de Dios”; así se

ha constatado, aunque los “colonizadores” llegaron con engaño y espada, también Dios envió misioneros, hombres y mujeres de Evangelio, por medio de los cuales Jesucristo se insertó en la vida de los nativos y continuó también con ellos la historia de salvación.

A propósito de esta historia evangelizadora, los habitantes de esta región de América se encontraron con Jesucristo, y el Señor Resucitado comenzó a ser su compañero de camino. En la soledad, en el dolor, en la pobreza, en la impotencia frente a la guerra y el miedo, los cristianos han aprendido a fortalecer su vida con la ayuda de la fe, no desde una actitud pasiva, sino con la experiencia de la esperanza, de la comunión y participación, que con el paso del tiempo ha ido cobrando mayor sentido y valor.

La Conferencia de Medellín, un paso importante en el camino de Renovación

Después de la 1ª Conferencia General del CELAM y del Concilio Vaticano II, viene

⁵ Cf. CELAM. “*Río de Janeiro*”. Las cinco conferencias generales del Episcopado latinoamericano: Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Santo Domingo y Aparecida. Título XI. Bogotá: Celam. 2014, p. 54.

⁶ Cf. CONCILIO VATICANO II. *Constitución Pastoral Gaudium et Spes*. 7 de diciembre de 1965, n. 1; AAS 58 (1966), p. 1025.

otro acontecimiento importante para la Iglesia de América Latina: la celebración de la 2ª Conferencia General del CELAM, llevada a cabo en Medellín (Colombia) del 26 de agosto al 6 de septiembre de 1968. Esta segunda Conferencia fue sin lugar a dudas el mayor impulso no sólo para fortalecer el organismo del CELAM sino para dar también gigantescos pasos de renovación e innovación en la vida de las comunidades cristianas. El objetivo primordial fue precisamente poner en marcha todo el impulso otorgado por el Concilio Vaticano II, finalizado apenas tres años atrás; por eso de común acuerdo, los obispos definieron reflexionar sobre *La Iglesia en la Actual Transformación de América Latina a la luz del Concilio*.⁷ Uno de los aportes más valiosos que se podría resaltar en las intuiciones propuestas por la Conferencia de Medellín es la **opción preferencial por los pobres**, que se identificará explícitamente en la Conferencia de Puebla (1979) y que tendrá una nueva resonancia en Aparecida (2007), pero ya desde Medellín empieza a sentirse una importante preocupación por la realidad de pobreza en que vive el Continente.

La inspiración, entonces, de la Iglesia en América Latina de dar vida al CELAM ha sido de gran utilidad en la marcha y progreso del ímpetu evangelizador, porque este organismo que une a los obispos, primeros responsables de las comunidades cristianas, da también unidad y cohesión a la Iglesia y le abre espacios para profundizar en su razón de ser: convertirse en sal y luz para su continente y desde allí para el mundo entero (cf. Mt 5, 13-16).

En efecto, Los pueblos del sur tienen mucho que aportar al progreso de la humanidad y a la obra evangelizadora de la Iglesia: la belleza de su juventud, la sabiduría y experiencia de sus raíces indígenas, la fuerza de su carácter acrisolado en el sufrimiento, la sólida espiritualidad de quien tiene la fortuna de

contemplar al Creador en el resplandor que proporcionan las obras de sus manos. Constatamos nuevos vientos que soplan desde el sur.

Los procesos de formación, un gran logro de la Iglesia en América Latina⁸

En este contexto latinoamericano, fruto del empuje y el empeño de la gran obra emprendida por la unidad y dinamismo de sus obispos en el CELAM, cinco años después de su fundación, durante la V Asamblea ordinaria llevada a cabo en Buenos Aires en 1960, surge la intuición de crear algunos institutos de pastoral, un centro de estudios socio-religioso y una comisión teológica. Como consecuencia de este oportuno discernimiento nace en 1961 el Instituto Catequístico Latinoamericano (ICLA), pero el gran momento llegaría durante las primeras sesiones del Concilio Vaticano II en que los obispos de Latinoamérica allí presentes, durante sus encuentros semanales, acuerdan poner en marcha el Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano (IPLA), que da los primeros pasos de manera itinerante en 1963 y se continúan fortaleciendo las dinámicas de formación con otros institutos presentes en Colombia, Ecuador y Chile.

Y como un impulso más a esta obra de consolidación pastoral, no dejando de estar presente el sueño de unidad que es el sello característico de los discípulos de Cristo, durante la XIV Asamblea Ordinaria del CELAM celebrada en Sucre (Bolivia), en noviembre de 1972, se decide concentrar los diversos institutos en uno solo destinado a la formación de agentes de pastoral de todo el continente. Así, después de un año de estructuración y programación, el 4 de marzo de 1974 se da comienzo a las labores del nuevo instituto con sede en Medellín (Colombia), iniciando con la participación de más de un centenar de estudiantes

⁷ Cf. CELAM. “Medellín”. Las cinco conferencias generales del Episcopado latinoamericano: Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Santo Domingo y Aparecida. Bogotá: Celam. 2014, pp. 59-209.

⁸ Cf. GUILLERMO MELGUIZO YEPES. *Las Bodas de*

Rubí del ITEPAL. Los primeros cuarenta años del Instituto Teológico Pastoral del CELAM (ITEPAL). En: REVISTA MEDELLÍN. ISSN 0121 – 4977, vol. XL, No. 157. Bogotá: CEBITEPAL. Enero – Marzo (2014), pp. 9-42.

provenientes de 18 países. Se estaban cumpliendo entonces las palabras proféticas de Pio XII, anteriormente mencionadas:

*[...] es preciso obrar con prontitud, con generoso valor, con energía; no echando a perder preciosas energías, sino coordinándolas de manera que resulten casi multiplicadas; recurriendo, si es necesario a nuevas formas y nuevos métodos de apostolado [...].*⁹

Entonces, con este nuevo ardor misionero puesto por obra, se empezó a consolidar el nuevo instituto de formación del CELAM fundamentado en dos significativos acontecimientos históricos en la vida de la Iglesia universal y continental: el Concilio Vaticano II (1965) y la II Conferencia General de Medellín (1968); suficientes inspiraciones para indicar la ruta a seguir, que estaría motivada precisamente por la mirada sobre la realidad del pueblo de América Latina, como ya lo había insistido y puesto en marcha la Conferencia de Medellín, por una sólida reflexión teológica a la luz de la Palabra de Dios animada evidentemente por el Concilio Vaticano II y con un claro empeño en el anuncio del Evangelio en las realidades culturales y antropológicas propias del pueblo latinoamericano.

Más adelante, en 1978, como una realidad en camino, en marcha, el instituto formula un nuevo nombre que indicaría su interés en adecuarse a las posibilidades de mejoramiento y sucesivas comprensiones a que diera lugar, como es normal de toda obra que se construye constantemente, que está en movimiento, deja de llamarse IPLA (Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano) y asume un nuevo nombre que fortalece su identidad: ITEPAL (Instituto Teológico Pastoral para América Latina) que, como indica Mons. Guillermo Melguizo, no es un pleonismo “sino una feliz conjunción entre la ortodoxia y la ortopraxis”.¹⁰

Buscando mantenerse en constante evolución y transformación, en el año 1989 el ITEPAL traslada su sede central a Bogotá, desde donde continuará iluminando pastoral y teológicamente a la comunidad de discípulos

que, deseando ahondar en la Buena Nueva de Jesucristo, iban llegando a su sede provenientes de diversos países de Latinoamérica. Comenzaba una nueva fase global para recibir estudiantes que animados por esta metodología contextual venían procedentes de otros lugares de América, de África y más adelante participarían de Europa y Asia.¹¹ Se concibe así otro logro importante de este instituto de formación posicionándose como ejemplo de comunión y participación continental, así lo considera Mons. Melguizo, citando al P. Agenor Brighenti:

*El potencial de esta Institución es enorme. Se trata ya del único Instituto de formación de agentes de pastoral mantenido por un Consejo de obispos a escala continental permitiendo fortalecer una acción eclesial a partir de objetivos y criterios comunes. Es una especie de laboratorio de nuevas respuestas pastorales a los desafíos presentados en el continente y lugar de comunión eclesial que contribuye significativamente a la integración latinoamericana.*¹²

El ITEPAL no ha dejado de estar a la vanguardia, atento a la producción, desarrollo y evolución de la sociedad y de la Iglesia en su conjunto. Desde su creación ha estado abierto a los cambios, a todos los procesos que ayudan en el mejoramiento de su calidad formativa y sobre todo evangelizadora; como han sido la adecuación de nuevos cursos, temáticas, trabajos de investigación, producción bibliográfica, la REVISTA MEDELLÍN como uno de sus grandes logros y valores, entre otros.

Un paso importante de *aggiornamento* en la tarea formativa

Otro gran paso en este constante camino de *aggiornamento* se da al otorgarle por segunda vuelta un nuevo nombre al instituto y con él una misión más amplia, que contribuye al fortalecimiento de la unidad en la diversidad. La XXXIII Asamblea ordinaria del CELAM, celebrada en Montevideo en mayo de 2011 pide la unificación de todos los centros de formación, y es así como el ITEPAL junto con

⁹ PIO XII. *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰ GUILLERMO MELGUIZO YEPES. *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, Yepes, pp. 31-36.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

los demás centros propios del CELAM pasan a conformarse en una nueva realidad con un nuevo nombre: CEBITEPAL (Centro Bíblico – Teológico – Pastoral para América Latina y el Caribe), que continúa siendo el Centro de formación del CELAM con una amplia visión; ayuda a profundizar en los rasgos propios de la teología y la metodología latinoamericana, centra sus procesos de formación en la Palabra de Dios, pone en práctica la exégesis vinculada a la hermenéutica, propicia el diálogo entre teología y pastoral a la luz del Magisterio latinoamericano, se identifica con la teología del Reino de Dios y del Pueblo de Dios a partir de la opción por una Iglesia pobre y para los pobres, fortalece la espiritualidad y pedagogía propias del discipulado misionero y de la comunión misionera, se compromete con la dimensión social del Evangelio que interpela y transforma la realidad.¹³

Este camino que ha recorrido la Iglesia en América Latina ha sido de estímulo y ejemplo para todas las comunidades eclesiales del continente; como ya se ha mencionado, estamos frente a un significativo proceso eclesial en “contexto” que viene estimulado por las regiones del sur. En efecto, Asia, África y América Latina han avanzado significativamente en este camino formativo, sobre todo en el que se recoge y se aprecia la identidad propia de los pueblos, sus culturas, sus diversas maneras de pensar y de producir conocimiento, como ha indicado el P. Paul Steffen:

*Fifty years later, the pastoral institutes have developed a new role, in the local churches they are serving, in building up a participatory church of the people of God in the process of being evangelized, and becoming, as a Christian community, a witness of the Good News to all members of human society. In this context, they are called to contribute to the Church's mission of new evangelization.*¹⁴

¹³ Cf. CEBITEPAL. *Quiénes somos – Nuestro Ser y quehacer*. Recuperado de: <http://www.celam.org/-cebitepal/nuestro-ser.php> (04-07-20).

¹⁴ PAUL BENEDIKT STEFFEN. *The contribution of pastoral institutes for an inculturated and contextualized ministry*. In:

Asia Pacific Mission Studies. ISSN 2704-3339.

Este Nuevo rol de los institutos pastorales tendrá la tarea de poner a la Iglesia en estado de “salida”, de no acomodarse a las estructuras cerradas que impiden el aire fresco del Espíritu Santo, sino abrir nuevos espacios, proponer caminos que tengan en cuenta la vida de los pueblos. En este sentido, el teólogo peruano Gustavo Gutiérrez, reconociendo el avance teológico de América Latina, también indica:

*Se ha operado, en primer lugar, un fecundo redescubrimiento de la caridad como centro de la vida cristiana. Esto ha llevado a ver la fe, más bíblicamente, como un acto de confianza, de salida de uno mismo, como un compromiso con Dios y con el prójimo, como una relación con los demás. Es en ese sentido que San Pablo nos dirá que la fe opera por la caridad: el amor es el sustento y la plenitud de la fe, de la entrega al otro e, inseparablemente, a los otros. Ese es el fundamento de la praxis del cristiano, de su presencia activa en la historia. Para la Biblia la fe es la respuesta total del hombre a Dios que salva por amor. En esta perspectiva, la inteligencia de la fe aparece como la inteligencia no de la simple afirmación –y casi recitación– de verdades, sino de un compromiso, de una actitud global, de una postura ante la vida.*¹⁵

En efecto, los nuevos procesos formativos, como lo ha mencionado Mons. Melguizo, están invitados a proyectarse en “contexto”, a conjugar la ortodoxia y la ortopraxis;¹⁶ esto es, de acuerdo a la anterior citación de Gustavo Gutiérrez, una inteligencia de la fe que se presenta no sólo “desde la recitación de verdades” sino desde la lectura atenta de la experiencia de Dios encarnado en la historia. En consecuencia, la obra del Señor Resucitado no se detiene en la experiencia de un «esplendor celeste ultramundano en la eternidad, sino en la luz de una aurora que anticipa su futuro escatológico para el mundo»¹⁷; es decir, la experiencia de pascua no se confunde con observar a Jesucristo

Volume 2, Number 2, 2020, p. 42.

¹⁵ GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ. *Teología de la liberación. Perspectivas*. Séptima edición. Salamanca: Sígueme. 1975, p. 27.

¹⁶ GUILLERMO MELGUIZO YEPES. *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁷ Cf. JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN. *Teología della speranza. Nona edizione*. Brescia: queriniana. 2017, pp. 83-84.

como un ser “extraño”, fuera del mundo; al contrario, de acuerdo a la reflexión propuesta por Jürgen Moltmann, Él es el que “viene”. Los discípulos no observan al Maestro Resucitado como el que vive en la eternidad donde no existe el tiempo sino como “aquel que vendrá a Reinar”, Él es el que “vive”, Él está en movimiento, Jesucristo Resucitado camina con los discípulos en dirección a la meta. Como indica Karl Barth, citado por Jürgen Moltmann: «Él se encuentra aquí evidentemente en movimiento; es decir, en el camino divino-humano [...] como aquel que revela su obra Él mismo aún no ha alcanzado su meta, pero se mueve en dirección a ella: desde el inicio, en la revelación de su vida, Jesucristo se mueve en dirección a la meta aún no cumplida que es la manifestación de su vida a todos los hombres y a toda la creación y la compenetración de su existencia con la de ellos, abriendo espacio a una nueva creación sobre una nueva tierra y bajo un nuevo cielo». ¹⁸ En este contexto, el futuro de Jesucristo es la revelación y manifestación pública de aquel que ha venido. ¹⁹

Así, pues, la revelación no puede referirse a un proceso que ya ha concluido en sí, sino como un camino abierto que indica y conduce hacia delante, que está en marcha. Y, en este sentido, los discípulos del Resucitado continúan la obra de la promesa, ellos son testigos de la promesa, de la revelación de Dios, sin ser dueños o poseedores absolutos de la revelación sí tienen la tarea de dar testimonio de la obra de Dios sobre los hombres.

Esta senda de profundización teológica también ha iniciado desde hace 50 años atrás por la Iglesia que camina en América Latina, y se propone ciertamente, ahora, para la Iglesia universal. De hecho, el Papa Francisco, venido de los pueblos latinoamericanos, lleno de esta experiencia de estudio y de vida eclesial, entiende que poner en marcha los procesos de formación

“contextualizados” no nos aleja de la revelación; al contrario, nos acerca mucho más al “proyecto Jesucristo”. Por eso el mismo pontífice, en su primera exhortación apostólica, ha invitado a “avanzar en una saludable descentralización” ²⁰ y, al mismo tiempo, ha invitado a soñar con nuevas opciones, con nuevos caminos de transformación, acordes a las necesidades del mundo actual. En definitiva, junto al Papa, Obispo de Roma y signo de unidad eclesial, las comunidades cristianas de todos los continentes están siendo motivadas a procurar nuevos dinamismos misioneros que tengan como marca original una actitud de “salida”. ²¹

A manera de Conclusión: América Latina, un pueblo lleno de esperanza

La esperanza es el mayor signo del compromiso cristiano. América Latina, como ya se ha indicado inicialmente, es un pueblo que tiene arraigada esta virtud en todas sus culturas. Nunca se rinde, nunca pierde la alegría ni la fuerza. La gente latinoamericana, como el patriarca Abrahán, sabe “esperar contra toda esperanza” (cf. Rom 4, 18). Y, mucho más, los cristianos leen la vida desde la perspectiva del Evangelio y proyectan el futuro con la certeza que Jesús, en medio de las vicisitudes del camino, es el siempre presente. A este respecto, El Papa Francisco, en su primera encíclica, al hablar de la esperanza indica:

[...] la esperanza nos proyecta hacia un futuro cierto, que se sitúa en una perspectiva diversa de las propuestas ilusorias de los ídolos del mundo, pero que da un impulso y una fuerza nueva para vivir cada día. No nos dejemos robar la esperanza, no permitamos que la banalicen con soluciones y propuestas inmediatas que obstruyen el camino, que «fragmentan» el tiempo, transformándolo en espacio. El tiempo es siempre superior al espacio. El espacio cristaliza los procesos; el tiempo, en cambio, proyecta hacia el futuro e impulsa a caminar con esperanza. ²²

[traducido del Alemán por Aldo Comba].

¹⁸ KARL BARTH, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. IV/3, p. 377.

Citado por: JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN, *Op. Cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁹ Cf. JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN, *Op. Cit.*, p. 85.

²⁰ FRANCISCO, *Exhortación Apostólica Evangelii Gaudium*. 24 de noviembre de 2013, n. 16; AAS 105 (2013), p. 1027.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, n. 27; AAS 105 (2013), p. 1031.

²² ID. *Carta encíclica Lumen Fidei*. 29 de junio de

En definitiva, Ha sido un sendero de más de 50 años que aún está en sus inicios; los procesos de formación, la vida de las parroquias, el sendero de las pequeñas comunidades cristianas, la lectura en contexto de la teología, la renovación de la catequesis, la profundización en la Palabra de Dios que alimenta la vida cristiana, la reforma litúrgica, la puesta en marcha de la eco-espiritualidad, etc., toda la obra evangelizadora de la Iglesia latinoamericana está en camino, se está trabajando y se está avanzando.

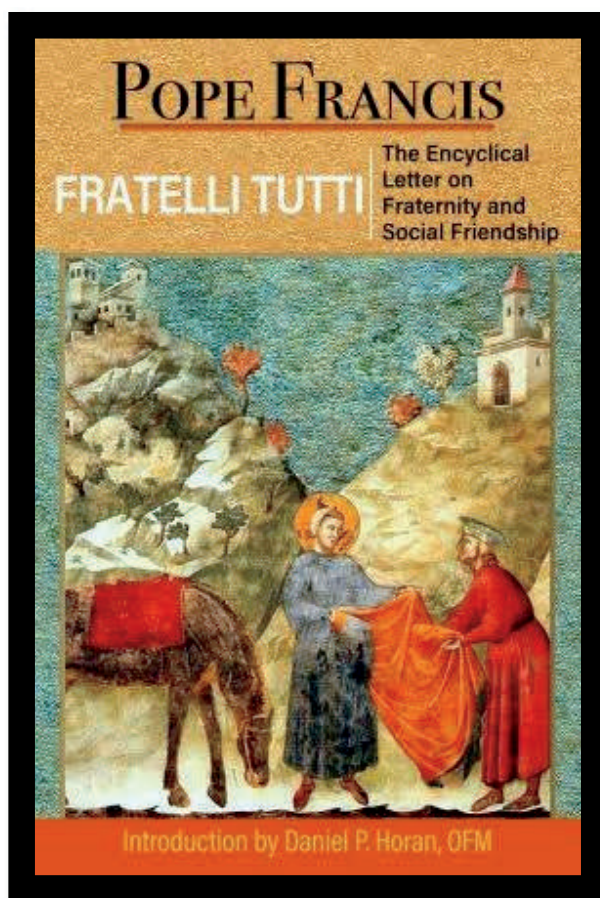
Dos mil años caminando, siguiendo las huellas del Maestro, intentado ser “sal de la tierra y luz del mundo” (cf. Mt 5, 13-16), es el trayecto que durante veinte siglos han recorrido las comunidades cristianas compartiendo las realidades y acontecimientos de los hombres y mujeres de cada tiempo, sus alegrías y esperanzas, tristezas y angustias, nada ha sido ajeno para los cristianos.²³ Esta historia, fundada en el “acontecimiento Jesucristo”²⁴, en el hecho promisorio de la Resurrección de Cristo Crucificado, es una historia de esperanza, es un camino humano y divino que manifiesta la intervención de Dios en el espacio humano: «Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν...» (Jn 1, 14a), la Palabra de Dios se ha hecho carne y ha venido a habitar en medio de nosotros.

Por eso, no perdamos la esperanza. Hay grandes sueños para América Latina y para la Iglesia universal. Hay una grande tarea por delante: la encarnación. El Papa Francisco continúa animándonos así:

*Todo lo que la Iglesia ofrece debe encarnarse de modo original en cada lugar del mundo, de manera que la Esposa de Cristo adquiera multiformes rostros que manifiesten mejor la inagotable riqueza de la gracia. La predicación debe encarnarse, la espiritualidad debe encarnarse, las estructuras de la Iglesia deben encarnarse.*²⁵

América Latina, una Iglesia en marcha, es una Iglesia que continúa encarnando el Evangelio, continúa soñando por hacer realidad el derecho de los más pobres, de los pueblos originarios, de los últimos, donde su voz sea escuchada y su dignidad promovida, es una familia que insiste en la búsqueda y preservación de la identidad cultural, es el “pueblo de Dios” que custodia la creación y busca dar testimonio de unidad en la diversidad, promueve la formación de las pequeñas comunidades cristinas, profundiza la fe y llama a todos para que juntos construyan la paz tan anhelada. América Latina es casa de esperanza.²⁶

(An English translation of this article
can be found on Sedos Website)



Gift from ORBIS BOOKS

2013, n. 57; AAS 105 (2013), p. 594-595.

²³ Cf. CONCILIO VATICANO II. *Op. Cit.*

²⁴ Cf. JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN. *Op. Cit.*, p. 288.

²⁵ FRANCISCO. *Exhortación Apostólica Querida Amazonia*. 2 de febrero de 2020, n. 6. Recuperado de:

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html (04-07-20).

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, n. 7.

Fratelli Tutti*, an Encyclical that Unfolds the Kingdom Prayer *The Our Father

By now the Catholics and the world at large have heard about the Encyclical of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* and many, in fact, have already reacted to it, most with enthusiasm while a few also with reservation. In this paper I wish to show how the Encyclical is unique in so far as it spells out a summary of the Gospel values, as contained in the prayer that the Lord taught, the Our Father. In this sense the Encyclical is revolutionary as the values upheld in the letter are ever relevant for the contemporary times.

The Spirit of *Fratelli Tutti*

Since the Council of Nicea (325 CE), there have been a growing preoccupation in Catholic teaching with doctrines and dogmatic expressions, with exceptions, though. However, the core of *Fratelli Tutti* (FT) is the biblical command of loving God and the neighbour, including the nature (Lk 10:25-28; Dt 6:4-5; Lev 19:18).

Inspired by the words and spirit of Saint Francis that involves a love that transcends any imaginable barrier between humans, Pope Francis dedicated his Encyclical to fraternity and social friendship (FT 2). For St Francis the motto, *Fratelli Tutti*, imbedded peace, and the driving force for accompanying the poor, the abandoned, the sick and the outcast, all those at the margins, irrespective of any imaginable borders (FT 2), that is ever vital to church's service towards the contemporary world.

The Pope cites the example of the Saint visiting the Sultan Malik-el-Kamil of Egypt, despite the barriers of geographical distance, race, religion or the perils of the prevailing crusade. This, in turn, holds out the Christian ideal of *Fratelli Tutti*, emphasizes the Pope (n

3). It is the expression of the all-inclusive love without renouncing his own Christian identity. St Francis relativised doctrines and dogmatic disputes to the spread of the love of God (1Jn 4:16). That is the essence of a fraternal society, based on the Fatherhood/Motherhood of God. Saint Francis' words, "only the man who approaches others, not to draw them into his own life, but to help them become ever more fully themselves, can truly be called a father" (FT 4), the Pope reminds, calls for the love of God and the neighbour. When religious conflicts and political wars raged, Francis was free of any agenda of wielding control and power over others, the common temptations. This vision of human fraternity and social friendship is another name for the divine household of God, in Christian terminology.¹ As the Pope underlines, this has been his primary concern in his teachings and apostolic endeavours, emphasising the different aspects, such as human dignity, human rights, justice to creation, interreligious harmony, peace and solidarity, motivated by the conviction, "God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called to live together as brothers and sisters" (n 5).

The driving force of the Encyclical is the universal scope of the ideal of fraternal love with its openness to every human person without any exception, more so in the prevailing culture of "ignoring and eliminating others" that can be overcome only by the Kingdom-vision of fraternity and social friendship, through a dialogue among all people of good will (n 6). The Pope illustrates the prevailing pandemic of Covid19, as an instance of the need for all

¹ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the*

Lord's Prayer (New York, NY: Harper One, 2010).

humans to work together with the ideal of fraternity and social friendship (n 7). What is unnegotiable is the dignity of every human person, with the implied social friendship, for, all belong to a “single human family, as fellow travellers, sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.” (n 8)

The kingdom-vision of fraternity and social friendship cannot tolerate any myopic or aggressive nationalism or extremism, resentful of others (n 11). Against such narrow outlook each generation should have recourse to the path of goodness, love, justice and solidarity. The Encyclical is not just a goody spiritual talk, but discusses the utter disregard for the common good by the promoters of individual interests, in the name of global market where the powerful promoters of corporate interest, diminishing the ‘identity of the weaker and poorer regions, making them more vulnerable and dependant (n 12).

Amid such conflicting interests where the powerful seek nothing but the elimination of any opposition, FT asks how to recognize our ‘neighbour’ fallen on the wayside of development, where the distance between humans are ever on the increase on an alarming proportion (n 16). Human persons are no more seen as of paramount value to be cared for or respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, who are not yet useful (the unborn), or no longer needed – like the elderly (n 18).

“When the dignity of the human person is respected, and his or her rights recognized and guaranteed, creativity and interdependence thrive (n 22). In the contemporary societies one comes across “numerous contradictions that lead us to wonder if the equal dignity of all human beings, solemnly proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948, is truly recognized, respected, protected and promoted in every situation” (n 22).

The Pontiff continues to discuss the inequality meted out to different human groups such as women, guest workers, children and others. He laments the fact that in today’s world a sense of belong to a single human family, the core of the biblical message and the fulcrum of Jesus’ ministry, is fading and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia (n 30). What we experience is a ‘comfortable and globalized indifference,’ forgetting the reality that all are in the same boat! The Encyclical refers specifically to the absence of the respect for human dignity on the borders, created by political regimes, as well as certain liberal economic approaches, preventing free movement of migrants (n 37).

It is imperative that our age, with its unparalleled developments in awareness and rapid physical moveability, develops the ability to sit down and listen to others transcending narcissist tendencies and caring and welcoming others. “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9) is a question that resounds not only all through the Bible but also at every avenue of human encounters.

Biblical Outlook

The very divine revelation in the Old Testament begins with the Hebrew experience of God’s concern for their state of slavery and misery: “I have seen their affliction and I have heard their cry,” is God’s message to Moses (Exo 3:7). God wants to lead them to a land “flowing with milk and honey” (3:8), which is to say God wants them to live in well-being, and dignity, without being discriminated, along with a special service to the nations.

Even if ethnocentric attitudes are not absent in the Bible, more so at the initial stages, the defining Philosophy of the Bible is universalism. Already in the book of Genesis we see how Abraham is called to be a blessing to the nations (12:3). The former slaves in Egypt, the Hebrews, are reminded by God that they are liberated and going to be made a chosen people through the impending covenant so that they shall be to God “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6), that is, they will be a kingly, priestly

and a holy nation at the service of God to all nations. This verse is almost verbatim repeated by St. Peter reminding the new community, the followers of Jesus Christ, that they “are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” that they may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness into his marvellous light (1Pt 2:9). Prophet Isaiah expresses this call in a nutshell: “you shall be a light to the nations” (42:6; 49:6). Later in the New Testament, Jesus will prescribe this role as the defining mission of the new community: “you are the light of the world” (Mt 5:14). This, the Lord spells out further through the images of salt and leaven.

The foundation of this service role is the love command of loving God “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt 6:4), as well as the counterpart of it, “you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lev 19:18). In the New Testament Jesus declares them as the sum of the Jewish/Christian life (Lk 10:27-28; Mt 22:37-38; Mk 12:29-31). The love command is not restricted to fellow citizens, but extends to all as we see in Tobit’s advice to his son: “And what you hate, do not do to anyone. ... Give of your bread to the hungry, and of your clothing to the naked. Give all your surplus to charity... (Tob 4:15ff.).

Obviously, this love command in the Bible, permeates the socio-economic life as well. One is not to wrong a stranger or oppress him/her (Ex 22:21). When the Israelites crossed over to Canaan under Joshua, all have their portion of land (Cf. Josh 13-19). The situation is ideally portrayed under Solomon’s reign, “every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (1King 4:25). Deuteronomy prescribes that there should be no poor among them (15:4). The Jubilee year prescribed liberty to all the inhabitants of the land (Lev 25:10). If one had sold one’s land or if one made oneself a slave, the land is to be returned to the original owner and the slave set at liberty in the Jubilee year (Lev 25:13ff). There has to be a concern for the poor and the

sojourners (Lev 19:10) for the land belongs to Yahweh (Lev 25:23). Jubilee year is an acceptable year of the Lord (Is 61:2) when all can live in peace and equity (Lev 25:10).

However, in the course of time the ideal situation become corrupt due to human selfishness, and all the prophets condemn the exploitation of the poor. Prophet Amos was shocked by the ever-growing inequality between the rich and poor ((5:21-24). Amos is a typical example of the prophetic indignation at the social disparity and exclusion. Under the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746) the Northern Kingdom, Israel reached its material power and prosperity, at the expense of the poor. There was no justice in the land (3:10), the poor were afflicted, exploited, even sold into slavery (2:6-8; 5:11). They have rejected the Torah of the Lord, and have not kept his Statues (2:4). They have deserted the divine plan for bringing them out of Egypt. Judges were corrupt (5:12). It is in this background that Amos appears on the scene (6:1-7). Israel is not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore, they shall now be the first of those to go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves shall pass away (6:7).

Isaiah protests to the daughters of Zion: “It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people by grinding the face of the poor?” (3:14-15). Isaiah warned both Israel and Judah that their failure to follow God’s commands would result in woe, the impending exile (Is 28:1-29; 29:1-14; Cf. also Jer 4:7, 16 et al).

The primary concern of the prophetic experience is not an anxiety about the right worship to God, but how God’s people are treated (Amos 9:14-15). They constantly chastise Israel for moving away from the vocation of love and compassion (Amos 2:5; Jer 26:18; Micah 3:12, et al). The pages of the prophetic writings are filled with the divine love and, equally, the divine disappointment. This divine pathos² is the core of the prophetic institution and only in the light this

² Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York, NY:

Harper Perennial, Modern Classics, 2001), 29.

divine pathos, along with the biblical covenant theology, can we understand the spirit of FT!

Even as the first Isaiah predicted exile as the punishment for the prevailing injustice, the deuterio Isaiah consoles the people in exile assuring they are God's chosen people, and saying "fear not I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God" (41:10). Isaiah refers to the Persian emperor Cyrus as the messiah (anointed one) whom God has chosen as the instrument to let the people return to their land (45:1: ff.).

Eventually, the Trito Isaiah speaks of God's anointed who will bring the good news to the poor, bind up the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, set free those in prison, and thus, "proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (the Jubilee year)" (61:1-2). It is this prophecy that Jesus makes as his 'manifesto,' in the Lukan gospel (4:18-21), and qualified as the Kingdom of God in Mark (1:14), Mathew (4:23) and in John, indirectly though, qualifying the Kingdom as doing the deeds of light (3:21). Interestingly, John insists on the place of Jesus' baptism, as "Bethany beyond the Jordan" (close to Jericho), where Joshua and the people crossed the Jordan to enter the promised land (Jos 3:16). Jesus's ministry of ushering in the acceptable year of the Lord, begins with his baptism in the Jordan, at the same place where Joshua and the Israelites crossed over to the land "flowing with milk and honey."

Without going into an exhaustive analysis of the ministry of Jesus to show how it was the spelling out of the acceptable year of the Lord, the paper intends to show that the prayer that Jesus taught, the Our Father, is an unfolding of the Kingdom reality.

The Our Father

The Our Father is the basic Christian prayer and it contains in a nutshell the Christian spirituality as well as the Christian world-view. It distils the essentials of Christian faith that must orient the life of every Christian, as

it uncovers God's will for a Christian. It is the gist of the biblical revelation, showing at the same time how it is not a mere verbal recital, but the framework of life and action, the model of Jesus' own ministry, with its primary concern for justice and compassion. In this sense, the Our Father can be qualified as the Christian Manifesto.

Already it has been shown how the Reign of God, the Kingdom, that Jesus inaugurated had certain sociological character right from the beginning. Jesus *created* (epoiesen) (Mk 3:14) a new community at the beginning of his ministry, to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim and to cast out demons (Mk 3:14-15). This is more specifically spelt out in Lk 4:18-19, "to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" and thus "to preach the good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). In fact, Luke defines this as the identifying mark of the Messiah as he narrates Jesus' response to the question of John the Baptist, if he were indeed the Messiah (Lk 7:22), and again from Jesus' response to Herod who wanted to kill him: "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course'" (13:32). The Our Father outlines this kingdom life-style, even as the encyclical FT, the leading themes of which are the spelling out of the concerns of the Our Father.

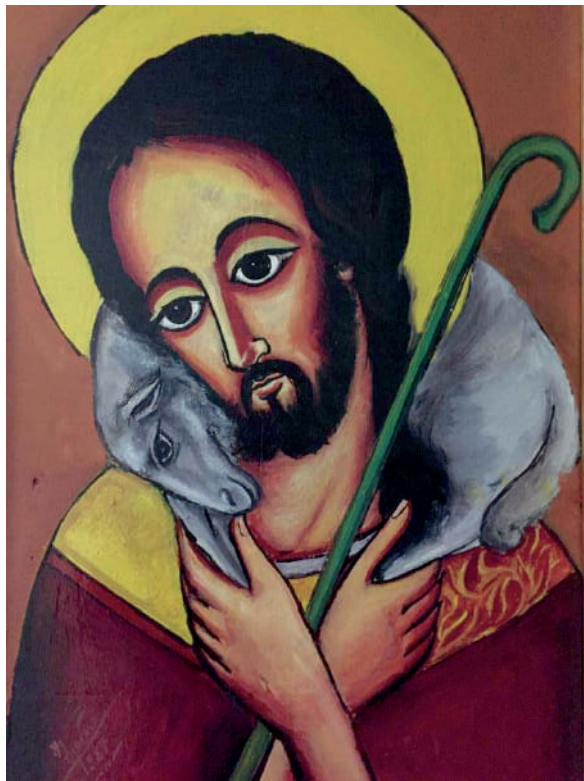
Our Father (Abba ho Pater)

Abba, the Father: The very address of God, reminds us that God is the Father of all, and not the monopoly of any particular religion. God taught prophet Jonah how every nation and every human person is dear to God (Jonah 4:9-11). As such, God is accessible to all who come to God. The intimacy and universality of God is the characteristic ring as one recites the prayer. St. Cyprian, already in the third century Christian era, had taught how the Our Father is a prayer for humanity and not just for the church or the individual.³

³ St. Cyprian, *The Lord's Prayer*, (translated and

edited Roy J. Defarai, *The Fathers of the Church* 36,

By addressing God as “Our Father,” the prayer indicates how God is a sort of Householder of all creation and of humanity, Protector, Saviour, Redeemer and Liberator of humans.⁴ As in the Old Testament, the Our Father inhibits God’s concern for the poor and all those who suffer from injustice in any form, that destroys the integrity of the divine household. This, in turn, is the focus of the Encyclical as well. To remove the resources meant for the parents, brothers and sisters, neighbours in the widest sense, under whatever pretext, is going against the wish of God, the Householder. It is idol worship.



Based on the biblical tradition, Dominic Crossan argues, “to call God “Father in Heaven” is to call God “Householder of Earth.”⁵ The Father as householder of the home is the model, metaphor, and microcosm for God as Householder of the world. At the same time, it is, from the biblical perspective, the affirmation that the inequality that destroys the integrity of the household dishonours the Householder.

‘Our Father in heaven’ has two parts. The first focuses on the divinity of God, on the one hand, and the latter half at the same time on our humanity. In the first part of the prayer the pronoun ‘your’ predominates, while in the second part the pronoun ‘our’ predominates. The divinity concerns about “your Name, your Kingdom and your Will.” The latter, humanity, has the focus on daily bread, forgiveness of debts and the need of not being led into temptation as well as the rescue from the evil one.

Hallowed be your name

Biblically, holiness is the retrieval of the *in illo tempore*, the original time when all things came from God. It refers to the creation story, when all the world was distributed fairly and equitably by God (Gen 1:1-2:4a), reflected in the sabbath year regulation in Lev 25:2b-7 and again in the Jubilee mandate in Lev 25:8-55, ensuring justice, a fair distribution for all, “the justice of an equitable household.”⁶

In Greek jubilee is translated as forgiveness, i.e., debt release, remission, freedom, liberty. Jubilee is the time to re-establish the original equality and fraternity with fair and equitable distribution of the resources. It is retrieving the divine concern for distributive justice and restorative righteousness and thus human holiness becomes a participation in the divine character.

Thy Kingdom Come

Biblically, we come across the first promise of the kingdom in 2 Sam 7:12-14. Though the text speaks directly about Solomon, it has a tinge of the Messianic Kingdom in so far as it refers to an everlasting Kingdom. In fact, the letter to the Hebrews 1:5 takes the text as referring to the Messiah Son.

Daniel in the mid second century BCE, speaks of the Kingdom of God that would stand forever (2:44). The Kingdom is mentioned three times in Daniel chapter 7. Both the Hebrew word *malkuth* and the Aramaic *malkutha*, emphasize the process of reigning

New York, NY: The Fathers of the Church Inc.1958), 132.

⁴ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 42.

⁵ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 41.

⁶ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 69.

rather than the territory, even as the Greek equivalent *basileia* underlines not so much where God rules as how God rules the world. “It dreams of an earth when the world would be, if the biblical God actually sat on the imperial throne and ruled below,” comments Dominic Crossan.⁷ That is what is inaugurated by Jesus at the Nazareth Synagogue (Mk 1:14-15; Lk 4:19; Mt 4:23). But what did Jesus mean as to its content, mode and the method of its coming?

On one occasion Jesus warned: “Unless your holiness (justice) surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of God” (Mt 5:20). They taught dogmas that were human precepts but their hearts were far from God (Mk 7:6-7). Jesus used the example how the Pharisees misused the *Korban* for their own advantage, in violation of God’s concern about sharing resources with those in need. They created a religion based on their own norms, chastising those who did not follow them as irreligious (Mk 2:23ff). They set aside God’s commandment in the interest of keeping their own traditions (Mk 7:9). As a result, injustice has become sanctioned as a religious act. In no way can God identify with them because all his commands are just (Ps 119:172; Cf Is 10:1-4). In the Bible God’s commands consistently identify with the implementation of justice among people. It is identifying with God’s creative purpose in history. It is the affirmation human rights and equal access to the resources of the earth. That is what Jesus inaugurated at the Nazareth Synagogue (Lk 4:19). That is what Jesus asks us to pray for and the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* is a visualization of it for the contemporary times.

Your will be done on Earth as in Heaven

God’s will is inseparable from his plan for the world. Hence, the immediate addition, on earth as it is in heaven. Dominic Crossan has pointed out how God’s name and God’s kingdom come to a climax in “will.”⁸ God’s name is God’s honour for justice and

righteousness. That is established by the advent of God’s Kingdom. That advent was the will of God. This has to be repeated on earth and this is the subject matter of the next three triads of the Prayer, bread, debt and temptation.

Give us our Daily Bread

Jesus’ ministry had something to do with eating and drinking. No wonder, he was mocked at as ‘a glutton and a drunkard’ (Lk 7:33-34), apart from the various bread-multiplication stories to feed the hungry. In fact, he characterized the ‘eschaton’ as a marriage feast (Mt 22:2). When the disciples ‘prudently’ ask the Master to send the crowd away so that they could go and buy food for themselves, Jesus rebukingly asks them that they give the people something to eat (Mk 6:37), emphasizing their responsibility in feeding the people as well. What is to be underlined is the role of the disciples all through the feeding miracles, suggesting their intimate association with the feeding.

The transformation of the earth involves also a fair distribution of bread so that all have something to eat. A perceptive reader cannot fail to notice the parameters between the multiplication story (Mk 6:41) and the Eucharistic scene (Mk 14:22), took-blessed-broke-gave, implying the mission of feeding, even in the central liturgical act of the church. Equitable distribution of food for all is integral to the Kingdom.

It is common knowledge how the world produces enough food to reach to all humans, if it were distributed according to the Divine Justice, “when food is seen as God’s consecrated gift.”⁹ The petition, give us our daily bread, has to be seen from the divine justice. Sharing of the same bread and of the same cup in the Last Supper is already present in the Lord’s prayer.

Commenting on the phrase, “our daily bread,” basing himself on the Greek expression of it, Dominic Crossan argues that the meaning is: “enough for today, but also with the assurance

⁷ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 78.

⁸ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 115.

⁹ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 130.

of the same for tomorrow. It is a request that our daily bread be never again exceptional or conditional as in the past, but always normal and unconditional in the present and the future.”¹⁰

Though the Pope does not directly refer to the equitable distribution of food in FT, it is included in the themes of the issues of hunger as well the dignity of all especially those at the margins (Cf FT 61).

Forgive us our debts: It has already been noted how the Leviticus prescribed Jubilee was the occasion when debts were remitted so that all could live in peace and equity. In fact, all through the covenantal theology of the Bible there is the spirit of debt forgiveness and freedom from slavery even by outsiders like Cyrus (Is 45:1; Ezra 1:1ff). In the context of the cry of the poor, after return from the Babylonian exile, Nehemiah’s decree is instructive: “I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us leave off this interest. Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the hundredth of money, grain, wine, and oil which you have been exacting of them” (Neh 5:10-11). The reason for the debt release is the very character of God who brought Israel out of the forced labour (Ex 20:22-23:33; Dt 15:13-14; Jer 34:13-14).

The petition for the forgiveness of debt is only a spelling out of the biblical justice, distributive and restorative righteousness of the biblical God. It is the very character of the divine Householder. “But for God to forgive us our literal debts, we must owe God literal debts, so what are these literal debts?” asks Crossan.¹¹ According to John Howard Yoder, “In the Our Father, then Jesus is not simply recommending vaguely that we might pardon those who have bothered us or made us trouble, but tells us purely and simply to erase debts of those who owe us money; which is to say, practice the jubilee.”¹²

FT described this atmosphere in terms of political love, expressed in those acts of charity “that spur people to create more sound institutions, more just regulations, more supportive structures.” (n 186) The end is that one’s neighbour will not find oneself in poverty.

Lead us not into temptation: This petition can be understood better from the Lord’s own temptation at the beginning of his ministry (Mt 4:1-11). The triple temptations concern about power (power to turn the stone into bread), prestige (prestige of being held by the angels) and possessions (possession of all the kingdoms of the world). These were the basic temptations of the church at all times, and the Lord overcame them by quoting the texts from the book of Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13 and 6:16). Deuteronomy is the book that gives the basic command of Loving God with an undivided heart and mind and strength (4:5). The temptations are causing one to have a divided heart between God and one’s own interests. The Kingdom happens only when we trust the Lord with an undivided heart and soul.

Conclusion

The Abba Prayer that Jesus has given us “is both a revolutionary manifesto and a hymn of hope not just for Christianity, but for the world,” observes Crossan.¹³ It is a prayer from the heart of Judaism, through Christianity to the conscience of the earth.¹⁴ This exactly is the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* is doing. Though FT explicitly does not say so, it is a spelling out of the petitions of the Our Father for the contemporary world, so that it can be transformed into the anticipation of the Kingdom already now. What the prophet Isaiah foretold that the future Messiah would do, “will teach us his ways that we may walk in his paths” (Is 2:2), is continued through his servant, Pope Francis.

¹⁰ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 138.

¹¹ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 154.

¹² John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand

Rapids: W.B.Eerdmans Pub., 1972), 66.

¹³ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 182.

¹⁴ Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 182.

James H. Kroeger, MM

Mary's Christmas Song A *Magnificat* Meditation

Advent and Christmas form a unique “Marian Season.” Christians recall that it was Mary, awaiting the birth of her son, who celebrated the very first advent. Mary made a unique faith journey, preparing for Christ’s nativity for nine full months. Filipinos make their proximate preparation for Christmas during Advent, particularly with the nine-day novena of morning masses, known as *Simbang Gabi* or *Misa de Gallo*, the “Mass of the Rooster.” In the novena of dawn masses, most of the Gospel readings are drawn from “Mary’s Biographer,” Luke the Evangelist. On the seventh day of the novena (December 22), the faithful hear as the Gospel proclamation the beautiful *Magnificat* prayer of Mary during her visit to her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1:46-55). Mary can be heard singing her Christmas song, that same canticle she probably sung repeatedly during the nine months of her pregnancy, the original advent season.

Spiritual Insight. “The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn,” preached Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian killed by the Nazis during the Second World War. “It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might say, the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings; this is the passionate, surrendered, proud, enthusiastic Mary who speaks out here.”

Bonhoeffer continues: “This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind.” Yes, Mary sings a song that proclaims God’s gracious, effective compassion and liberation!

It is helpful to recall the context of Mary’s *Magnificat* hymn. Mary has generously said

fiat to the invitation to become the Mother of God through Gabriel’s Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38). Her deep faith and willingness to serve have prompted her to make the arduous journey to Ain Karim, a trip of over one hundred kilometers from Nazareth. Mary’s Visitation to Elizabeth (Lk 1:39-45) is a generous act of service; though pregnant herself, she does not hesitate to be of service to another much older Jewish woman, six months pregnant with her first child. What a scene of great joy! Mary and Elizabeth, both faithful women of Israel, have been uniquely blessed by the Most High. In Luke’s Gospel, Mary’s *Magnificat* is the long and beautiful prayer-poem she uttered on this emotion-filled occasion.

Two Moments. Mary’s *Magnificat* song, structured as a thanksgiving psalm, unfolds in two parts. Part One praises God’s mercy; Mary’s eyes are raised to the Lord (Lk 1:46-50); “my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” Part Two reflects on God’s victorious deeds for the oppressed; Mary’s eyes are scanning all humanity, especially the poor and marginalized (Lk 1:51-55); “he has exalted the lowly.” The two parts are linked by a profound sense of God’s faithful compassion, to Mary and Elizabeth as well as to the liberated poor and needy. Two integrated themes emerge: *spirituality* and *social justice*. Mary begins by focusing on the Lord, magnifying him, proclaiming his greatness, rejoicing in her savior. She is filled with joy. Looking into her own heart, she acknowledges what the Lord has done for her; he has looked upon his lowly, faithful servant. All will call her blessed, for “the Almighty has done great things” on her behalf.

With one piercing glance, Mary grasps the paradox of her littleness and her greatness. Simultaneously she is the lowly slave, the one totally at the service of the Lord; yet she is so

great that all future generations will bless her, a prophecy fulfilled in every “Hail Mary” prayed through the centuries. In her *Magnificat* Mary gives us the fruit of her “treasuring” and “pondering” over many months the mystery of the incarnation unfolding in her womb. Her joyful song allows us to have a glimpse into the depths of her maternal heart.

Another Dimension. The second moment in Mary’s song accentuates the radical spiritual revolution that she heralds. The Lord is turning everything upside down. The powerful, the proud, the rich are being dethroned, and the lowly, the poor, and the weak now become the favored ones. Mary’s canticle is indeed the song of a “spiritual revolutionary.”

Mary’s song is the prayer of a poor woman, reflecting her own situation as a member of an oppressed people who now experience God’s compassion and liberation. God favored her precisely as a lowly woman to manifest his all-encompassing love for the world. The *Magnificat* prayer also reflects the great biblical theme of “final reversal,” where the last become the first, the least become the greatest, the barren become the fruitful, and the humble of heart (*anawim*) become God’s favored. In God’s design, the social hierarchy of wealth and poverty, power and subjugation are inverted, turned upside down.

Joining Mary’s Song. The *Magnificat*, which the entire Church says daily during evening prayer, must remain a challenge for us—at Christmas and always. Christians need to constantly integrate prayer and praise of God (worship) with commitment to social transformation (justice). To glorify God demands striving to be *anawim*, opting for the poor, the hungry, the powerless. To be Christian demands a reversal of values; one

must become “counter-cultural,” challenging the *status quo*. We join with Mary in praising God for his loving-kindness and in generously embracing the poor of this world. Indeed, it is only in this two-fold way that our celebration of Christmas will be authentic!

Two Papal Insights. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (Mother of the Redeemer) [37], Pope John Paul II spoke eloquently about Mary’s holistic vision of God’s design of salvation manifested at Christmas: “The Church’s *love of preference for the poor* is wonderfully inscribed in Mary’s *Magnificat*.... Mary is deeply imbued with the spirit of the ‘poor of Yahweh’.... Mary truly proclaims the coming of the ‘Messiah of the poor’ (cf. Is. 11:4; 61:1). Drawing from Mary’s heart, from the depths of her faith expressed in the words of the *Magnificat*, the Church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that *the truth about God who saves*, the truth about God who is the source of every gift, *cannot be separated from the manifestation of his love of preference for the poor and humble*, that love which, celebrated in the *Magnificat*, is later expressed in the words and works of Jesus.”

Pope Francis also provides us with profound insights on the role of Mary and her “exceptional pilgrimage of faith” in his *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) [287-288]: “There is a Marian ‘style’ to the Church’s work of evangelization.... Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for “bringing down the mighty from their thrones” and “sending the rich away empty” (Lk 1:52-53) is also ... “a model of evangelization” for all Christians.

Final Greeting. May you and your family enjoy a “*Magnificat* Christmas,” filled with both singing God’s praises and serving our needy neighbors!



New Year Prayer for SEDOS

Lord, you made us come together under one roof,
to believe in You and Your message.
Help us to realize this and to unite our strength for the accomplishment of
Your Mission.

As an Inter-Congregational body,
we want to stimulate and adjust the way we do Mission,
through studying together and building up a documentation source,
open to, and valid for, all Mission-minded Christians around the Globe.

Times change rapidly and so do needs.
Understanding the needs of our time and finding the right answers to them is what unites us.
We do it out of love for You and for Your Son Jesus Christ,
for the World You created,
and for a lasting Peace among the people of all nations, combined with Your idea of Justice.

Though our means are simple and few,
we nevertheless make the best of what is entrusted to us,
because through the cooperation of the different Congregation and Societies,
we will be able to go ahead and lighten the Path for those who are still in the dark.

The tasks are many: Peace, Justice, Integrity of Creation,
Interreligious Dialogue, Inter-culturality,
Ecumenism, Gender equality, Formation, Financial government, and so on.
But with Your Grace, we can handle them one by one and find the right answer for our time.

Be close to us with Your Grace, and let us be close to Your People.
We ask this in the Name of Your Son Jesus Christ and His Mother Mary.

AMEN



*Jesus is the gift that
perfectly fits the size of every heart.*

*Wishing you and your community
peace, joy, health
and prosperity in the coming year.*

*May the joy and peace
that were present at the birth of Christ
be present in your heart this season.*

*Merry
Christmas!*

-HAPPY-

New Year
2022

