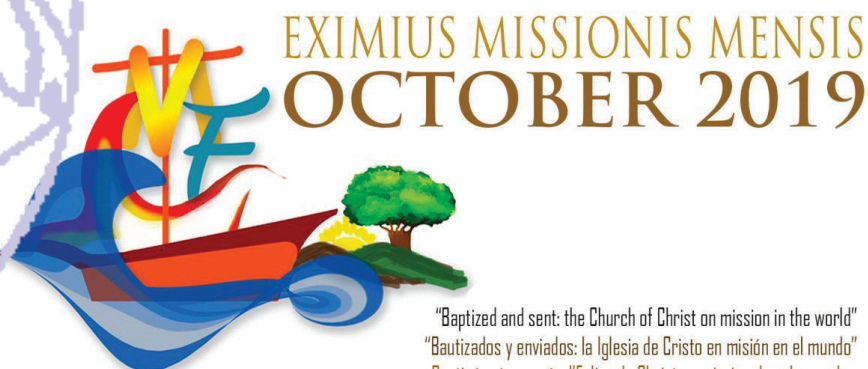


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SEDOS



EXTRAORDINARY MISSION MONTH

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It encourages research and disseminates information
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EDITORIAL



Dear Readers,

On the occasion
of this year's
extra-ordinary
mission month

we have collected a series of articles
on mission.

We start with Pope Francis and his thinking. According to Martínez and Espinosa, for him the Gospel has to be the point of departure of every missionary reform; then the face of God is compassion; next, the Church has to go out into the world; and last, we need a cosmic vision. It requests us to get rid of a clerical attitude in order to work together with joint responsibility.

Fr. James Kroeger perceives the great missionary writings of the last three popes as one great spiral centered on “missionary discipleship”. Four key theological-pastoral themes help us see this clearly in: Mystery, Meditation, Ministry, and Mission.

Fr. Joseph Palakeel surveys the different Catholic views on evangelization over the last years, and concludes that there is a turning away from theocentric, Christocentric, as well as ecclesio-centric approaches to an anthropological view: the “cultivation, perfection, and healing” of humanity.

Mgr. John Shelby Spong elaborates on the question posed to him by a lay woman: “Can we be Christian

without being theist?” Mission today asks that we once more learn to speak a different language. We should not always ask ourselves, “who is God?” but “what is God?”. For example, the Hebrews spoke of the “wind”, *ruach*, or “rock” as God, and not directly about His face, word, hand and so on. The great theologians of last century also looked for a new image of God such as Bultmann (demythologizing), Whitehead (process-theology), Bonhoeffer (Christianity without religion), and Tillich (source of life).

We are concluding with two special contributions. One I wrote on at the occasion of a visit to a new member Congregation of SEDOS, the lay celibate male *Society of Christian Doctrine*, who asked me to speak to their members in Malta about the cultivation of an interior missionary spirit and zeal. The talk centered on the importance of a dialogical spirit in current mission theology. And a short contribution sent to us by White Father, Sense Moses Simukonde, about one of his encounters in Niger with a Muslim lady who deplored the terrible acts against the Church by her people. A good education can avoid this kind of violence, she reasons. Dialogue among people of different religions can help us to construct a “new brave world” of love and respect.

Enjoy reading these articles!

La Figura y el Pensamiento del Papa Francisco

Una Interpelación Misionera

“Nadie cose un remiendo de paño nuevo en un vestido viejo, porque el pedazo añadido tira del tejido viejo y el rasgón se hace más grande. Tampoco se pone vino nuevo en odres viejos, porque hará reventar los odres, y se perderán el vino y los odres. ¡A vino nuevo, odres nuevos!” (Mc 2, 21-22).

INTRODUCCIÓN

En estas líneas del evangelio de Marcos podemos descubrir una clave excepcional para comprender mejor la interpelación misionera que el Papa Francisco está lanzando a toda la Iglesia. La primera parte de la sentencia evangélica nos ayuda a ver que no adelanta poner pequeños parches cuando hay que revisar todo; y la segunda, deja bien claro que tampoco sirve querer encerrar una propuesta radicalmente nueva en moldes anticuados.

Mantener los odres viejos o apostar por otros nuevos

Quienes sigan apostando por emplear los odres viejos de toda la vida, difícilmente *comprenderán* lo que está en juego respecto a la vida de la Iglesia y su Misión. Pero quien acoja las luces del *Evangelio* y se deje orientar por ellas, saludará con gozo los nuevos odres capaces de llevar el vino nuevo del Evangelio a las realidades conflictivas de nuestro mundo. El Papa Francisco manifiesta dónde está su preocupación: *“más que el temor a equivocarnos, –dice él– espero que nos mueva el temor a encerrarnos en las estructuras que nos dan una falsa contención y en las normas que nos vuelven jueces implacables, o en las*

costumbres donde nos sentimos tranquilos, mientras afuera hay una multitud hambrienta y Jesús nos repite sin cansarse: ‘¡Dadles vosotros de comer’ (Mc 6,37). (EG 49). El Papa pone al descubierto el grave riesgo de inmovilismo, autosuficiencia y rigidez que padecemos en la Iglesia; pero, a continuación, señala el cambio de perspectiva con el que poder superarlo: *“No quiero una Iglesia preocupada por ser el centro y que termine clausurada en una maraña de obsesiones y procedimientos” (EG ibíd.)* El trabajo de este simposio puede ayudarnos a caminar en la dirección correcta.

I. LA FIGURA DEL PAPA: RASGOS DE SU PERSONALIDAD

Vamos a hacer un recorrido por las tres etapas que marca el título de la ponencia:

- 1) La figura del Papa Francisco;
- 2) Su pensamiento;
- 3) Y la interpelación misionera que surge de las dos premisas anteriores.

El lenguaje de sus gestos

Dentro de muy pocos días se van a cumplir los seis años de aquel 13 de marzo de 2013, cuando el Papa Francisco se asomó por primera vez al balcón del Palacio del Vaticano.

Es bueno recordar sus primeros pasos que tanto impactaron al mundo por la sencillez y normalidad en su forma de vestir y de presentarse, o al pedir que todos rogaran a Dios para que le diera su bendición antes de darla él a los demás. Recientemente ha sido publicado un libro que lleva por título

*“La Encíclica de los gestos del Papa Francisco”*¹. En sus cuatro capítulos habla de los gestos de la caridad y de la misericordia; de los gestos «pastorales»; de los gestos de la comunicación; y de los incontables gestos significativos en su vida cotidiana que, a lo largo de todo este tiempo, se han ido sucediendo. Son suficientemente conocidos por todo el mundo. No vamos a detenernos en ellos.

Sus enseñanzas iluminadoras

Además, nos ha ofrecido palabras llenas de sabiduría en escritos de gran importancia: dos encíclicas, tres grandes exhortaciones junto con varias Cartas y Constituciones apostólicas²; son verdaderos GPS para la Iglesia y el mundo. Ha dado muestras inequívocas de libertad evangélica para pensar, y para decir lo que piensa; derrocha creatividad permanente para buscar nuevos caminos que lleven a Dios, y que manifiesten cómo su amor está presente en nuestro mundo de hoy.

El impacto de su vida

Si prestamos atención a su vida diaria, fácilmente se descubre que está seducido por Jesucristo, y lleva en el corazón el sufrimiento de los pobres del mundo. Ha prodigado sencillez, ternura y misericordia a raudales, sobre todo con los enfermos, los ancianos y los niños. Dejándose guiar por la luz del Evangelio, dice lo que piensa y lo que siente en

relación a la Iglesia y a la sociedad de nuestro tiempo. Lo dice sin ánimo de ser infalible. Pero lo dice. Tampoco se conforma con repeticiones de lo que siempre se ha dicho. Inventa nuevas palabras y usa expresiones llenas de vida que llaman la atención, y contrastan con cualquier tipo de convencionalismos vacíos. Cree en el diálogo. Le interesa de veras la verdad. Una verdad que conecta con la “realidad” más importante; es decir, con la vida de las personas, comenzando por la vida de los últimos, de todos los descartables. Es alguien tan coherente que se transforma en un signo de los tiempos. Su persona, por sí misma, habla al mundo de la cercanía de Dios. Sus comportamientos y decisiones a nadie dejan indiferente.



Un hombre especial, don de Dios para el siglo XXI

La inmensa mayoría del pueblo cristiano ve en su persona el gran regalo de Dios para nuestro tiempo. Y mucha gente que se había alejado de la Iglesia, gracias a su testimonio y a sus orientaciones ha vuelto a encontrar sentido a las páginas del Evangelio, y a vivir la alegría de creer en Jesucristo. También personas no creyentes manifiestan abiertamente su profunda admiración por el actual obispo de Roma. Con razón, el Papa Francisco es considerado como uno de los líderes más influyentes del mundo. En su persona y en sus indicaciones, Dios nos está concediendo un gran don, un regalo impresionante para la Iglesia y para la humanidad entera.

Rechazos y acción de gracias

Es verdad que hay resistencias hacia el Papa Francisco. Nadie lo ignora. Frente a este “milagro de Dios en el siglo XXI”, nos encontramos con reacciones

¹ Esta peculiar encíclica presenta los gestos del Papa en cuatro apartados: 1. Los gestos de la caridad y de la misericordia; 2. Los gestos «pastorales»; 3. Los gestos de la comunicación; 4. Los gestos en su vida cotidiana. Cf. *“La Encíclica de los gestos del Papa Francisco”*- Mimmo Muolo. Ed. Paulinas. 2019. El autor es subdirector de la redacción romana del diario Avvenire.

² Encíclicas: “Lumen Dei” (2013), “Laudato Si” (2015). Exhortaciones Apostólicas: “Evangelii Gaudium” (2013), “Amoris Laetitia” (2016), “Misericordia et misera” (2016), “Gaudete et Exultate” (2018); Constituciones Apostólicas: “Veritatis Gaudium” (2018), “Episcopalis Communio” (2018).

incomprensibles, y hasta absurdas, en personas y en colectivos de la misma Iglesia que no admiten el cambio de rumbo que el Papa propone. Sin embargo, la inmensa mayoría de cristianos saluda gozosamente los nuevos aires del Papa Francisco porque traen resonancias claras de Evangelio. *“Bienaventurados los ojos que ven lo que vosotros veis, –dijo un día Jesús– porque os digo que muchos profetas y reyes quisieron ver lo que vosotros veis y no lo vieron; y oír lo que vosotros oís y no lo oyeron “ (Lc 10,23-24. Cf. Mt 13,16-17).* Estas palabras tienen hoy plena actualidad. En épocas anteriores, muchos habrían deseado oír lo que nosotros oímos ahora y no lo oyeron; y hubieran deseado ver lo que nosotros estamos viendo y no lo vieron. En nuestras manos está dar gracias, sentirnos felices y hacer que esa felicidad sea realmente operativa. Estamos invitados a *“ser audaces y creativos”*; llamados a participar en esa grandiosa tarea que, según el libro del Apocalipsis, ya está iniciada por el mismo Señor: *“He aquí que hago nuevas todas las cosas” (Ap 21, 5).* En este cambio de época, el desafío mayor consiste en buscar y encontrar caminos que lleven adelante la Buena Noticia de Jesús.

II. EL PENSAMIENTO DEL PAPA FRANCISCO

Al hablar del pensamiento del Papa, querríamos advertir que nos fijaremos de manera especial en la exhortación *“La alegría del Evangelio”*³. Creemos que, de acuerdo con lo que el mismo Papa ha manifestado, se puede encontrar ahí el programa de acción para toda la Iglesia

³ El Papa dice con toda claridad que quiere *“indicar caminos para la marcha de la Iglesia en los próximos años”* (EG 1); y, saliendo al paso de quienes puedan pensar que este objetivo no es decisivo, vuelve a insistir unos números más adelante: *“Espero que todas las comunidades procuren poner los medios necesarios para avanzar en el camino de una conversión pastoral y misionera, que no puede dejar las cosas como están. Ya no nos sirve una «simple administración». Constituyámonos en todas las regiones de la tierra en un «estado permanente de misión»* (EG 25).

(EG 25); por tanto, también instrucciones valiosas para comprender el sentido de la Misión ad Gentes en este momento de la historia humana. A la hora de preparar este tema, junto a otros escritos y autores, también hemos encontrado luces en dos sugerentes reflexiones sobre la *“Missio ad gentes”*; una del profesor Eloy Bueno de la Fuente sobre *“La Misión universal en la actualidad”*, y otra del SCAM-Servicio Conjunto de Animación Misionera⁴.

La renovación-reforma de la Iglesia

Llama poderosamente la atención el compromiso del Papa Francisco con la renovación-reforma de la Iglesia. Puede decirse que ésta es la melodía de fondo que recorre la partitura de estos seis años. Difícilmente se podría comprender su pensamiento, si no se tuviera en cuenta esa preocupación que el Cardenal Bergoglio ya llevaba dentro de sí antes de ser elegido *“Obispo de Roma”*. Basta recordar su intervención en una de las Congregaciones secretas que tuvieron los Cardenales, como preparación para el Cónclave: *“Cuando la Iglesia no sale de sí misma para evangelizar –afirmó él en esa ocasión– deviene autorreferencial y entonces se enferma. Es la mujer del Evangelio, encorvada sobre sí misma. Los males que a lo largo del tiempo se dan en las instituciones eclesiales, tienen raíz de autorreferencialidad, una suerte de narcisismo teológico. En el Apocalipsis Jesús dice que está a la puerta y llama. Evidentemente el texto se refiere a que golpea la puerta desde fuera, para entrar... Pero pienso en las veces en que Jesús golpea desde dentro para que le dejemos salir. La Iglesia autorreferencial prende a Jesucristo dentro de sí y no lo deja salir”*⁵. Son palabras fuertes, pero llenas de sabiduría.

⁴ Cf. *“La Misión universal en la actualidad”*. Eloy Bueno de la Fuente. *“Hacia una Teología de la Misión”*. Servicio Conjunto de Animación Misionera-SCAM.

⁵ Este es uno de los puntos que el Cardenal Bergoglio expuso en la Congregación de Cardenales que precedió al Cónclave; al día siguiente entrego al Cardenal de la Habana, Jaime Ortega, una copia de lo que había dicho

El Papa Francisco nos ha recordado, una y otra vez, que su llamada a la renovación de la Iglesia está enraizada en el Concilio Vaticano II; nos dice que *“el Concilio Vaticano II presentó la conversión eclesial como la apertura a una permanente reforma de sí por fidelidad a Jesucristo”*; y añade: *Cristo llama a la Iglesia peregrinante hacia una perenne reforma, de la que la Iglesia misma, en cuanto institución humana y terrena, tiene siempre necesidad”* (EG 26). Por tanto, en este interés por la reforma de la Iglesia se encuentra la clave que da sentido a todo lo demás; pero hay un ingrediente nuevo que el Papa señala con fuerza, y es que esa renovación ha de ser misionera. Todo el primer capítulo de la EG está dedicado a la *“transformación misionera de la Iglesia”* (EG 19-49). Y casi dos años después, en la encíclica *“Laudato Si”*, reafirmará esa intención al recordar que su primera exhortación iba dirigida *“a los miembros de la Iglesia en orden a movilizar un proceso de reforma misionera todavía pendiente”* (LS 3)⁶.

Los principales ejes de esta reforma

Para exponer con suficiente claridad lo que nos parece fundamental en el pensamiento del Papa, hemos elegido unos ejes dinámicos de reforma que aparecen una y otra vez en su actuación y en sus planteamientos doctrinales. En ellos tienen cabida múltiples aspectos que exigen una nueva comprensión de la Misión y nuevos modos de llevarla a cabo. Estos son los ejes:

- La vuelta al Evangelio y a Jesús de Nazaret.
- Un nuevo rostro de Dios.
- Un nuevo modelo de Iglesia.
- Una nueva cosmovisión.

en su intervención. Roma, 9 marzo 2013

⁶ El preámbulo del extenso volumen *“La reforma y las reformas en la Iglesia”*, Ed. Sal Terrae, 2016, escrito bajo la coordinación de Antonio Spadaro y Carlos María Galli y con el que ha colaborado un numeroso grupo de teólogos, plantea el tema desde “una reforma misionera de la Iglesia” (págs. 21-32).

1. La vuelta al Evangelio y el encuentro con Jesús de Nazaret

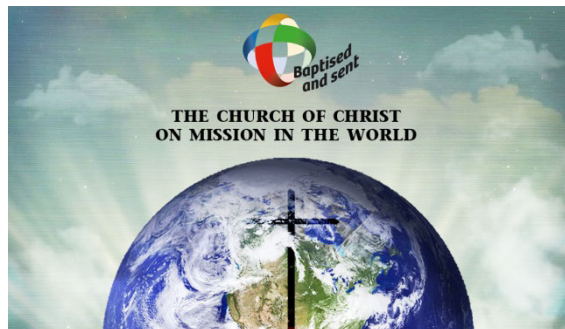
El Evangelio, punto de partida para la reforma misionera

El programa de renovación del Papa Francisco no se apoya en costumbres del pasado; tampoco se alimenta con fantasías del futuro. El Papa busca volver al Evangelio sin añadiduras, para que pueda ser acogido en el mundo de hoy como la gran oferta de “vida en abundancia” (Cf. Jn 10,10). La referencia fundamental está en el Evangelio. Es poner el Evangelio en el primer plano; y no las doctrinas. Como dice el cardenal Walter Kasper⁷, lo que interesa al Papa Francisco es el Evangelio de Dios, vivamente anunciado, celebrado y vivido en la Iglesia. Para al Papa Francisco el Evangelio es, ante todo y sobre todo, un MENSAJE ACTUAL, VIVO Y PALPITANTE. Con el Evangelio nos llega *“el mensaje más hermoso que tiene este mundo”* (EG 277).

Ahora bien, al proponer “la vuelta al Evangelio” estamos diciendo algo evidente, pero que no siempre se admite. Hay que volver porque nos hemos ido. Sin reconocerlo así, no hay arreglo posible. El Papa Francisco nos ofrece algunas pistas que nos ayudan a ver lo que ha ocurrido. En primer lugar, han interferido los filtros que nosotros ponemos: *“A veces, usando un lenguaje completamente ortodoxo, lo que los fieles reciben debido al lenguaje que ellos utilizan y comprenden, es algo que no responde al verdadero Evangelio de Jesucristo. Con la santa intención de comunicarles la verdad sobre Dios y sobre el ser humano, en algunas ocasiones les damos un falso dios o un ideal humano que no es verdaderamente cristiano”* (EG 41). Y, en segundo lugar, se han acumulado en la Iglesia demasiados mandatos, reglas y rúbricas que no permiten descubrir la grandiosa y atrayente belleza de la Buena Noticia: *“Santo Tomás*

⁷ Cf. Walter Kasper. “El Papa Francisco. Revolución de la ternura y el amor. Raíces teológicas y perspectivas pastorales”. Ed. Sal Terrae, 2015. Pág. 42.

de Aquino destacaba que los preceptos dados por Cristo y los Apóstoles al Pueblo de Dios son poquísimos. Citando a san Agustín, advertía que los preceptos añadidos por la Iglesia posteriormente deben exigirse con moderación «para no hacer pesada la vida a los fieles» y convertir nuestra religión en una esclavitud, cuando «la misericordia de Dios quiso que fuera libre». [48] Esta advertencia, hecha varios siglos atrás, tiene una tremenda actualidad. Debería ser uno de los criterios a considerar a la hora de pensar una reforma de la Iglesia y de su predicación que permita realmente llegar a todos " (EG 43) ¿No se hace necesario volver al Evangelio?



El Evangelio y el encuentro personal con Jesucristo

El evangelio nos ofrece la plenitud de vida a la que todo ser humano aspira (Cf. EG 265), la meta a la que hemos de llegar. Y en el centro del Evangelio, fuente de alegría (Cf. EG 1), está Jesucristo en persona. Puede afirmarse que Jesús es el Evangelio. Citando a Benedicto XVI, el Papa Francisco recuerda que “no se comienza a ser cristiano por una decisión ética o una gran idea, sino por el encuentro con un acontecimiento, con una Persona, que da un nuevo horizonte a la vida y, con ello, una orientación decisiva” (Cf. EG 7). Por tanto, el encuentro con Jesús de Nazaret es el final del viaje y, al mismo tiempo, es un nuevo comienzo, porque Él es quien nos llama una y otra vez a recomenzar el camino de búsqueda, de servicio y de entrega a los hermanos. El Papa intuye que, después de 20 siglos de

historia de la Iglesia, la manera acertada de enraizar de nuevo el cristianismo es encontrarse con la persona de Jesús: “Invito a cada cristiano, en cualquier lugar y situación en que se encuentre, a renovar ahora mismo su encuentro personal con Jesucristo o, al menos, a tomar la decisión de dejarse encontrar por Él, de intentarlo cada día sin descanso” (EG 3). Necesitamos redescubrir a Jesucristo y su mensaje que busca no solo la conversión real del corazón, sino también la transformación radical de las estructuras sociales y religiosas de todos los tiempos.

2. El nuevo rostro de Dios

El segundo eje del pensamiento del Papa Francisco lo constituye su empeño en presentar la novedad del verdadero rostro de Dios. Un rostro que el Papa no se lo inventa. Lo encuentra inventado en el Evangelio; pero consigue que nosotros lo veamos con mayor nitidez y firmeza.

La herencia lamentable de un rostro deformado

José M.^a Mardones publicó en el año 2008 un libro titulado “Matar a nuestros dioses (falsos). Un Dios para un creyente adulto”. Su contenido es impactante. En la introducción, escribía lo siguiente: “En mi experiencia pastoral me he ido encontrando con una triste constatación: alrededor de su figura —de Dios— se dan cita un cúmulo de miedos, terrores, cargas morales, represiones o encogimientos vitales. (...) Y muchos no se atreven ni a tirar este fardo por la borda”. Se entiende que Mardones no está diciendo todo esto refiriéndose a Dios, sino a las falsas y terroríficas imágenes que sobre Él hemos ido construyendo y transmitiendo durante siglos. Más recientemente, en los ejercicios predicados al Papa Francisco y a los miembros de la Curia, el sacerdote Hermes Ronchi hace el siguiente diagnóstico: “Hemos empobrecido el rostro de Dios; a veces lo hemos vuelto

miserio, relegándolo al oficio de hurgar en el pasado, y en el pecado del hombre y la mujer. Hemos hecho de él, quizá, un Dios al que se le venera y adora, pero no alguien implicado e involucrado, que ríe y juega con sus hijos en los cálidos regateos del sol y del mar. Todo el mundo busca a un Dios que se implique"⁸. ¿Estamos de acuerdo con este diagnóstico o nos parece exagerado y fuera de lugar?

El nombre de Dios es misericordia

Desde los primeros días como obispo de Roma, se puede comprobar que el Papa tiene el firme propósito de liberar a la Iglesia de esas falsas imágenes. La caricatura de un Dios *"que premia a los buenos y castiga a los malos"* nada tienen que ver con el Dios de Jesús, un *"Padre celestial que hace salir el sol sobre buenos y malos, y manda la lluvia sobre justos e injustos"* (Mt 5, 45). En su segunda homilía como Papa, al comentar el evangelio sobre la mujer adúltera, manifiesta con toda claridad su pensamiento: *"El mensaje de Jesús es éste: La misericordia. Para mí, lo digo con humildad, este es el mensaje más fuerte del Señor: la misericordia"*⁹. El Papa siente que ese rostro de Dios es la verdadera respuesta a los anhelos más profundos del corazón del hombre, no el Dios castigador y terrible. En la entrevista concedida al periodista Andrea Tornielli, después de afirmar que nuestra época es un *"kairós"* de misericordia, hace un recorrido que va desde Juan XXIII a Benedicto XVI, pasando por Pablo VI y Juan Pablo II, para mostrar que, ahora, él está recogiendo el fruto de las semillas del *"Dios-misericordia"* sembradas en la Iglesia por sus inmediatos predecesores¹⁰. No puede extrañarnos que el Papa se haya volcado con tanto empeño en presentarnos la misericordia de Dios como algo decisivo

para la vida de la Iglesia. El periodista Andrea Tornielli, después de recordarle lo que había dicho en la exhortación *"Evangelii Gaudium"* y que lo había repetido en otras ocasiones - que *"Dios no se cansa nunca de perdonar"* (Cf. EG 3), le pregunta: *"¿Por qué Dios no se cansa nunca de perdonarnos?"* El Papa le responde: *"Porque es Dios, porque Él es misericordia, y porque la misericordia es el primer atributo de Dios. Es el nombre de Dios"*¹¹.

La revolución de la misericordia

Preguntado sobre la decisión de convocar un año jubilar de la misericordia, el Papa Francisco dio esta respuesta: *"Creo que la decisión vino rezando, pensando en la enseñanza de los Papas que me precedieron, y pensando en la Iglesia como en un hospital de campaña, donde se curan sobre todo las heridas más graves"*¹². Con la celebración del Año Jubilar, el Papa Francisco quiso lanzar un llamamiento para hacer la gran revolución de la misericordia. De hecho, en la Bula *"Misericordiae Vultus"* aparecen una serie de afirmaciones que confirman esa intención. *"La misericordia –dice el Papa– es la viga maestra que sostiene la vida de la Iglesia"*. Esta sola afirmación cuestiona toda una serie de prácticas y procedimientos que han estado muy presentes en la historia de la Iglesia: Cruzadas, guerras de religión, Inquisición, procesos inquisitoriales, y prohibiciones a diestro y siniestro, con secuelas muy graves para personas concretas. ¿Son compatibles estas realidades con la viga maestra de la misericordia?

El Papa asegura que, en la acción pastoral de la Iglesia, *"todo debería estar revestido por la ternura con la que se dirige a los creyentes; nada en su anuncio y en su*

⁸ Cf. "Las preguntas escuetas del Evangelio". Hermes Ronchi. Ed. Paulinas. 2016 pág. 22.

⁹ Cf. Homilía del 17 de marzo de 2013.

¹⁰ Cf. *"El nombre de Dios es misericordia"*. Andrea Tornielli. Editorial Planeta S.A. 2016. págs. 26-28.

¹¹ Ibid. págs. 95-96. De esta respuesta del Papa, Tornielli sacó el título de su libro.

¹² Ibid. pág. 28. Cf. "Dios no es sólo un padre, sino también como una madre, que nunca deja de amar a su criatura" Cf. Catequesis del Papa sobre el Padre Nuestro 16.01.2019.

testimonio hacia el mundo puede carecer de misericordia. La credibilidad de la Iglesia pasa a través del camino del amor misericordioso y compasivo” (MV 10). Impresiona el contraste entre ese “todo” y ese “nada”, “todo” revestido de ternura y “nada” carente de misericordia. Para conseguirlo, habrá que superar rutinas e inercias de generaciones; y, sobre todo, se tendrán que repensar estructuras pastorales, administrativas y jurídicas, vigentes hoy en la Iglesia, junto con el modo de encarar el estudio de la teología¹³. Dirigiéndose a la Asociación de teólogos italianos, decía el Papa que “Se necesita una teología que ayude a todos los cristianos a anunciar y mostrar, sobre todo, el rostro salvífico de Dios, el Dios misericordioso.”¹⁴ Realmente, la imagen de un Dios implacable es diametralmente opuesta a su perdón sin restricciones y a su misericordia infinita. Surge una pregunta elemental: ¿Será posible evangelizar hoy, manteniendo el lastre de unas enseñanzas teológicas ajenas a la novedad amorosa de Dios?

3. El nuevo modelo de “Iglesia” (LG 9-14; EG 102-106.111.119.120)

Breve pincelada histórica

A lo largo de estos veinte siglos de historia, la Iglesia ha intentado seguir a Jesucristo y acercarse al Evangelio. Esto no se pone en duda. Hemos funcionado con una serie de normas que han prestado un cierto servicio; pero otras muchas se han ido convirtiendo en carga pesada, en rutinas, sin valor y sin sentido, que hoy no contribuyen a transformar la vida humana y no sirven para hacer más atrayente la fe cristiana. Es cierto que también se han hecho serios intentos de renovación-reforma. Uno de esos momentos fuertes ocurre en la segunda mitad del siglo

pasado, con el Concilio Vaticano II. Allí se dio un giro copernicano¹⁵. Se habló sin rodeos de una Iglesia necesitada siempre de reformas¹⁶. Pero, después de pasar más de cincuenta años, ese cambio tan extraordinario, netamente evangélico, no se ha desarrollado como debiera. Ahora, hemos llegado a una situación de la humanidad donde se hace más necesaria que nunca esa renovación-reforma eclesial que ha de ser genuinamente misionera. Así lo expresa el Papa Francisco: *“Sueño con una opción misionera capaz de transformarlo todo, para que las costumbres, los estilos, los horarios, el lenguaje y toda la estructura eclesial se convierta en un cauce adecuado para la evangelización del mundo actual más que para la autopreservación”* (EG 27). Por eso mismo -añade el Papa-, es necesario abandonar para siempre el cómodo criterio pastoral del “siempre se ha hecho así”. *“Invito a todos a ser audaces y creativos en esta tarea de repensar los objetivos, las estructuras, el estilo y los métodos evangelizadores de las propias comunidades”* (...) *“Exhorto a todos a aplicar con generosidad y valentía las orientaciones de este documento, sin prohibiciones ni miedos.”* (EG 34). Unos cristianos, unos sacerdotes o unos obispos que se cerrasen en banda y no aceptasen este camino de renovación, ¿no se convertirían en el gran obstáculo para que el Evangelio pueda ser acogido en nuestro mundo de hoy?

Rasgos fundamentales del nuevo modelo de Iglesia

En razón de las limitaciones que impone el tiempo de nuestra intervención, iremos enumerando cada uno de esos rasgos, y anotando los textos de la EG en los que se puede encontrar su desarrollo.

¹³ Ibíd. pág. 28. Cf. “Dios no es sólo un padre, sino también como una madre, que nunca deja de amar a su criatura” Cf. Catequesis del Papa sobre el Padre Nuestro 16.01.2019.

¹⁴ Cf. Discurso del Papa en la Audiencia a los miembros de la Asociación Teológica Italiana. 29.12.2017.

¹⁵ En la Constitución sobre la Iglesia (LG) el capítulo dedicado al Pueblo de Dios fue antepuesto al capítulo que trata sobre la jerarquía, dando a entender que lo fundamental de la Iglesia es “el ser Pueblo de Dios”, y que la Jerarquía está en función de ese pueblo de Dios. Cf. LG 9-14).

¹⁶ Cf. Decreto sobre el Ecumenismo, 6.

La Iglesia entendida y vivida como pueblo de Dios (Cf. EG 111).

- *En la que todos tengan la igual dignidad, proveniente del bautismo, teniendo claro que el sacerdocio ministerial es una función, y que en la Iglesia las funciones no dan lugar a la superioridad de unos a costa de los otros* (Cf. EG 102.104).

- *Una Iglesia donde la responsabilidad misionera es de todos los bautizados, no sólo de los obispos, sacerdotes y consagrados/as* (Cf. EG 119.120).

- *Una Iglesia que supere el recalcitrante clericalismo que mantiene a los laicos al margen de las decisiones, e impide que estos sean corresponsables de la vida de la Iglesia* (EG 102)¹⁷.

- *Una Iglesia donde las mujeres ocupen el lugar que les corresponde, recordando la praxis de Jesús y la enseñanza de la carta a los Gálatas 3, 28-29.* (Cf. EG 103.104; Sínodo sobre los jóvenes, n. 148).

- *Una Iglesia que apueste por los jóvenes, ya que ellos son el presente y el futuro de la Iglesia* (Cf. EG 105.106. Doc. final del Sínodo sobre los jóvenes).

Una Iglesia, testigo de la misericordia entrañable de Dios (EG 24.47.112.114. 193.194.197).

- *Una Iglesia consciente de que Dios se le adelanta en el amor* (EG 24).

- *Una Iglesia que salga al encuentro, brindando siempre misericordia* (EG 114).

- *Una Iglesia que sea "casa de puertas abiertas" y nunca aduana* (EG 47).

Una Iglesia pobre y especialmente acogedora con los pobres EG 48.53-58. 93-97. 186-201).

- *Una Iglesia que se mire en Jesucristo, cercano a los pobres* (EG 186).

- *Una Iglesia que abandone símbolos de poder y de grandeza* (EG 93-97).

- *Una Iglesia que denuncie la economía de la exclusión que mata* (EG 53).

- *Una Iglesia que rechace la idolatría del dinero* (EG 55-57).

¹⁷ Cf. Discurso del Papa a los Obispos del CELAM en Rio de Janeiro (2013). Carta al Cardenal Ouellet (2016); Discurso al CELAM en Bogotá-Colombia (2017).

Una Iglesia preocupada por el Ecumenismo

- *El empeño ecuménico responde a la oración del Señor Jesús que pide "que todos sean uno" (Jn 17,21). La credibilidad del anuncio cristiano sería mucho mayor si los cristianos superaran sus divisiones y la Iglesia realizara "la plenitud de catolicidad que le es propia" (Cf. EG 244). Tenemos que recordar siempre que somos peregrinos, y peregrinamos juntos. Para eso, hay que confiar el corazón al compañero de camino sin recelos, sin desconfianzas, y mirar ante todo lo que buscamos: la paz en el rostro del único Dios* (EG 244).

- *Dada la gravedad del antitestimonio de la división entre cristianos, particularmente en Asia y África, la búsqueda de caminos de unidad se vuelve urgente. Los misioneros en esos continentes mencionan reiteradamente las críticas, quejas y burlas que reciben debido al escándalo de los cristianos divididos. Si nos concentramos en las convicciones que nos unen y recordamos el principio de la jerarquía de verdades, podremos caminar decididamente hacia expresiones comunes de anuncio, de servicio y de testimonio* (EG 246).

Una Iglesia que profundiza las relaciones con el Judaísmo (EG 247) y el Diálogo interreligioso (EG 250)

Una Iglesia realmente sinodal en la que todos sean corresponsables

- *El camino de la sinodalidad es el camino que Dios espera de la Iglesia del tercer milenio*¹⁸.

- *Es imposible imaginar una conversión de la actuación eclesial sin la participación activa de todos los integrantes del Pueblo de Dios*¹⁹

¹⁸ Cf. Discurso del Papa con ocasión del 50 aniversario de la Institución Sinodal por Pablo VI. Sábado, 17 de octubre de 2015.

¹⁹ Cf. Carta del Papa Francisco al Pueblo de Dios, 20 de agosto de 2018. Resulta curioso que el término "sinodalidad" aparece una sola vez en la Evangelii Gaudium (Cf. EG 246); y es para decir que los católicos tenemos la posibilidad de aprender algo más de

El P. Víctor Codina, comprometido teólogo jesuita que ha pasado la mayor parte de su vida en América Latina, nos ofrece una visión profética de la situación que está viviendo hoy la iglesia. *“El Espíritu cierra la puerta de una Iglesia clerical y machista, de una vida religiosa poderosa y auto suficiente; y nos abre la puerta hacia una Iglesia toda ella Pueblo de Dios, sinodal, pobre y abierta, en la que los laicos, durante siglos marginados y pasivos, asuman su responsabilidad eclesial y social, una Iglesia nacida en el bautismo y la confirmación, toda ella ministerial, con diversos dones jerárquicos y no jerárquicos del Espíritu, una Iglesia en la que todos vivamos la unción del Espíritu que nos hace vivir la fe y participar activamente de la eucaristía, que es fuente de comunión eclesial y de solidaridad con los pobres y descartados de la sociedad”*²⁰.

4. Una nueva cosmovisión

Las referencias para esa nueva visión

A partir de la vuelta al Evangelio, teniendo en cuenta el rostro de Dios-Padre que Jesucristo hace patente, y la centralidad de los pobres, se puede entender mucho mejor el significado de este cuarto eje en el pensamiento del Papa Francisco. El contempla el mundo con una mirada especial, propia de alguien que, aún en medio de las sombras, sabe ver los pequeños destellos de luz y de esperanza que aparecen en todos los rincones de la tierra. Santo Tomás decía que según sea la visión que tengamos del mundo –creación de Dios–, así será la imagen que nos hagamos de Él. Si le damos la vuelta a este

pensamiento, también cabe decir que según sean los rasgos que descubramos de Dios a través de Jesús de Nazaret, así será nuestra manera de contemplar su obra y la intensidad de nuestra preocupación por cuidarla.

El mundo, campo de la acción continuada de Dios

La visión del mundo que el Papa Francisco transmite se parece mucho a la que el autor del Génesis pone en boca de Dios al final del relato de la creación: *“Y vio Dios que todo era bueno”* (Gn 1,31). Parece que el Papa se ha dejado influir por la enseñanza del evangelio de Juan (Jn 3,16), donde aparece el amor desmedido que Dios tiene al mundo. También conecta con lo que sentía y pensaba aquel otro Papa que ha pasado a la historia con el apelativo de “el Papa bueno”. Juan XXIII conocía perfectamente las consecuencias de encarar el mundo con la mentalidad de “profetas de calamidades”²¹, y la diferencia tan enorme que existe cuando se le mira con los ojos de Dios y se le ama con el corazón de Dios. Ahí es donde se sitúa el Papa Francisco. Y desde esa vertiente nos ofrece pistas para encarar todo un sistema de relaciones:

- *La relación con la madre-tierra y con toda la creación* (Cf. “*Laudato Si’* 1-16).
- *Una mirada nueva e iluminadora de la realidad* (Cf. EG 71-75).
- *Nuevos criterios para encarar las relaciones humanas* (Cf. EG 87.88).
- *El mundo, tarea para todos nosotros* (Cf. EG 84).
- *Una mirada contemplativa para “reconocer” las ciudades desde la presencia de Dios y la actuación de su Espíritu* (Cf. EG 71-75).

la experiencia de la sinodalidad que ya tienen los hermanos ortodoxos. Posteriormente se ha publicado sobre este tema un importante Documento de la Comisión Teológica internacional (02.03.2018), y la Constitución Apostólica “Episcopalis Communio” (15.09.2018).

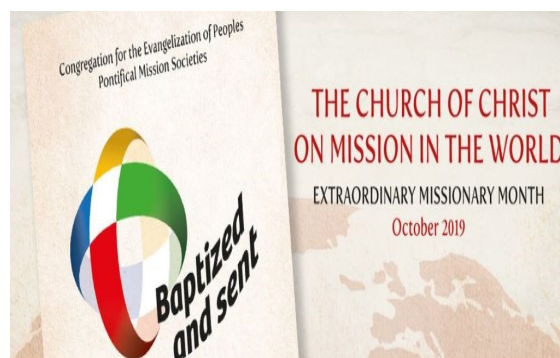
²⁰ Cf. “El Espíritu cierra y abre puertas”. Víctor Codina s.j. Artículo publicado en Religión Digital el 11 de noviembre de 2017. El teólogo Víctor Codina ha pasado más de 35 años de su vida en Bolivia, como formador de jesuitas y trabajando pastoralmente en barrios populares.

²¹ El Papa Francisco hace una larga cita del discurso de Juan XXIII donde se alude a los profetas de calamidades. Cf. EG 84.

III LA INTERPELACIÓN MISIONERA Y SUS NUEVOS ACENTOS

El Papa Francisco no ha modificado el mensaje del Evangelio, sino que lo ha hecho más cercano y asequible; no se ha desviado de la fe en Jesucristo, sino que la ha potenciado en medio del Pueblo de Dios. Él ha hecho algo muy importante: ha puesto acentos nuevos²² en palabras antiguas. Y esto resulta sorprendente y decisivo. Es verdad que, de alguna manera, la mayor parte de esos nuevos acentos arrancan del Vaticano II. Por tanto, no son totalmente nuevos. Sin embargo, no es menos verdad que ha pasado más de medio siglo desde que terminó el Concilio; y, en estos cincuenta años, los procesos de cambio en el mundo se han acelerado, y han surgido nuevos desafíos. De ahí la importancia de la llamada que el Papa está haciendo a toda la Iglesia. Como bien sabemos, se anunció la convocación de un mes misionero extraordinario para octubre de 2019. En la carta de convocatoria difundida por la Santa Sede, está formulado con toda claridad el objetivo que el Papa quiere alcanzar: *“Convoco un mes misionero extraordinario en octubre de 2019, con el fin de despertar aún más la conciencia misionera de la ‘missio ad gentes’ y de retomar con un nuevo impulso la transformación misionera de la vida y de la pastoral”*. A partir de esta doble finalidad señalada para el mes misionero extraordinario, ¿cuál sería la gran interpelación misionera para toda la Iglesia? Podría expresarse con el conocido alegato de Paul Claudel *“Y vosotros, los que veis, ¿qué habéis hecho de la luz?”* Es un cuestionamiento que puede recibirse

²² Los términos: “novedad, renovado, renovada, renovar, renovación; y nuevo, nueva, nuevos, nuevas” se repiten a lo largo de la exhortación “Evangelii Gaudium” hasta sumar en su conjunto 173 veces (Nuevo=28; nuevos=29; nueva=50; nuevas=21; novedad=10; renovación=13; renovar=8, renueva=3, renuevan=2) Para caer en la cuenta de este desafío de la novedad, basta leer con un poco de atención uno de los párrafos en el que esas palabras aparecen 11 veces en unas pocas líneas (Cf. EG 11).



como una acusación o un duro reproche, pero también se puede entender como una invitación apremiante para sacarle partido a unas circunstancias que son auténticos desafíos y, por tanto, con nuevas oportunidades.

La Iglesia, *en lugar de ser un faro que da luz, pero que permanece estático y siempre está en el mismo lugar, ha de ser una antorcha que se mueva y acompañe el caminar de cada persona y de toda la humanidad*. Esta doble imagen puede parecer insignificante, pero en este caso concreto lleva consigo un tipo de interpelación que no deja títere con cabeza. ¿Qué pretendemos? ¿Preferimos que la Iglesia se contente con ser faro inmóvil, o queremos que sea antorcha que acompañe en el camino? Hay que repensarlo todo porque hay que estar dispuestos a transformarlo todo. Hablando en términos coloquiales, podríamos decir que se trata de “una enmienda a la totalidad”. Tanto a partir de la figura personal del Papa como a la luz de sus enseñanzas, se puede ver fácilmente que pasar de faro a ser antorcha es más que una interpelación. Son muchas. Por eso, en lugar de interpelación, en singular, sería más acertado hablar de “interpelaciones misioneras”. Con el fin de situarlas mejor, echamos mano de unos términos que habitualmente se usan en los medios de comunicación: *El Mensaje, los mensajeros, los receptores del Mensaje, y la transmisión*.

1. Nuevos acentos en el Mensaje que se quiere transmitir

La finalidad de la “Missio ad gentes” y el primer anuncio

Partiendo de lo que acabamos de decir sobre la convocatoria del Papa Francisco, el primer nuevo acento habría que ponerlo sobre la finalidad que debe tener hoy la “Missio ad gentes”, sobre el significado del primer anuncio. ¿Se trata de bautizar al mayor número posible de personas, inscribiéndolas en los registros de la respectiva Iglesia, para librarlas del pecado original y de la condenación eterna? Durante varios siglos se entendió de esa manera la finalidad de la Misión. Hoy no. Entonces, ¿será su objetivo prioritario la “plantatio ecclesiae”, la implantación de la Iglesia en los pueblos y culturas de raíces no cristianas, con clero nativo suficiente y con la puesta en marcha de los organismos diocesanos de gobierno? Hace setenta años se decía esto con toda naturalidad. ¿Tiene sentido hoy, cuando precisamente está cuestionada la Iglesia por su autorreferencialidad? Para el Papa Francisco, la finalidad última de la Misión no está en fortalecer las instituciones de Iglesia, sino en hacer presente el Proyecto de Dios para la vida del mundo, tal como la ha vivido y transmitido Jesús de Nazaret. Ahí es donde resplandece “*la belleza del amor salvífico de Dios manifestado en Jesucristo muerto y resucitado*” (EG 36, Cf. 39, 128, 164).

El núcleo del primer anuncio: Jesucristo y su forma de vivir

El mandato-Misión de Evangelizar no puede orientarse a comunicar ideas o a repetir determinadas formulaciones doctrinales. Hoy descubrimos, mejor que en tiempos pasados, que lo esencial de la Misión-Evangelización se centra en anunciar “el amor personal de Dios que se hizo hombre, se entregó por nosotros y está vivo, ofreciendo su salvación y su amistad” (EG 128). La imagen de Dios que se transmita en el primer anuncio, no

puede ser otra que la del Padre misericordioso que presenta Jesús en el Evangelio, haciendo palpable que su amor entrañable y su ternura están por encima de todo. Es hacer presente a Jesucristo y llevar a la práctica su manera de vivir, amando y sirviendo, con todas las consecuencias. Tendremos que preguntarnos si estamos prestando suficiente atención al corazón de ese primer anuncio, para volver una y otra vez a él, siempre que sea necesario (Cf. EG 164).

2. Nuevos acentos de cara los mensajeros

Desclericalizar la Misión (EG 111.116. 120)

Todo el Pueblo de Dios está llamado a anunciar el Evangelio. “*El sujeto de la evangelización es más que una institución orgánica y jerárquica, porque es ante todo un pueblo que peregrina hacia Dios*”. Eso trae consigo algunas consecuencias elementales. La primera es que “*cada uno de los bautizados, cualquiera que sea su función en la Iglesia y el grado de ilustración de su fe, es un agente evangelizado!; y sería inadecuado pensar en un esquema de evangelización llevado adelante por actores calificados donde el resto del pueblo fiel sea sólo receptivo de sus acciones*” (EG 120). Es absolutamente necesario superar el clericalismo, y poner en práctica “la Misión compartida”²³.

No son “los clérigos” los únicos llamados a la Misión. Son todos los bautizados. La Misión ya no es monopolio de las Congregaciones Religiosas, ni de los Institutos o Sociedades Misioneras; es patrimonio de todos y cada uno de los discípulos-misioneros. Hay que dejar de lado cualquier tipo de autosuficiencia, creyéndose por encima de los demás, y desmitificar la figura del misionero “Superman o superhéroe”. Todo cristiano, se encuentre donde se encuentre y haga lo

²³ Superar el clericalismo”, artículo de Fernando Vidal, publicado en Vida Nueva. Enero 2019.

que haga, está llamado a sentirse “discípulo misionero”. Esto supone un gran desafío. Los laicos están llamados a desempeñar un papel preponderante en la Misión; y las mujeres, como apunta el Papa, “*no pueden ser reducidas a sierras de nuestro recalcitrante clericalismo*”²⁴. La llamada urgente que hoy nos hace el Papa Francisco es la de vivir todos, intensamente, la condición de “discípulos misioneros”. Es imprescindible hacerse diariamente discípulo. La Iglesia no evangeliza si no se deja evangelizar (Cf. EG 174). Y lo mismo ocurre con cada uno de los mensajeros. Hace falta superar la pasividad y el conformismo. La rutina que nos hace incapaces de nuevas iniciativas. Con frecuencia nos hemos dado por satisfechos con vivir de las rentas. Por eso es preciso cultivar la admiración y el asombro.

Disposiciones en la vida de los mensajeros

El misionero, como cualquier agente de pastoral, está sometido a toda una serie de tentaciones o desviaciones. El Papa, en el segundo capítulo de la exhortación EG, les da nombre y apellidos: *La acedia egoísta* (EG 81-83); *el pesimismo estéril* (EG 84-86); *la mundanidad espiritual* (EG 93-97); *las guerras, envidias y celos* (EG 98-101). Y frente a esas posibles desviaciones, ofrece otra serie de salidas o caminos de realización evangélica: *El estimulante desafío de una espiritualidad misionera* (EG 78); *las nuevas y enriquecedoras relaciones que Jesucristo genera* (EG 87-92); y *la sublime ley del amor fraterno* (EG 101). Estamos llamados a crecer como evangelizadores, procurando adquirir una mejor formación, una profundización de nuestro amor y un testimonio más claro del Evangelio. (Cf. EG 121). Después, partiendo de esa convicción, llegará el momento de compartir el anuncio con una actitud humilde y testimonial de quien siempre

sabe aprender, con la conciencia de que el mensaje es tan rico y tan profundo que siempre nos supera (Cf. EG 128).

La fórmula “ad gentes, ad extra, ad vitam”

Este era el tríptico que formaba la aureola del “misionero”. Creemos que está bien merecida la valoración positiva de quienes dejan su tierra, su cultura, su ambiente, sus familiares y amigos para anunciar el Evangelio en otros pueblos y culturas, con la disposición de hacerlo por toda la vida. Es importante. Pero, sinceramente, ¿no sería conveniente relativizar las tres referencias mencionadas? Aferrarse a ellas, ¿no supondrá confundir lo secundario con lo esencial de la Misión-Evangelización?

El “ad gentes” (Ir a los “gentiles”, aquellos que no han oído hablar de Jesucristo). Hoy, el “ad gentes”, ha pasado a ser un “inter gentes”, ya que los “gentiles” están en todos los lugares de la tierra, en medio de nuestras familias y... en nuestra propia vida. Un compañero de Japón entiende el “ad gentes” y el “ad extra” con un matiz diferente; él dice que se trata de “salir a lugares y culturas de raíces no cristianas” y ahí estarían los gentiles. Pero esto mismo no parece que sea algo absoluto.

“Ad extra” (Salir fuera de las propias fronteras) ¡Todos experimentamos hasta qué extremos se ha modificado el mapamundi y se han reducido las distancias! Es verdad que dejar atrás la propia tierra y llegar a otros lugares del mundo, siempre constituye un especial desafío; es como una invitación a reeducar la mirada y a nacer de nuevo. Pero, la Misión no es cuestión de lugares sino de actitudes. Se puede dar el caso de gente que “sale” y, sin embargo, continúa viviendo de nostalgias, usos y costumbres propias de su lugar de origen.

“Ad vitam” (Durante toda la vida) Si aceptamos el modelo de Iglesia-Pueblo de Dios, y creemos sinceramente que todo bautizado es discípulo-misionero, el “Ad vitam” se aplica a todo cristiano. ¡Eso es

²⁴ Cf. Discurso del Papa a los obispos del CELAM, Bogotá (Colombia), 07.09.2017.

para toda la vida! En cambio, los modos y lugares de ejercer la condición de “discípulos misioneros”, siempre será cuestión secundaria; dependerá de la decisión que cada persona tome, o de la organización y de los reglamentos que cada grupo adopte, una vez que tengan la aprobación de quien corresponda en la Iglesia. ¿De qué sirve estar inscritos “Ad vitam” en una institución misionera, si lo que se vive es rutina continuada, sin inquietud, sin horizontes, sin nuevos impulsos?

3. Nuevos acentos en cuanto a los destinatarios del mensaje

Los destinatarios no son “tierra de nadie”, ni un “campo arrasado”

Es tierra preparada. El Espíritu se ha adelantado a los enviados. Cuando estos llegan, se encuentran con que las semillas del Verbo ya están plantadas; y, sin que haya habido labradores oficiales que las hayan regado y cuidado, de día y de noche esas semillas han ido creciendo (Cf. Mc 4, 26-29). El Papa Francisco, en su primer encuentro con representantes del Camino Neocatecumenal les recordaba esto mismo: “*el Espíritu de Dios llega siempre antes que nosotros. Dios siempre va por delante*”²⁵. En todos los destinatarios está la huella amorosa de Dios; son hijos suyos. De ahí que el mensajero necesite desarrollar su capacidad de admiración y de asombro para descubrir esa presencia²⁶.

²⁵ Cf. Discurso del Papa en el encuentro que tuvo con miembros del Camino Neocatecumenal, en el Aula Pablo VI, el día 1 de febrero de 2014.

²⁶ Esta visión llevó a los Padres del Concilio Vaticano II a afirmar que en las tradiciones no cristianas existen “cosas verdaderas y buenas” (LG 16), “preciados elementos humanos y religiosos” (GS 92), “semillas de contemplación” (AG 18), “elementos de verdad y de gracia” (AG 9), “semillas de la Palabra” (AG 11, 15), “destellos de la Verdad que ilumina a todos los hombres” (NAe 2). Estos valores se encuentran preservados en las grandes tradiciones religiosas de la humanidad. Por ello merecen la atención y la estima de los cristianos, y su patrimonio espiritual es una genuina invitación al diálogo (Cf. NAe 2, 3; AG 11), no sólo en los temas convergentes sino también en los divergentes.

Todos tienen el derecho de recibir el Evangelio

Y los cristianos tienen el deber de anunciarlo sin excluir a nadie. Pero siempre como oferta; como quien comparte una alegría y señala un horizonte bello u ofrece un banquete deseable; nunca imponiendo ni manipulando (Cfr. EG 14). La Iglesia, dice el Papa Francisco, no crece por proselitismo sino por atracción. Citando la encíclica “Redemptoris Missio” de Juan Pablo II, el Papa añade que el anuncio a los que están alejados de Cristo es la tarea principal de la Iglesia. Por eso mismo, la actividad misionera es el mayor desafío (Cf. EG 15).

La exigencia de inculturar el Evangelio (EG 69.129)

El anuncio del Evangelio no se lleva cabo solamente de persona a persona, ni siempre con determinadas fórmulas aprendidas de memoria, o con palabras que expresan un contenido invariable. El Evangelio se difunde de formas muy diversas.

Hay que procurar que la predicación del Evangelio, expresada con categorías propias de la cultura donde es anunciado, provoque una nueva síntesis con esa cultura (Cf. EG 129). “Es imperiosa la necesidad de evangelizar las culturas para inculturar el Evangelio” (EG 69).

4. Nuevos acentos en la transmisión del mensaje evangélico

La pedagogía es tal vez uno de los ámbitos que ha experimentado mayores transformaciones a partir del siglo pasado. Y en este campo, los nuevos acentos del proceso evangelizador resultan especialmente relevantes.

Escuchar, testimoniar y dialogar, para anunciar el Evangelio

El anuncio pierde en parte su capacidad de transformar la mente y el corazón del misionando, en la medida en que no va

precedido de la escucha atenta, del testimonio humilde y del diálogo respetuoso por parte del anunciante. Estos tres condicionantes han ido adquiriendo cada vez mayor destaque en la conciencia eclesial de los últimos tiempos.

La escucha. Siempre ha existido la tentación de tener respuestas confeccionadas antes de escuchar las preguntas, o llevar recetas preparadas antes de conocer las necesidades. Resulta muy significativo el dato bíblico. Primero, Dios “*escucha el clamor de su pueblo y conoce sus angustias*” (Cf. Ex. 3,7); sólo más tarde, quedará registrado el mandato de que el pueblo escuche la voz de Dios: “*Escucha, Israel, el Señor es nuestro Dios*” (Cf. Dt 6,4). La pedagogía de Dios marca el nimbo, pero los procedimientos humanos andan con retraso. ¿Por qué no es recibido el Evangelio como sería de esperar? ¿Sentimos una necesidad de aprender a escuchar como un nuevo modo de acercarnos a la realidad? (Cfr. EG 46.105.108.139.158.171) ¿Somos capaces de escuchar realmente las voces y gemidos del pueblo?

El testimonio. En el viaje de vuelta de la visita apostólica a Myanmar y Bangladesh, el grupo de periodistas de Francia le preguntan al Papa: *Durante este viaje, usted ha hablado del diálogo para construir la paz. Pero, ¿cuál es la prioridad: evangelizar o dialogar para la paz?* Y el Papa responde: “*La Iglesia crece no por proselitismo, sino por atracción, es decir por testimonio. (...) ¿Cómo es la evangelización? Es vivir el Evangelio, es testimoniar cómo se vive el Evangelio: testimoniar las Bienaventuranzas, testimoniar Mateo 25, testimoniar el Buen Samaritano, testimoniar el perdón setenta veces siete. Y en este testimonio, el Espíritu Santo trabaja y hay conversiones*”. El acento de la proclamación del Evangelio hay que ponerlo, hoy más que nunca, en el testimonio de vida de los mensajeros y no tanto en las palabras; de poco sirven los discursos, por muy bien elaborados que

estén, cuando los comportamientos desmienten lo que se predica.

El diálogo. La Evangelización implica un camino de diálogo; el “anuncio” demanda ciertas condiciones: no imponer la verdad, libertad en la respuesta y no reducir el anuncio a unas pocas doctrinas, a veces más filosóficas que evangélicas (Cf. EG 165. 238). La evangelización y el diálogo se sostienen y se alimentan recíprocamente (Cf. EG 251). Para comprender la importancia del diálogo de cara al primer anuncio, es preciso descubrir que es algo más que un mero intercambio de ideas; que no es una yuxtaposición de monólogos, ni una discusión entre sujetos antagónicos. Como decía el conocido pedagogo Paulo Freiré, el auténtico diálogo se nutre del amor, de la humildad, de la fe y de la confianza. Y cuando los dos polos del diálogo se relacionan de ese modo -con amor, con esperanza, con fe de uno en el otro-, entonces se crea una relación de simpatía entre ellos, y ambos se vuelven “críticos” en la búsqueda de algo común y mejor²⁷. Entendido así el diálogo, es evidente que, sin él, no puede haber auténtica Evangelización.

Acompañar para discernir

La necesidad de ser acompañados y de acompañar a otros, pasa a formar parte del tejido normal de la existencia humana. En el mundo cambiante que nos toca vivir, cada vez se hace más difícil discernir qué es lo más conveniente, y cuáles son las decisiones acertadas; por eso, se requieren tantos asesoramientos y consultas. Lo mismo ocurre en el proceso de la evangelización. Siendo que todas las dimensiones de la existencia humana han de ser evangelizadas, se hace necesario -dice el Papa Francisco- acompañar con misericordia y paciencia las posibles etapas de crecimiento de las personas en el camino de la fe (Cf. EG 44). Anunciar el Evangelio es también acompañar a los

²⁷ Cf. “Educación como práctica de la libertad”. Paulo Freiré. Ed. Tierra Nueva. 1971. Pág. 127.

nuevos discípulos-misioneros en el camino de la vida.

Vivir la “sinodalidad-corresponsabilidad”

La sinodalidad, –caminar juntos, compartiendo responsabilidades-, es la mejor manera de afrontar los desafíos que se le presentan hoy a la Misión de la Iglesia. Aunque la inspiración sinodal viene de lejos, su explicitación es, como todos sabemos, bien reciente. En los Documentos del Vaticano II nunca aparece el término “Sinodalidad”. En la Exhortación "Evangelii Gaudium" aparece una sola vez, y es para recordar que podemos aprender mucho de la experiencia sinodal de los hermanos ortodoxos (Cf. EG 246). El Papa Francisco, en estos tres últimos años, nos está ayudando a redescubrir este nuevo dinamismo del Espíritu, para que podamos crecer como Iglesia de Jesús²⁸. Desde los primeros pasos de la Evangelización, no deberíamos hablar más de "colaboradores" respecto a la Misión, porque todos los bautizados somos corresponsables de lo que la Iglesia es y de cómo actúa.

Conclusión: Oportunidad extraordinaria para el anuncio del Evangelio

Al finalizar esta reflexión, nos hacemos una última pregunta: ¿Qué futuro tiene el anuncio del Evangelio en la actual situación del mundo? La respuesta está en nuestras manos. Si la Misión no es un adorno que me puedo quitar y poner, si no es un apéndice o un momento más de la existencia, si es algo que no puedo arrancar de mí sin destruirme, si -como dice el Papa Francisco- yo soy una misión en esta tierra y para eso estoy en este mundo (Cf. EG 273), en tal caso la Misión tiene garantizado su futuro. Para el Papa Francisco, es urgente que todos nos

hagamos más conscientes de esta oportunidad excepcional, y no permanezcamos de brazos cruzados. Pero esto mismo supone que seamos cada vez más decididos en la vuelta incondicional al Evangelio y en nuestro renovado encuentro personal con Jesucristo. *"No se puede perseverar en una evangelización fervorosa si uno no sigue convencido, por experiencia propia, de que no es lo mismo haber conocido a Jesús que no conocerlo, no es lo mismo caminar con El que caminar a tientas, no es lo mismo poder escucharlo que ignorar su Palabra. (...) Si uno no lo descubre a El presente en el corazón mismo de la entrega misionera, pronto pierde el entusiasmo y deja de estar seguro de lo que transmite, le falta fuerza y pasión. Y una persona que no está convencida, entusiasmada, segura, enamorada, no convence a nadie "* (EG 266) ¡Ojalá todos los bautizados nos sintiéramos como marcados a fuego por esa misión de iluminar, bendecir, vivificar, levantar, sanar y liberar! (Cf. EG 273).

Aquí terminamos. Somos conscientes de que nuestra aportación es muy limitada; mejor dicho, es mínima si la comparamos con los numerosos artículos y libros que se han publicado, en los que se analizan la figura y los planteamientos del Papa Francisco. Estamos seguros de que las restantes ponencias, comunicaciones y mesas redondas de este Simposio, completarán nuestra reducida visión y llenarán las lagunas que hemos dejado. No sólo eso, creemos que todos los participantes de este encuentro están en condiciones de aportar nuevas ideas y propuestas, otras luces que nosotros no hemos sido capaces de ver. Gracias por vuestra paciencia y atención.

(Ref: Misiones Extranjeras N° 288 Enero-Marzo 2019, pp.67-87; translation available at SEDOS website)

²⁸ Cfr. 1) Discurso del Papa en el 50 aniversario de la Institución Sinodal. (17.10.2015); 2) “La Sinodalidad en la vida y en la Misión de la Iglesia”, de la Comisión Teológica Internacional. 02.03.2018. 3) Constitución Apostólica “Episcopalis Communio” (15.06.2018).

James H. Kroeger, M.M.

Exploring the “Missionary Disciple” Spiral

Insights of Recent Popes

Energy, dynamism, and growth are common images evoked by the simple word “spiral.” A spiral connotes advancing action, increasing or developing movement. And yet, a spiral, even in its continuous dynamism, moves and advances around a fixed center.

To capture and express realities of a spirituality of ministry and mission always demands the creative use of dynamic, expansive language. Thus, approaching the topic of ministry and spirituality under the rubric of a “spiral” is an attempt to present an apostolic spirituality that encompasses and integrates many facets and riches. Several essential dimensions, all interacting and reinforcing each other, produce a holistic and living spirituality of missionary ministry, centered on an encounter with the living God.

Four pivotal Church documents on missionary evangelization contain key insights for a holistic apostolic spirituality. Active Catholics (ordained, religious, and lay faithful) will find these four sources enlightening and inspiring as they serve in their various ministries. Saint Paul VI’s 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [EN] (Evangelization in the Modern World) is filled with abundant wisdom for all Jesus’ disciples. Saint John Paul II’s mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* [RM] (On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate), issued in 1990 on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Vatican II’s *Ad Gentes*, remains a pivotal source for developing an integral apostolic spirituality. Pope Francis’ first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* [EG] (The Joy of the

Gospel), dated November 24, 2013, is a treasury of material for all Christians whom Pope Francis calls “missionary disciples” (EG 120).

Finally, to complement the insights of these three papal “missionary” documents and to situate them in a concrete pastoral context, helpful material is drawn from John Paul II’s *Ecclesia in Asia* [EA] (The Church in Asia) released in November 6, 1999 [Asia is this author’s pastoral *locus* since 1970]. The enthusiasm and dynamism that these four documents manifest as well as the insights that they contain are a rich thesaurus for elaborating important elements of a “spirituality spiral” for ministry and mission. Four key theological-pastoral themes expressed in words that all begin with the letter “M” (Mystery, Meditation, Ministry, and Mission) form the basis and structure of this presentation.

MYSTERY. The origins of all mission and ministry are found in mystery (*mysterion*), understood in the Pauline sense as God’s universal loving plan of salvation for the entire world. God loves all peoples, desiring everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth (I Tim 2:4). The goal of ministry, then, is to serve the unfolding of this wonderful design God has for all peoples. “Missionary activity is nothing other and nothing less than the manifestation or epiphany of God’s plan and its fulfillment in the world and in history” (RM 41). Indeed, evangelization will always contain “a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead,

salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy" (EN 27).

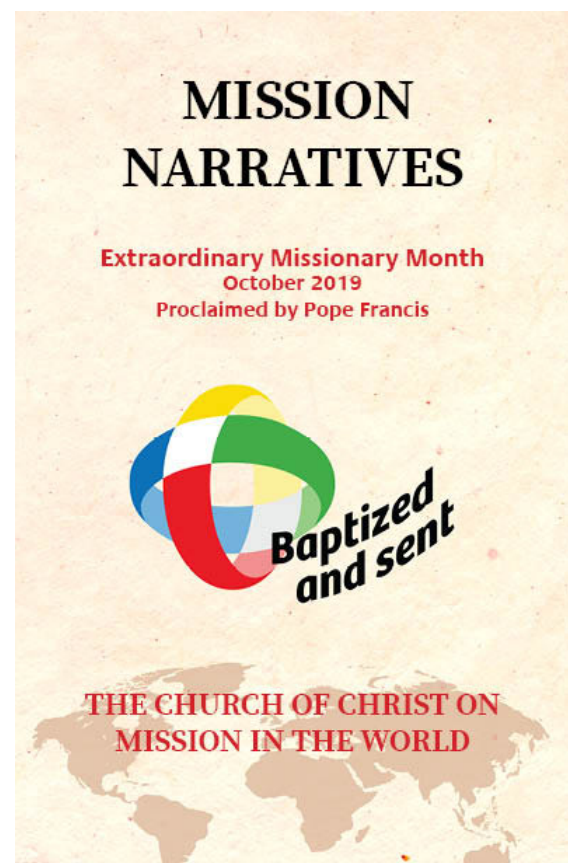
Further exploration into the *mysterion*-theology of Saint Paul helps anchor the foundations of mission. Paul is absolutely certain that God has a wonderful, marvelous vision of salvation for the whole world. His letter to the Ephesians convincingly—almost mystically—explains how “God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery” (1:9), “the mysterious design which for ages was hidden in God” (3:9). Paul personally speaks of “the depths that I see in the mystery of Christ” (3:4), because “it was by a revelation that I was given the knowledge of the mystery” (3:3).

Pauline reflection on God's loving plan of salvation (*mysterion*) synthesizes his belief that this design has been fully revealed in Christ the Savior and will be recapitulated in Christ at the end of time (RM 4, 5, 41, 44). This manifestation is focused on salvation, not condemnation or judgment, and is open to all peoples (RM 55). It unfolds in stages: God's design through the Israelite people, the missions of Jesus and the Spirit, the Church's presence in the world; humanity's response is faith or personal appropriation of the *mysterion* (RM 6, 9, 11).

Paul is a true minister of the Good News, an evangelizer *par excellence*, because he believed, lived, prayed, labored, and suffered (cf. 2 Cor 11:23-28) so that God's loving plan for the redemption of humanity would be known and graciously received. Obviously, Paul's apostolic commitment had the “*mysterion*-encounter” as its central driving force.

Paul's self-awareness as God's instrument was deeply rooted in being chosen as a servant and apostle of God's loving plan of salvation (Rom 1:1-6; 1 Cor 4:1; 15:9-11; Eph 3:1-21; Col 1:24-29). It might be stated that this “*mysterion*-awareness”

engulfed and consumed Paul; his consciousness was so transformed that he could assert that Christ lived in him (Gal 2:20), that fellow-Christians could imitate him (1 Cor 4:16), that life or death no longer mattered (Rom 14:8), and that he gloried in giving his life for Christ (2 Tim 4:6). In brief, the *mysterion* is foundational to Paul's apostolic identity and therefore he emphatically declares: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16 and RM 1). All dedicated apostles must necessarily feel the same sense of “Pauline” urgency to spread the Gospel!



MEDITATION. Because all mission and ministry flow from God's loving plan of salvation (*mysterion*), the evangelizer necessarily seeks to be deeply rooted in this mystery. There simply is no other foundation for all that one does. “Meditation” is a possible manner of expressing the “rooting-process” whereby the Christian apostle seeks to discover God's constant loving presence in the

depths of the soul. Early in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ; ... I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord’” (EG 3).

A meditative awareness or consciousness should flow through the various actions of life (prayer, scripture-reading, experience, reflection, service); it should serve as a running thread and connecting bond in all the various activities of the day as well as through the different periods and stages of life. Such an uninterrupted and continuous flow will make the evangelizer's whole life a prayer and a state of meditation and contemplation. In a word, the person in ministry must strive to develop a deep “*mysterion*-consciousness.”

Pope Paul VI, who said that *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is a “meditation on evangelization” (EN 5), invites the whole People of God assembled in the Church “to make the same mediation” so that they will receive a “fresh impulse,” and follow “a straight course”; thus, each person will more effectively “work as a preacher of the Gospel and acquit himself perfectly of his ministry” (EN 3).

Pope Francis devotes his entire final chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium* to the theme of “Spirit-filled Evangelizers.” He notes that “I do not intend to offer a synthesis of Christian spirituality.... I simply wish to offer some thoughts about the spirit of the new evangelization” (EG 260). “How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction!” (EG 261). “Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the Word, of sincere

conversation with the Lord [this is prayerful meditation], our work becomes meaningless, we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer...” (EG 262).

In *Ecclesia in Asia* Saint John Paul II emphasizes that “*Mission is contemplative action and active contemplation*” (23). Therefore, a minister who has no deep experience of God in prayer and contemplation will have little spiritual influence or missionary success. For the Pope, “the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation” (23). All evangelizers “need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation” (23). In the Oriental context, it is a fact that “a genuinely religious person readily wins respect and a following in Asia” (23).

This discussion focuses attention on the evangelizer's need of a spirituality. If the previous section (MYSTERY) outlined God's plan of salvation in Pauline categories, this section (MEDITATION) emphasizes the personal appropriation and integration of the *mysterion* into our lives and activities, our very consciousness. As one of the sources for building a “spirituality of ministry,” *Redemptoris Missio* of John Paul II contains rich material for enhancing this “rooting-process.”

In particular, two chapters of John Paul II's mission encyclical treat *Spirituality*. The third chapter presents “The Holy Spirit, the Principal Agent of Mission”; chapter eight is entitled: “Mission Spirituality.” All spirituality centers on God's action in, with, and through the minister or evangelizer; all mission and ministry are “God's work,” “the work of the Spirit”; they are not based “on human abilities but on the power of the Risen Lord” (RM 23, 24). The Church in Asia desires to promote the Lord's mission: “Her one ambition is to continue his

mission of service and love, so that all Asians ‘may have life and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10:10)” (EA 50). People in Asia want and need to see the Church’s ministers (lay and ordained) “not just as charity workers and institutional administrators but as men whose minds and hearts are set on the deep things of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:5)” (EA 43).

In the profoundly reflective chapter on the Spirit, one finds some of the most creative insights of *Redemptoris Missio*. Both the opening and closing paragraphs frame the discussion by asserting that “the principal agent of the whole Church’s mission” is the Holy Spirit (RM 21, cf. 30). All evangelizers, like Christ himself, experience “*a sending forth in the Spirit*” (RM 22). As Gospel ministers, “we are missionaries above all because of *what we are* as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries *in word or deed*” (RM 23).

The Spirit’s action is both within and beyond the bounds of the Church. The encyclical notes that “the Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.... The Spirit of God with marvelous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth.... We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God” (RM 28).

Proceeding to chapter eight of RM (entitled: “Missionary Spirituality”), evangelizers will find several precious pearls for the apostolate. Spirituality demands “a life of complete docility to the Spirit” (87), “intimate communion with Christ” (88), and following Jesus “along the path of suffering and humiliation” (87). The minister must be “a person of charity” who practices “love without exclusion or partiality” (89). One must respond to “the

universal call to holiness” and become “a person of the Beatitudes” (90).

Scattered at various points in John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio* one finds two themes related directly to spirituality: Conversion and Eucharist. Jesus invites his co-workers “to faith, conversion and the desire for forgiveness” (14). For the evangelizer, “conversion is expressed in faith which is total and radical, and which neither limits nor hinders God’s gift” (46). “We cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted anew every day” (47). As disciple-apostles, all are called “to carry out a sincere review of their lives regarding their solidarity with the poor” (60); “we should reassess our own way of living” (81); “Fight hunger by changing your lifestyle” (59).

Vatican II has noted that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life (*Lumen Gentium* 11; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5; *Ad Gentes* 9); Eucharist is eminently central for the minister. One clear purpose of ministry is “to bring people together in hearing the Gospel, in fraternal communion, in prayer and in the Eucharist” (RM 26). The early Church always sent forth its new ministers in the context of the Eucharist (Acts 13:1-4). The popular word that Catholics use today for Eucharist is “mass”; the words for both mission (*missio*) and mass (*missa*) derive from the same source (*mittere*); Eucharist always empowers the disciple-apostle for ministry and mission.

As a concluding thought to this section on “meditation,” one hears both Popes Paul VI and Francis speak of the transforming power of prayer and contemplation. Quoting Paul VI, Francis asserts: “Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that ‘delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow.... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be

enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ” (EN 80; EG 10).

MINISTRY. Perceiving one's call to active ministry within the Church and to missionary service of Christians and all people is a gradual growth process. The call to become an evangelizer emerges into consciousness and seeks a definite commitment as one meditates on one's personal role in the loving plan of God. Only a life of faith and prayer (MEDITATION) leads the apostle to personally experience God's love and plan of salvation (*mysterion*); it is precisely in this process or continuous spiral that ministry becomes a personalized invitation for the mature Christian. In a word, MEDITATION on the MYSTERY is the only means to discern one's call to MINISTRY.

For a deeper understanding of ministry as “faith-service,” one can profitably open the pages of *Redemptoris Missio*. The encyclical straightforwardly asserts: “*Mission is an issue of faith*” (11). Without faith nothing will progress. The Church and her members—all those in ministry—will accomplish little unless their lives and apostolates are rooted in living faith.

John Paul II, constantly encouraging all Christians to follow Christ, was a public witness to faith in Jesus; he lived what he challenged others to do. He noted in RM: “From the beginning of my Pontificate I have chosen to travel to the ends of the earth” (1). These frequent and often grueling trips are “journeys of faith ... for evangelical proclamation in spreading the Gospel” (63). “*Faith is strengthened when it is given to others*” (2).

Ministry always connotes the concrete service of others; it is manifested in a variety of forms and apostolates. The Church's various ministries seek to reach the total person within community. *Ecclesia in Asia* pays tribute to Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, canonized on September 4, 2016. She was “known all over the world for her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor” (7); thus, she remains “an icon of the service to life which the Church is offering in Asia, in courageous contrast to the many dark forces at work in society” (7). EA also calls upon “the great host of Asian martyrs, old and new, to teach the Church in Asia what it means to bear witness” (49).

Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI), *Redemptoris Missio* (John Paul II), *Evangelii Gaudium* (Pope Francis), as well as *Ecclesia in Asia* all offer helpful insights on apostolic commitment and involvement. Two words capture the comprehensive vision of ministry and mission in these beautiful documents: *integral evangelization*. Briefly, this means that evangelization and salvation are best viewed in a holistic fashion. In EN Paul VI asserts that “evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new” (18). In RM John Paul II notes that “Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person” (11); “evangelical witness ... is directed towards integral human development” (42). Pope Francis speaks of “a definite style of evangelization which I ask you to adopt *in every activity which you undertake*” (EG 18). *Ecclesia in Asia* affirms that ministry flows from a contemporary, holistic vision of evangelization, which is “a reality that is both rich and dynamic [and] has various aspects and elements” (23). In short, contemporary ministry develops the whole person and society. It touches the social

and cultural, political and economic, historical and religious dimensions of life—all from the perspective of faith. Indeed, it is an *integral, comprehensive, and holistic* vision of evangelization!

Further elaboration of *integral* evangelization can be found in all the four sources being used in this brief presentation. For example, Paul VI speaks of the holistic nature of evangelization, asserting that it is “a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entrance into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact, they are complementary and mutually enriching” (EN 24). Keeping all these varied elements in an integral balance, evangelizers (lay and ordained) will “reach a full understanding of the Church’s evangelizing activity” (EN 24).

Several key dimensions of integral evangelization are noted by John Paul II in RM; they are: the witness of Christian living (42), the service of humanity (58-60), inculturation and interreligious dialogue (52-54, 55-57), explicit Gospel proclamation (44-45), and sacramental-liturgical-ecclesial life (46-49).

Pope Francis, who emphasizes the “integral meaning of the mission of evangelization” in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG 176), sees the Church’s mission ministry encompassing a wide variety of areas demanding apostolic activities [note that many of these are specific fields where laity can make a significant contribution]: “problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defense of life, human and civil rights, and so forth” (65), “new processes for evangelizing culture” (69), “human trafficking, the narcotics trade, the abuse and exploitation of minors, the abandonment of the elderly and infirm,

and various forms of corruption and criminal activity” (75); indeed, countless other areas might be mentioned. For Pope Francis, evangelizers “need to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society ... processes of people building” (223-224).

In *Ecclesia in Asia* one finds the assertion that “evangelization today is a reality that is both rich and dynamic. It has various aspects and elements: witness, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism, insertion into the ecclesial community, the implantation of the Church, inculturation and integral human promotion. Some of these elements proceed together, while some others are successive steps or phases of the entire process of evangelization” (EA 23).

In a word, the totality of the ministry “cycle” will combine these many elements already mentioned. Together they form the Church’s total program of holistic evangelization; they follow the example of Jesus who lived his ministry in silence and reflection, in action and service, in dialogue and outreach, in teaching and proclamation, as well as in prayer and contemplation. This is *ministry*; this is *evangelization*; this is authentic “faith-service”! The creative involvement of all Christians in integral evangelization today is urgently needed and desired by the Church!

MISSION. A stark question must be posed: Is it possible to truly have an authentic program of ministry, catechesis, or evangelization without a concomitant vibrant sense of mission? Some may attempt to propose and defend such a possibility through rationalization. Yet, in the considered opinion of this author any apostolic ministry or program of evangelization without a missionary dynamism and perspective can quickly degenerate into parochialism or provincialism. Promoting mission

awareness and commitment among all Catholics (lay, religious, ordained) is an urgent challenge facing all local Churches today!

The Second Vatican Council places mission and evangelization at the center of the Church: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature” (*Ad Gentes* 2). Pope Paul VI spoke with deep conviction: “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all peoples constitutes the essential mission of the Church.... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize...” (EN 14). Pope Francis says that the very purpose of his *Evangelii Gaudium* is “to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” (EG 1). Again, Francis notes: “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything” (EG 27). Francis quotes what John Paul II said to the Bishops of Oceania: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (EG 27).

What meaning does the imperative of evangelization have for the Church, for Christ’s faithful? All Catholics must become a living proclamation of the *mysterion*—God’s loving design of universal salvation. Only in this way does the Church as the community of Jesus’ disciples realize her “deepest identity” and “her very nature.” She is called to be always and everywhere “the universal sacrament of salvation” (*Lumen Gentium* 48; *Ad Gentes* 1). For her, to live is to evangelize! A non-missionary Church is impossible; it is self-contradictory. Animation and rededication are necessary, because Christians are faithful to the nature of the Church to the degree that they love and sincerely promote her missionary activity. In the insightful

words of Emil Brunner: “The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.”

Redemptoris Missio emerged from Pope John Paul II’s deep concern about the “urgency of missionary activity” (1). He notes that “missionary activity specifically directed ‘to the nations’ (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning.” This fact “must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ [because] in the Church’s history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith” (2).

John Paul II seeks the help of all Catholics as ministers and evangelizers in their diverse apostolates to promote “a new missionary age” (92), “a new springtime for the Gospel” (86), “a fresh impulse to missionary activity” (2). He senses that “the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization” (3).

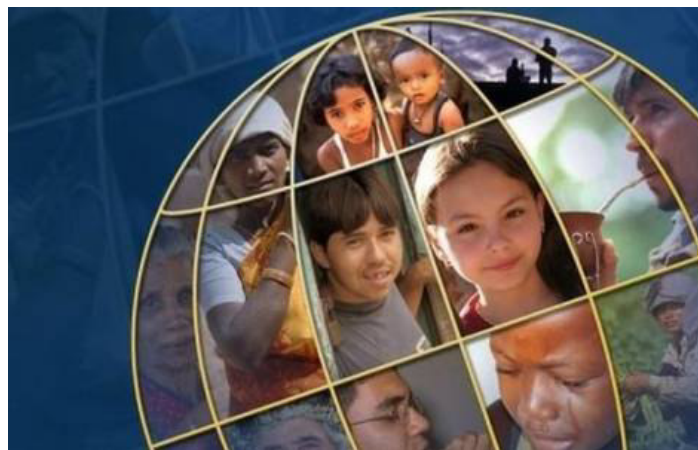
Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* overflows with missionary dynamism and wisdom. He quotes (EG 15) John Paul II, noting that “there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel ... because this is the first task of the Church” (RM 34). Indeed, “today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church” (RM 40) and “the missionary task must remain foremost” (RM 86). Francis asks: “What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*” (EG 15).

One finds copious insights into mission in *Ecclesia in Asia*; this is naturally to be expected, since EA emerges directly from the lived experience of the Asian local churches. The very purpose of the 1998 “Asian Synod” was “to discern the principal areas of mission for the Church in Asia as she crosses the threshold of the

new millennium” (18). The Church in Asia has clear convictions about mission; “the question is not whether the Church has something essential to say to the men and women of our time, but how she can say it clearly and convincingly” (29). In speaking of Asia, John Paul II says: “we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium *a great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent” (1).

Approximately one-half of EA examines the paths of the Church’s mission in Asia, presented under four discernable themes: Church as Communion for Mission (24-28), Dialogue (29-31), Human Promotion (32-41), and the Agents of Evangelization (42-49). One can validly assert that a “Communion Ecclesiology-Missiology” underlies much of EA. Because the Church is “the sacrament of the unity of the human race,” EA affirms that “communion and mission are inseparably connected [and] they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other; ... communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion” (25). Similarly, Pope Francis notes that “communion and mission are profoundly interconnected” (EG 23).

Two inherent demands of “Communion Missiology” in EA are dialogue and human promotion. The “desire for dialogue” is not simply a strategy for peaceful coexistence among peoples; it is an essential part of the Church’s mission, “a veritable vocation for the Church” (29). Dialogue is “a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission *ad gentes*”; indeed, “communion



and dialogue are two essential aspects of the Church’s mission” (31).

As she strives to build a “civilization of love” (EA 32), the Church and her ministers emphasize both Church social teaching and human promotion. Human development is not only a “technical or economic question; it is fundamentally *a human and moral question*.” Evangelizers see it as “an integral part of their evangelizing mission” (32). Mission as human promotion therefore encompasses the diverse areas of human dignity, preferential love for the poor, health care, education, peacemaking, globalization, foreign debt, and the environment (33-41).

Such renewed commitment to mission on the part of ordained and lay agents of evangelization is a key path for deepening the faith commitment and spirituality of local Churches and missionaries everywhere. Mission awareness is both the goal and the crowning achievement of effective evangelization. It remains a paradoxical truth that the home parish or diocese is strengthened when it sends forth missionaries—even out of an insufficient supply of personnel. John Paul II in EA urges “the Church in Asia to send forth missionaries, even though she herself needs laborers in the vineyard” (44). God’s ways so often supersede our ways!

Specifically, turning to the role of the laity in missionary evangelization, EA notes that “the vocation of lay people sets them firmly in the world to perform the most varied tasks, and it is here that they are called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.... All lay people are missionaries,

and the arena of their missionary work is the vast and complex worlds of politics, economics, industry, education, the media, science, technology, the arts and sports” (45). Laity are to serve as “true missionaries, reaching out to ... [those] who might never have contact with clergy and religious” (45). “Witnessing to the Gospel in every area of life in society, the lay faithful can play a unique role in rooting out injustice and oppression” (45). “The presence of women in the Church’s mission of love and service contributes greatly to bringing the compassionate Jesus ... to the poor and marginalized” (45).

REVISITING THE SPIRAL OF INTEGRAL MISSION. This brief essay has sought to capture and elucidate four key elements which are essential for a holistic mission spirituality and ministerial commitment, one truly adequate to mature Christians who are “missionary disciples” (EG 120). It could be termed the “**4-M** approach”: MYSTERY, MEDITATION, MINISTRY, and MISSION. Each element in the four-part spiral builds upon and reinforces the other; if any dimension is lost or under-emphasized, the Church’s entire mission of evangelization automatically suffers.

As a spiral, this approach to ministry must be dynamic and progressive, moving forward the individual evangelizer as well as God’s holy people, the Church. At times, one dimension of the spiral or cycle may be more visible or more emphasized than another; yet, the spiral remains complete. This spiral must be an integral part of ministerial formation and practice—whether an individual may be in the initial stages of formation or in life-long, on-going formation. All four **Ms** are important and essential for integral growth in a spirituality that serves the apostolate and the Church’s mission of evangelization. In a word, one does not then really have a spirituality “for”

ministry; *living the totality of the ministry spiral is in itself already spirituality.*

While emphasizing four central elements of the spirituality spiral, one could propose additional supports for this paradigm. Two central items (two more **Ms**) are the **Mass** (Eucharist) and **Mary** (Model of Discipleship and Ministry); both sources provide rich dimensions of spirituality and greatly enhance the spiritual life of effective evangelizers. Pope Francis has many creative insights on the Eucharist [**Mass**] (EG 13, 47, 104) and the Blessed Mother [**Mary**] (EG 104, 284-288).

Genuine ministry is of its nature contagious; engaged evangelizers rekindle mission dynamism; the spiral moves forward and upward. All evangelizers are to be “on fire with the love of Christ and burning with zeal to make him known more widely, loved more deeply and followed more closely” (EA 23). Why? “A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire” (EA 23). This is an authentic spirituality for ministry and mission!

Permit one final suggestion which will propel the “spiral” into further dynamic action: consider reading again and meditating on Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* in its entirety; your spirituality and motivation for ministry and mission will most certainly be enriched!

ABBREVIATIONS:

EA - *Ecclesia in Asia* The Church in Asia (Pope John Paul II)

EG - *Evangelii Gaudium* The Joy of the Gospel (Pope Francis)

EN - *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Evangelization in the Modern World (Pope Paul VI)

RM - *Redemptoris Missio* On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate (Pope John Paul II)

(Article received from the Author)

Anthropological Grounding of Evangelization

From Ad Gentes to New Evangelization

Introduction

In his introduction to the book *A Century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, Stephen B. Bevans lists six qualities that make the Catholic Mission theology unique and distinctive. Catholic missiology (1) is truly catholic or all-embracing and (2) relies on the wealth of Catholic magisterium and (3) is deeply rooted in the documents especially those of the second Vatican Council; (4) Mission is a complex reality composed of several constitutive elements and belongs to the core of the church (AG 2); (5) Mission is first and foremost God's activity, entrusted to the church by Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Finally, (6) "Catholic mission in practice and reflection *takes the world seriously*. ... historical, social, and cultural contexts are acknowledged and honoured as sources that reveal God's will and action. Mission, therefore, is *never about destruction of the human. It is rather about its cultivation, perfection, and healing*"¹ [italics mine].

Mission is God's saving activity entrusted to the church and it is the core activity of the church. God's saving action and church's evangelizing work take place *in this world and for the sake of the whole humanity*. For two thousand years, mission *ad gentes* is going on uninterrupted. But today, 'taking the world seriously' means to be faced with many challenges from the political social and cultural factors such as new personal freedom and individualism and relativism. Thus the anthropological

question - what does it mean to be human - is of utmost importance in mission theology and praxis. This emphasis has led Catholic mission theology to adopt an anthropological predilection, especially in the post-Vatican II period and this anthropological turn has seriously affected the catholic understanding and practice of *missio ad gentes*.

While Protestant mission theology is still firmly rooted exclusively on the idea of *missio Dei* and the great commission of Christ, Catholic mission theologies are divergent in their inclination to theocentric, Christocentric, ecclesiocentric and/or anthropocentric foundations. Anthropological grounding of mission *ad gentes* is discernible as prime in the practical realms of mission as well as mission theology of the developing world. A Christological anthropocentrism has found pride of place in recent official church and papal documents, in clear contrast to the long held ecclesiocentric position. We will trace here the course of anthropological turn of Catholic mission theology and briefly examine its implications for mission *ad gentes*.

1. Anthropocentric Turn in Mission Theology

Today, evangelization is given a firm theoretical and practical basis in Christian vision of man shaped in dialogue between the biblical doctrine and the modern and post-modern insights on man, society and nature. This provides fresh theological justification and a renewed spiritual impulse to shape a new mission theology capable of meeting the challenges today. Anthropological underpinning is evident in

¹Stephen B. Bevans, "Introduction", in Stephen B. Bevans (ed.), *A Century of Catholic Mission Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2013, 1-7, here 3-5.

all recent church documents of the twentieth century, starting with *Maximum Illud* (1919), and above all from *Ad Gentes* to *Evangelii Gaudium*. Pope John Paul II is the champion of the anthropological approach to mission, basing himself firmly on the Christological anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*². Christ is at the centre of proclamation, yet the human condition is the starting point and full realization of the transcendental potential of the human is considered as the pinnacle of evangelization.

Soon after the second Vatican Council, missionaries and missiologists in the developing world – Asia, Africa and South America – adapted an anthropological approach to mission, taking cue from *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate*, and later, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* as well. Hence the leading trends in mission today are rooted on a positive estimation of other religions and cultures as well as a critique of the social, political and economic conditions of human existence. Thus, inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and liberation movements have become inherent dimensions or *paths* of mission. Evangelization has, consequently, digressed from the proclamation of Jesus Christ to social and political action in favour of total liberation and integral ecology. The underlying presupposition is that the Good News is for man and, hence, the incarnational approach, which takes human condition seriously, is the best paradigm for evangelizing mission. The anthropocentric grounding of mission is a two-edged sword, which has, on the one hand, immensely expanded the vistas of mission, while, on the other hand, has doused the enthusiasm for the proclamation of Jesus Christ to the people who have not heard of him.

²Douglas Bushman, “Pope John Paul II and the Christ-centered Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*”. Cf. http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2008/dbushman_gaudiumetspes1_jan08.asp. (accessed on Jan 31, 2018).

1.1 Maximum Illud

Maximum Illud, the apostolic letter of Pope Benedict XV, published in 1919, was an epoch making event that led to the reconstruction of Catholic missions after World War I, and their flowering thereafter³. This document streamlined major changes in the missionary policies of the Catholic Church in the post-colonial, post-world-war I period, which marked the end of European missions in Asia and Africa. In the words of Pope Francis, “In 1919, ... the Pope [Benedict] recognized the need for a more *evangelical* approach to missionary work in the world, so that it would be purified of any colonial overtones and kept far away from the nationalistic and expansionistic aims that had proved so disastrous.”⁴ By laying strong emphasis on the need for taking into consideration the cultural and religious condition of the nations, this document initiated an anthropological approach to missions. Clearly, the reason behind the call for formation of local clergy for mission is anthropocentric: “For the local priest, one with his people by birth, by nature, by his sympathies and his aspirations, is remarkably effective in appealing to their mentality and thus attracting them to the Faith. Far better than anyone else he knows the kind of argument they will listen to, and as a result, he often has easy access to places where a foreign priest would not be tolerated.” (MI 14). *Maximum Illud* has assumed an anthropocentric approach to Catholic missions to make it universally relevant and appealing. We see the fruits

³Valentine Ugochukwu Iheanacho, *Maximum Illud and Benedict XV's Missionary Thinking. Prospects of a Local Church in Mission Territories*, Scholars Press, 2015.

⁴Lettera del Santo Padre Francesco in Occasione del Centenario della Promulgazione della Lettera Apostolica “*Maximum Illud*” sull'attività Svolta dai Missionari nel Mondo, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171022_lettera-filoni-mese-missionario.html (accessed on January 29, 2018).

as rapid emergence of indigenous clergy, indigenous church and mission theology in the subsequent period.

1.2 Vatican II: New Charter for Mission in the Modern World

Mission in the twentieth century could not be done the way it was practiced in the hegemonic pattern of the colonialist era, which saw territorial missionary expansion into Asia, Africa and the Americas. The “saving the souls” mantra based on the old dictum of “*extra ecclesia nulla salus*” was no more a credible argument before nations and peoples like India, which saw a religious and cultural resurgence coupled with the political independence. In such a context, the much needed positive estimation of other religions and cultures, without harm to the missionary nature of the Church, is carved out very adeptly in *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate*.

The path-breaking revision of the theology of religions and cultures by *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate* gave the Church a charter of mission, drawn from the living tradition and missionary practice, to navigate the rough waters of the post-colonial era plagued by many questions arising from 20th century developments in social, economic, cultural, religious and scientific realms. They demonstrate a clearly anthropological approach to religions and cultures, which led to the deconstruction of the ecclesiocentric missionary concept of mission into a Christocentric paradigm for mission in the modern world.

1.2.1 Nostra Aetate October 28, 1965

Nostra Aetate (1965) lays out the reasons for promoting respect towards other religions on anthropological ground. It observes that “day by day, mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger”. Men have a lot of things in common like one origin, one final goal, one God, one humanity, which draws man to fellowship. Same are the questions asked by men and the answers expected

from the religions, such as “What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? ... whence do we come, and where are we going?” (NA 1). The role of religions everywhere is “to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing “ways,” comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites.” Hence, “Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions” and considers that they “reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.” And hence exhorts all to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men”, through dialogue and collaboration” (NA 2) “for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom” (NA 3).⁵

1.2.2 Ad Gentes 7 December 1965

Ad Gentes assigns a rather creative role to religions in the process of human salvation, a marked change from a long-held condemnatory view of other religions by many missionaries. It sees religions and cultures as part of the “universal design of God for the salvation of the human race” and stated that “they may sometimes serve as leading strings toward God, or as a preparation for the Gospel” (AG 3). Thus AG assumed a dialogical position in relation to other religions and cultures. Both ecclesiocentric (AG2, 6) and anthropocentric (AG 8) approaches are stated vividly in *Ad Gentes*, leaving possibility of divergent readings open. However, the latter caught more attention and wider acceptance in missiology, thereby expanding the vistas of mission into cultural, social, political and economic spheres, even surpassing the religious concern.

⁵Notwithstanding, “[Church] proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.” (NA 2).

It has amply safeguarded the missionary role and mandate of the Church by declaring that 'the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature' (AG 2) by virtue of being "a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG 1). The grounds for missionary activity is not so much based on inadequacy of other religions, but on the universal salvific will of God (*missio Dei*). Missions ad gentes is clearly defined as "those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ" (AG 6). AG 7 is a clever statement of the three traditional grounds of mission: "yet a necessity lies upon the Church (1 Cor. 9:16)" (*missio ecclesiae*) by the will of God (*missio Dei*) and explicit command of the Saviour (*missio Christi*), to preach the Gospel (AG 7, cf. also LG 16).⁶



(Photo by Andi Rieger on Unsplash)

A theological anthropological ground for mission *ad gentes* is stated explicitly in AG8. *First of all*, "Missionary activity is *closely bound up even with human nature itself and its aspirations*" and hence the Gospel "cannot be considered foreign anywhere or to anybody" (Cf. MI 16). *Secondly*, "The Gospel has truly been a leaven of liberty and progress in human history, even in the temporal sphere, and always proves itself a leaven of brotherhood, of unity and of peace."⁷

⁶LG 16: "Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature", the Church fosters the missions with care and attention."

⁷Cf. Irenaeus, "Against Heretics" III, 15, n. 3 (PG 7, 919): "They were preachers of truth and apostles

Thirdly, since all humans are under the influence of sin and finitude, "all stand in need of Christ, their model, their mentor, their liberator, their Saviour, their source of life". "This is true first of all about persons, but it holds also for the various goods of this world which bear the mark both of man's sin and of God's blessing" (Cf. Rom. 3:23). "For by manifesting Christ the Church reveals to men *the real truth about their condition* and their whole calling, since *Christ is the source and model of that redeemed humanity*" (AG 8). The anthropological motive for mission is that mission *ad gentes* is ontologically entreated by human nature.

1.2.3 Evangelii Nuntiandi

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Pope Paul VI

enlarges the concept of mission found in *Ad Gentes* and gives a holistic mission theology: "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity

from within and making it new" (EN18). This is in fact a deepening and widening of the anthropological vision briefly exposed in AG8 that "missionary activity is intimately bound up with human nature and its aspirations". EN 19 explains further the 'strata of humanity' that are transformed: "for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas . . . , but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life". EN is thus an invitation to be a leaven in the world in the interest of

of liberty", as quoted in AG 8.

liberty, progress, fraternity and peace, while at the same time it distanced itself from concepts such as liberation, option for the poor, dialogue and inculturation. EN does not, however, equate evangelization to human promotion or material well-being, nor substitute mission with dialogue, liberation or inculturation, but reminds that proclamation of the Gospel as intimately tied to man's eternal salvation.

2. Impact of Anthropocentric Mission Theology

Ad Gentes, *Nostra Aetate* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* are excellent treatises on Church and Mission in the contemporary world. They created great enthusiasm among most missiologists, who got new vistas of thinking opened for their theological innovation, for the modern times characterised by democratic and liberal values and demographic and cultural resurgence. We see quick branching out of mission theology into myriad forms and fields of theology of religion, theology of culture and theology of liberation. Interreligious dialogue and inculturation helped overcome the Church-centeredness and colonialist cultural religious superiority complex of the missionary enterprise. Social and political activities and human promotion and development became the mantra of evangelization. Missions became once more vibrant. These developments provided missionaries with many new options for evangelizing activities and we see the unprecedented human promotion program in the missions especially in the developing world.

At the same time, it must be said that the new mission theology based on *Ad Gentes* collapsed under the weight of its own strengths. The selective reading and exaggerated emphasis on the novelties in these documents, such as the positive estimation of the salvific role of other religions, the portrayal of dialogue, inculturation and human promotion as

evangelizing activity per se, slowly but steadily, drained mission theology of its steam. As a result, Christ and his missionary mandate were eclipsed in favour of secularised answers to real questions like poverty, injustice, exploitation, leading to downplaying of Christian identity substitution of a radical commitment to the world for the commitment of faith. We can say that one-sided emphasis on the anthropological approach to evangelization, embracing AG 8 and EN 18-19, without reference to the major teachings of the same documents, led to the collapse of catholic mission and confusion among missionaries. Catholic mission *ad gentes* slowly reduced into human promotion with a religious touch, while Protestants went ahead with church planting.

Despite the optimism in the missiological circles, further discussions on the dialogical fronts opened by *Ad Gentes* deviated in ways not exactly intended by the mission theology of *Ad Gentes*, which definitely upheld the absolute necessity and validity of the proclamation of the Gospel and presentation of Jesus Christ as the unique saviour of mankind. The key question regarding the necessity of mission *ad gentes*, 'if there is salvation outside of Church', remained open. Other questions are: What is evangelization and its means and modality. Can the new-found enthusiasm for dialogue, inculturation and liberation be legitimately be called mission, which then boiled down to human promotion as mission, instead of conversion, baptism and founding of churches. These theological developments sowed seeds of confusion among many well-meaning missionaries, who toiled hard in the mission front. While the mission-donor countries still believed in and supported church planting, so called missionary countries like India picked upon the pressing needs for interreligious dialogue, inculturation and liberation movements.

Piero Gheddo⁸, an Italian PIME missionary for sixty years, and one who contributed a great deal to *Ad Gentes*, and *Redemptoris Missio* describes the missionary situation thus:

“The missionary Church, which seemed to be at the zenith of its outward thrust at the start of the Second Vatican Council, now saw a sudden collapse, largely giving way to a Church that is and was more “open”, but so open to the world that the latter could be saved without knowing or accepting Christ; a Church that need not proclaim the Gospel, or seek conversion and baptism; in short, a Church without a mission. ...

Right after the council, the dream of a new missionary Pentecost gave way to the opposite as evangelisation came to be seen as mere social activism. But the Father did not send his Son to earth to dig wells; the Church too cannot be seen as just a first aid agency.⁹

Speaking specifically of the Italian experience, Piero Gheddo continues that looking at magazines and books, conferences, campaigns, organizations and missionary organizations, one has to say that “the Catholic mission slid towards short-sighted commitments: weapons, water, debt”. ... When issues such as these gain the most weight in the “missionary activities”, it is inevitable that the missionary *ad gentes* gradually becomes little more than a social worker and politician.”¹⁰

⁸Piero Gheddo, *Missione senza se e senza ma* (*Mission without ifs and buts*), EMI, Bologna 2013. See Sandro Magister, “Mission without ifs and buts, Fr Gheddo's last work”, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/-Mission-without-ifs-and-buts,-Fr-Gheddo's-last-work-29011.html> (accessed on January 30, 2018).

⁹Sandro Magister, “Mission without ifs and buts, Fr Gheddo's last work”.

¹⁰Piero Gheddo, “John Paul II, the pope of the mission ad gentes”, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/John-Paul-II,-the-pope-of-the-mission-ad-gentes-26155.html>. He continues: “Today the prevailing mobilization is on issues such as arms sales to poor countries, the collection of signatures against the external debt of African countries, water

3. Attempts to Restore mission ad Gentes

The Synod on Evangelisation in 1974 and the ensuing Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in the following year were attempts to deepen the mission theology of *Ad Gentes*¹¹. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* amply highlight the original mission theology of *Ad Gentes*, and condemn the “impoverishing and even distorting” of mission theology in the name of *Ad Gentes* (EN 17)¹². The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* by Pope John Paul II was another ardent clarion call to bring back mission *ad gentes* to the centre of church's life. EN has preferred to use the term evangelization rather than mission, with a clear theological reason not only to avoid the negative connotations of the word mission in the colonial period, but to deliberately explain and expand the meaning and areas of proclamation of the Gospel. However, RM has reinstated the term mission *ad gentes* and the core concerns it stands for. *The Doctrinal Note* published in 2007 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith is another vivid attempt to highlight the nature and importance of mission *ad gentes*. *Dominus*

as a public good, deforestation, etc.” He says further: “the loss of the missionary ideal is not only due to the crisis of faith and Christian life, the loss of identity of the “mission to the nations” and the consequent confusion of voices in Catholic and missionary theological production and publications”.

¹¹*Ad Gentes* did not really develop a complete theology of missions. It just contained some new orientations only. Gheddo speaks of 5 difficulties that led to leave *Ad Gentes* as a provisional text. <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/The-Ad-Gentes-decree,-Vatican-II%E2%80%99s-difficult-mission-25964.html>.

¹²EN 17. “In the Church's evangelizing activity there are of course certain elements and aspects to be specially insisted on. Some of them are so important that there will be a tendency simply to identify them with evangelization. Thus it has been possible to define evangelization in terms of proclaiming Christ to those who do not know Him, of preaching, of catechesis, of conferring Baptism and the other sacraments.”

Iesus by Pope Benedict insists on bringing back proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus to the centre of mission. Finally, Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, has invited every baptised person to share the joy of the Gospel with everyone.



3.1 *Redemptoris Missio* (1990)

A much sharper statement of the “urgency of the missionary activity” (RM1), together with a stronger rejection of all divergent readings of AG and EN, are found in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) by Pope John Paul II, published to mark the 25th anniversary of AG. Pope does not hesitate to say that “Missionary activity specifically directed ‘to the nations’ (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium”. He dedicates the present document “to clear up doubts and ambiguities regarding missionary activity *ad gentes*, and to confirm in their commitment those exemplary brothers and sisters dedicated to missionary activity . . .” (RM2). RM has much to offer in terms of a corrective to the wrong emphases, that crept into the mission theology post *ad Gentes*, in terms of theology of religions, interreligious dialogue and inculturation¹³. RM traces the

¹³RM 36 states, using the words of Pope Paul VI, that there are also certain “excuses which would impede evangelization. The most insidious of these excuses are certainly the ones which people claim to find support for in such and such a teaching of the Council.” (EN80).

“reasons for the lack of interest in the missionary task” to widespread indifferentism, and to a religious relativism resulting from the belief that “one religion is as good as another” (RM36).¹⁴

Redemptoris Missio (RM 17) points out the real problem with purely anthropocentric approaches in mission: “ideas about salvation and mission which can be called ‘anthropocentric’ in the reductive sense of the word, can ‘become something completely human and secularized’ and” focused on man’s earthly needs.” Such “programs and struggles for a liberation which is socio-economic, political and even cultural, but within a horizon that is closed to the transcendent”, may easily get translated into “one more ideology of purely earthly progress”. The “values of the kingdom” as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood” promoted by them as well as the “dialogue between peoples, cultures and religions” fostered by them are “values to be promoted”, “nevertheless, remains within the confines of a kingdom of man”, . . . [when] “deprived of its authentic and profound dimensions”. “Separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed”, but some form of a “purely human or ideological goal”. (RM 17)

RM addresses all the implications of the anthropological turn one by one. Speaking of new trends in theology of religions and inculturation, RM says that ‘these new ideas are also qualified as theocentric and/or regnocentric at the same time in the sense of “finding common ground in the

¹⁴Pope says, “I recently wrote to the bishops of Asia: “Although the church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all men, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is ‘the way, and the truth and the life’. The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.”, RM 55.

one divine reality.” While “they put great stress on the mystery of creation, which is reflected in the diversity of cultures and beliefs, they keep silent about the mystery of redemption.” RM opines that since we know of God and of kingdom of God only from Revelation, knowledge of God “cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church” (RM 18-19). It is of the view that a proper theology of religion should not be “detracting in any way from the fact that salvation comes from Christ”, even though God “does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches.” Similarly, “they consider the Church herself only a sign”, “in reaction to a presumed “ecclesiocentrism” of the past”, which is not justified. According to RM, church too has a “a specific and necessary role” and a “special connection with the kingdom of God and of Christ”. RM avoids “falling into a form of “ecclesiocentrism”, by stating that “the Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the kingdom” with an “openness toward others, . . . and in understanding and esteem for human institutions” (RM 20).

Pope feels that inculturation is running the risk of “passing uncritically from a form of alienation from culture to an overestimation of culture.” (RM 52-54). Inculturation is to be understood as a profound and all-embracing process of “intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures” without, however, compromising “the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith”¹⁵. Likewise, RM 55 calls interreligious dialogue as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment and not a substitute for mission *ad gentes*. Interreligious dialogue is not evangelization and “these two elements

[dialogue and evangelization] must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable”.

3.2 The Doctrinal Note

The *Doctrinal Note*¹⁶ (2007) starts with stating that Catholic Church’s understanding of the Christian mission of evangelization, is “to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (DN1). It observes that “there is “a growing confusion” about the Church’s missionary mandate” (DN 3)¹⁷ and lists all the objections raised against proclamation of the Gospel and conversion:

“It is enough, so they say, to help people to become more human or more faithful to their own religion; it is enough to build communities which strive for justice, freedom, peace and solidarity. Furthermore, some maintain that Christ should not be proclaimed to those who do not know him, nor should joining the Church be promoted, since it would also be possible to be saved without explicit knowledge of Christ and without formal incorporation in the Church”. (DN3)

Under section II: *Anthropological Implications* (DN 4-8), DN answers every objection raised against proclamation of Gospel to the non-Christians. DN asserts that “evangelizing dimension “must never be separated from the commitment to help all persons to meet Christ in faith, which is the primary objective of evangelization”. Quoting Pope Benedict it says that, “Social issues and the Gospel are inseparable. When we bring people only knowledge, ability, technical competence and tools, we

¹⁵The presumption here is that “Since culture is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be “healed, ennobled and perfected”.

¹⁶Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* (Dec. 3, 2007).

¹⁷The same year Pope Benedict said that the “duty for the Church to proclaim Christ to non-Christians is less felt, has lost power and acclaim, is disputed or rejected.” Cf. Pope Benedict “All the Churches for all the world”, Message for World Mission Day (2007).

bring them too little” (DN 3)¹⁸. Also justifies evangelization quoting RM that ““Every person has the right to hear the Good News [Gospel] of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ, so that each one can live out in its fullness his or her proper calling”.

The much misunderstood document *Dominus Iesus* by Pope Benedict was yet another attempt to safeguard mission theology within a Christocentric paradigm of human salvation. *Dominus Iesus* opens with specific reference to the missionary command of the Lord and points out that “Church's constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure* (or in principle)”. He ends the document by proposing Christian mystery as the sole path to unity of the human family: “The truth, which is Christ, imposes itself as an all-embracing authority”; “The revelation of Christ will continue to be “the true lodestar” in history for all humanity” (DI 23).

3.3 Evangelii Gaudium

Pope Francis has given us an anthropological approach to mission and to Christian life in general, by integrating the theocentric and Christocentric dimensions without losing sight of the anthropological concern expressed as genuine love for man. Christian life and evangelization are both based on knowing and experiencing God's love, mercy and salvation, offered to all through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and experienced through “a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them” (EG 3). The primary experience of a Christian is that “the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others.” What impels Christians

“to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear” is the firm conviction that “we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (EG 9). Thus, it is the Christian principle of love for another that serves as the source and inspiration of all our efforts to share the Gospel, help the poor and work for social justice. Pope Francis calls “the proclamation of the Gospel, . . . is itself the prime form of charity” (EG 199), which should be the foundation of all charitable works in mission.

The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.” (EG 23). “Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties” (EG 129). Pope also believes that “evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social” (EG 181). Reading EG together with, *Laudato Si*, we can say that Pope Francis promotes evangelization of the whole creation, not just of humans. Pope links all human beings to creation: “We are part of nature, included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it” (LS 139). Thus, ecological concerns too are integrated into the paths of mission. Through his call to care for creation and invitation to “ecological conversion” (EG 49), Pope Francis has successfully proclaimed “The Gospel of Creation” to the entire global community, thus, setting a model for a Biblically based anthropological approach to mission.

4. Towards a Christological Anthropocentrism

Post-Vatican magisterial documents have not rejected the anthropocentric approaches in mission *ad gentes*, but have

¹⁸Benedict XVI, “Homily at the Mass celebrated at the outdoor site of the Neue Messe in Munich”, (10 September 2006): *AAS* 98 (2006), 710.

advanced it from the rudimentary anthropological turn in *Ad Gentes* and EN to a full-fledged anthropocentric mission theology in RM. Thus, in place of the theocentric anthropological approach to mission *ad gentes*, emerging from the liberal interpretation of AG, NA and EN, RM proposes a *Christological* anthropocentrism as the ground of mission in the contemporary world. Here Pope John Paul harps on *Gaudium et Spes*, especially article 22 to enrich the anthropological approach with the unique Christian vision of man.

4.1 Jesus Christ fully Reveals man to himself

Pope John Paul II connects the anthropological turn in mission theology to the Christian vision of man articulate in GS 22. Proposing a “unified understanding of the human condition that begins with God's revelation”, Pope John Paul II pointed mission in the perspective of encounter with Jesus Christ. For him “missionary activity . . . has but one purpose: to serve man by revealing to him the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ” (RM 2). He declares *evangelization as “the primary service which the church can render to every individual and to all humanity* [italics mine] in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvellous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself” (RM 2). Pope had stated earlier in *Redemptor Hominis* that “Christ the Redeemer,” ... “fully reveals man to himself. ... The person who wishes to understand himself thoroughly. . . must . . . draw near to Christ. ... [The] Redemption that took place through the cross has definitively restored to man his dignity and given back meaning to his life in the world.” (RH 10). Thus, Christ and modern man are set as the essential poles of the dialogue between the Church and the modern world.

Although this Christological anthropology of GS is developed in pastoral perspective, it is equally applicable to mission theology, “seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation”. GS 22 sees man in relation to Christ: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come,¹⁹ namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, *fully reveals man to man himself* [italics mine] and makes his supreme calling clear.” Incarnation is the manner and motive of this thinking:” He Who is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15; Cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), is Himself the perfect man.”. ... by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man.” Through his passion, death and resurrection, Christ offers redemption from sin and death to everyone and invites all to share in his Sonship, the ultimate vocation of man²⁰. And “Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery”²¹. In short, these actions

¹⁹GS quotes: Cf. Rom. 5: 14. Cf. Tertullian, *De carnis resurrectione* 6: “The shape that the slime of the earth was given was intended with a view to Christ, the future man.”: P.2, 282; CSEL 47, p. 33, l. 12-13.

²⁰“The dichotomy affecting the modern world is, in fact, a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is in man himself” (GS, 10). “Redemption is the answer to man's perennial questions, but not only in the sense that it explains 'the mystery of man. ' Redemption at the same time offers man a source of enlightenment and strength to respond to his own supreme vocation.” See Douglas Bushman, “Pope John Paul II and the Christ-centered Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*” in *Ignatius Insight*, http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2008/dbushman_gaudiumetspes1_jan08.asp, (accessed on January 20, 2018).

²¹GS 22 ends thus: Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He has

of Christ and Holy Spirit in favour of man constitute the impetus and content of mission *ad gentes*.

4.2 Freedom - fulfilled in meeting Jesus

According to EN 80, one of the “excuses which would impede evangelization” is that ‘proclamation of the gospel truth would amount to imposition of one's views on others and violation of religious liberty’. DN also discusses the “legitimacy of presenting to others that which held to be true for oneself”, and argues that it is agnosticism, relativism and spiritual individualism” that is behind such arguments. It states categorically that “to lead a person’s intelligence and freedom in honesty to the encounter with Christ and his Gospel is not an inappropriate encroachment, but rather a legitimate endeavour and a service capable of making human relationships more fruitful” (DN 5). The foundation of the argument is that “human freedom cannot be separated from its reference to truth. Human beings are given intellect and will by God that they might come to know and love what is true and good” (DN 4).

This view is firmly rooted in the teaching of the *Decree on Religious Liberty*: “all men should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth” (DH 5). According to *Gaudium et Spes* by ‘being faithful to himself in seeking the truth, he is in fact being faithful to God, Who is the Author of human nature and thus of the innate desire to seek the truth. By seeking the truth man is in fact seeking God’ (Cf. GS 17, GS 41)²².

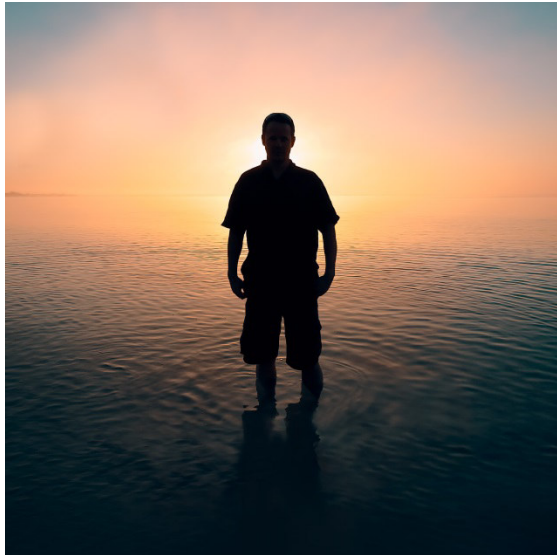
lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit; Abba, Father (*Rom.* 8:15 and *Gal.* 4:6; cf. also *John* 1:22 and *John* 3:1-2).

²²The fundamental presupposition of *Gaudium et Spes* is precisely this unity of truth as it pertains to the human person, that is, to anthropology. “For though the same God is Saviour and Creator, Lord

RM 39 says that “All forms of missionary activity are marked by an awareness that one is furthering human freedom by proclaiming Jesus Christ”; “mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. *The Church proposes; she imposes nothing*²³. She respects individuals and cultures, and she honours the sanctuary of conscience. The *Doctrinal Note*, likewise, argues further that “The communication of religiously significant events and truths in order that they will be accepted by others is not only in profound harmony with the human phenomena of dialogue, proclamation and education, it also corresponds to another important anthropological fact: the desire, which is proper to the human person, to have others share in one’s own goods.” (DN 7) Thus the Gospel in no way detracts from man's freedom, from the respect that is owed to every culture and to whatever is good in each religion; rather the Church wants everyone to share in these goods so that they may possess the fullness of truth and the fullness of the means of salvation, in order “to enter into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (*Rom* 8:21) (RM 3). In short, nothing puts in play human freedom like the search for the good and the true and hence, evangelization which creates an affinity for the truth and draws the human heart towards it is an a celebration of freedom.

of human history as well as of salvation history, in the divine arrangement itself, the rightful autonomy of the creature, and particularly of man is not withdrawn, but is rather re-established in its own dignity and strengthened in it” (GS 41).

²³As a counter argument it asks, “And why should only falsehood and error, debasement and pornography have the right to be put before people and often unfortunately imposed on them by the destructive propaganda of the mass media, by the tolerance of legislation, the timidity of the good and the impudence of the wicked? The respectful presentation of Christ and His kingdom is more than the evangelizer's right; it is his duty.” (EN 80).



(Photo by Simon Matzinger on Unsplash)

4.3 Mission for 'Rebirth of Humanity'

RM concludes with a call to “cooperate in the Church's apostolic mission for the rebirth of humanity” (RM 92). Evangelization is an act of enriching both the evangelizer and the evangelized (DN 6). EN 18-19 has expressed it best: “evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence *transforming humanity from within and making it new* (EN18). It is not merely an invitation to change of religion but a call for radical renewal of human nature, in accordance with the plan of creation as us expressed by EN 19: “for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation” (EN 19). Thus evangelization calls for a *regeneration* of cultures (EN 20) - and thereby humanity itself - through encounter with the Gospel. Evangelization aims at holistic renewal of man and all human institutions. Evangelization takes account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of

man's concrete life, both personal and social, political and economic, material and spiritual, (EN 29). That is why there is a profound link between “evangelization and human advancement- development and liberation” (EN 31). The “Joy of the Gospel” (*Evangeli Gaudium*) and 'the Gospel of Creation' explained in *Laudato Si* have streamlined an integral ecology for the rebirth and flourishing of humanity. Mission *ad gentes* does not dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption. In the Christian vision, “the ultimate fulfilment of the vocation of the human person is found in accepting the revelation of God in Christ as proclaimed by the Church” (EN 27). Hence, it is by helping “all persons to meet Christ in faith, which is the primary objective of evangelization” that we can bring about the rebirth of humanity.

Since the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus is essential for the rebirth of humanity, “Church holds that these multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ”. It is in Christ that “the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth” (EN 53). EN states that “the respectful presentation of Christ and His kingdom is more than the evangelizer's right; it is his duty. It is likewise the right of his fellow men to receive from him the proclamation of the Good News of salvation.” (EN 80). RM is more emphatic when it says, “What is overlooked is that every person has the right to hear the “Good News” of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ, so that each one can live out in its fullness his or her proper calling”²⁴ (RM 46).

²⁴The whole quote is: “Nowadays the call to conversion which missionaries address to non-Christians is put into question or passed over in silence. It is seen as an act of “proselytizing”; it is claimed that it is enough to help people to become more human or more faithful to their own religion, that it is enough to build communities capable of

Conclusion

This study shows that the anthropological turn taken by mission theology in the second half of the twentieth century was a major paradigm shift in understanding and practising *missio ad gentes*. It was a game changer which helped Catholic church to shed the European, colonialist and ecclesiocentric garb of mission *ad gentes* and encouraged the emergence and flourishing of local churches, local missionary vocations and local theology worldwide. Corresponding to the socio-cultural and religious context of each continent, Asian Church focussed on interreligious dialogue, while African Church implemented inculturation and Latin American Church developed liberation movements. Soon interreligious dialogue, inculturation and liberation became the paths of mission in all the continents, as is exemplified by the triple dialogue mooted by Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Mission theology grew more than any other branch of systematic theology. Missions began to grow and flourish with growing number of indigenous vocations, ever new forms of missionary engagements in the form of educational, health care, and social and developmental programs. Evangelization of cultures embraced the paths of mission as interreligious dialogue, inculturation and human promotion.

While the anthropological approach did bear fruit in expanding mission to all strata of human existence as envisaged by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the priority of mission slowly shifted from proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, conversion and baptism to human promotion and developmental works. The shift from ecclesiocentric to theocentric and regnocentric approaches were really a

working for justice, freedom, peace and solidarity. What is overlooked is that every person has the right to hear the "Good News" of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ, so that each one can live out in its fullness his or her proper calling." (RM 46).

welcome change in the post-colonial period, but lack of explicit proclamation and reluctance and failure to bring people to personally encounter Christ led to the reduction of mission *ad gentes* into indirect witness at best, and, in extreme cases, into mere social and political work for human promotion and development. This situation led to confusion and dampening of missionary enthusiasm in general.

All the post Vatican II church documents and magisterial teachings call attention to this 'waning and withering' of mission *ad gentes* and propose counter measures to boost the proclamation of the Gospel. Often, these mission documents were either ignored or read selectively to further the anthropocentric approaches in mission. *Redemptoris Missio* proposed a Christological anthropocentrism, which is the most suitable mission *ad gentes* approach today, which can safeguard both the proclamation of the Gospel and the new-found enthusiasm for dialogue, inculturation and human promotion. As Pope John Paul II said it: "Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age" (RM 92).

(Article received from the Author)



(Photo by Yannes Kiefer on Unsplash)

Oltre il Teismo

Verso Nuovo Immagini di Dio

Fu per me un momento piuttosto insolito. Mentre sbrigavo i miei compiti in una delle chiese della nostra diocesi, una semplice laica si avvicinò a me e chiese: «Vescovo, è possibile essere cristiani senza essere teisti?». La sua domanda m'impietrì. Le persone di chiesa di solito non fanno questo genere di domande. La maggior parte delle volte formulano la domanda in modo tale che la risposta rafforzi o affermi ciò in cui già credono. Questa donna, invece, stava varcando i confini del consenso istituzionale, apparentemente pronta a inoltrarsi verso qualche altra possibilità. Inoltre, mi stava presentando, in un luogo pubblico, proprio la questione che il mio studio mi stava obbligando a prendere in esame.

Se solo riuscissimo a mettere da parte il teismo, allora altre vie per esplorare Dio si aprirebbero davanti ai nostri occhi. (...) Se le analogie umane proiettate verso il cielo sono finite in bancarotta, allora forse dovremmo prendere in esame quegli aspetti dell'esperienza umana in cui ci sentiamo spinti ad avventurarci oltre i normali limiti o verso nuovi orizzonti. Forse possiamo esprimere l'esperienza cristiana con immagini non teistiche. Vale certamente la pena di provare.

Molte fonti della storia umana c'incoraggiano a esplorare questa nuova strada. La tradizione buddista, per esempio, non è una religione teistica. Da nessuna parte, nel buddismo classico, s'ipotizza l'esistenza di una divinità estema. Quando i buddisti fanno esperienza, nella meditazione, della beatitudine o della trascendenza, non attribuiscono questo al contatto con il soprannaturale. Essi presuppongono che tali stati siano naturali per l'umanità e possano essere appresi da chiunque viva rettamente e apprenda le adeguate tecniche spirituali. Fare esperienza della beatitudine comporta lo svuotamento dell'io in modo da superarne i limiti sia della

soggettività sia dell'oggettività per essere Uno con l'Essere stesso, che i buddisti descrivono senza tempo e non creato. Tuttavia, difficilmente sarebbe corretto affermare che i buddisti sono atei, a meno che l'ateismo possa essere definito come qualcosa di profondamente religioso.

Durante la mia visita in Cina di alcuni anni fa, ho avuto l'esperienza di condurre un dialogo interreligioso in un tempio buddista con un monaco e sant'uomo chiamato il Venerabile Kok Kwong. Esplorare il terreno delle fonti della santità di un'altra persona e permettere a lei di esplorare la mia, è stata una commovente e profondamente vera esperienza spirituale. (...).

I buddisti credono chiaramente in Dio, ma non in una divinità che sia definita in termini teistici. Esplorare i livelli di significato che si possono trovare in una tradizione di fede orientale può aiutarci a imparare ad avere uno sguardo che attraversa parole così limitate come teismo. Rivela pure che le nostre antiche definizioni occidentali di Dio non esauriscono la realtà di Dio.

Ricordiamo, inoltre, che a Socrate venne fatta bere la cicuta, finché non lo raggiunse la morte, perché anche lui fu giudicato colpevole di essere ateo. Chiunque legga Socrate oggi sa quanto profondamente ignorante fu ed è tale giudizio. Socrate aveva una visione diversa. Vedeva la realtà di Dio attraverso lenti diverse, che le menti ristrette del suo tempo non hanno saputo abbracciare. Le divinità popolari dell'Olimpo non erano semplicemente abbastanza grandi o abbastanza vere per sopravvivere alla transizione da un'età a un'altra del genere umano. Così Socrate disse no a queste divinità e iniziò a esplorare nuove possibilità. Ciò gli costò la vita. Oggi però, circa 2400 anni dopo, è diventato un modello per i credenti che rifiutano il contenuto tradizionale di Dio senza rifiutare Dio.

Karen Armstrong, nel suo acuto libro *A History of God*, ha dimostrato che ebrei, cristiani e musulmani furono tutti a loro volta accusati di essere atei quando le loro idee iniziarono a sfidare la sapienza religiosa popolare della loro epoca. È piuttosto tipico delle persone religiose trasformare in idoli le parole religiose. Forse nella loro ricerca di sicurezza, essi identificano il loro concetto di Dio con Dio. Quando questo concetto viene messo in discussione, pensano che Dio venga messo in discussione. Ecco perché nessun concetto di Dio può essere più di un limitato costrutto umano, e le parole che personalizzano Dio, dobbiamo imparare ad ammettere, non rivelano Dio ma il nostro stesso desiderio. Quindi, i credenti in esilio sono costretti ad affrontare oggi il fatto che tutte le Bibbie, i credo, le dottrine, le preghiere e gli inni non sono altro che artefatti religiosi creati per permetterci di parlare della nostra esperienza di Dio in un punto precedente della nostra storia. Ma la storia ci ha spinti in un luogo dove il contenuto letterale di questi artefatti è interamente senza senso, le definizioni tradizionali inefficaci e i simboli non più appropriati indicatori della realtà. Parte della natura dell'esperienza di esilio è di segnare l'ora della morte di Dio per come l'abbiamo conosciuto. L'angoscia dell'esilio è dovuta al fatto che nella storia umana nessun concetto morente di Dio è mai stato poi risuscitato. Il teismo, come modo di concepire Dio, è diventato palesamente inadeguato, e il Dio del teismo non solo sta morendo, ma è anche probabile che non possa essere riportato in vita. Se la religione del futuro dipenderà dal mantenere in vita le definizioni del teismo, allora il fenomeno umano che chiamiamo religione sarà giunto alla fine. (...). «Si può essere cristiani senza essere teisti?» diventa quindi una domanda decisiva.

Il Dio adorato dagli ebrei prima del loro esilio babilonese non era lo stesso Dio che scaturì dall'esilio. (...). Gli ebrei uscirono da Babilonia come persone di fede, con un Dio che era stato trasformato rispetto alla divinità tribale del passato d'Israele. Possiamo noi uscire dal nostro esilio con un Dio trasformato rispetto ai concetti teistici dell'antichità?

Questa sembra essere l'unica nostra strada che abbiamo davanti. Può Dio essere reale sebbene non situato in un luogo esterno come un essere soprannaturale? Può Dio essere reale se non è un'entità divina che possa essere invocata per venirci incontro nei momenti di bisogno? Può Dio essere reale se tutte le immagini di Dio come un super-genitore, e quindi come una divinità personalizzata, venissero scartate?

Non "chi", ma "cosa"

Per andare oltre queste definizioni, è necessario porre le domande religiose senza pretendere di avere una fonte divina di rivelazione, bensì guardando l'esperienza umana in un modo diverso.

(...). Esiste, ci chiediamo ora, una dimensione profonda della vita che sia, in ultima analisi, spirituale? Se è così, di cosa si tratta? C'è un nucleo sia della nostra vita sia della vita del mondo che in qualche modo ci leghi a una presenza che chiamiamo «trascendente» e «oltre», e che, ciononostante, non sia mai lontana da ciò che siamo e da ciò che è il mondo? Se è così, di cosa si tratta? C'è una presenza nel cuore della nostra vita che non possa mai essere invocata come un essere ma alla quale, tuttavia, si possa accedere come a una realtà divina e infinita? Se è così, di cosa si tratta? Se potessimo aprirci a una realtà di questo genere, diventare intensamente consapevoli di essa e avere sia il nostro essere sia la nostra coscienza ampliati da essa, potremmo usare la parola Dio per descrivere quel modo di essere? Potrebbe essere ugualmente una presenza profonda anche se non fosse definita come una presenza esterna? Alcuni sicuramente sosterranno che si tratta solo di un gioco di parole, dal momento che è così in contrasto con i concetti religiosi tradizionali, tuttavia sostengo che queste domande potrebbero aprirci una strada verso un'esperienza di Dio oltre l'esilio. Credo che questa sia almeno una strada meritevole di essere esplorata. È anche una strada che è sempre stata presente come una sorta di rapporto di minoranza nella storia religiosa, se uno sa come cercarla.

Una antica parola ebraica per Dio, ad esempio, era *ruach*. Letteralmente, questa

parola significava "vento", un concetto naturale e persino impersonale. Il vento o *ruach* veniva osservato non come un essere, ma come una forza vitalizzante. Non aveva né confini né una destinazione riconoscibile. Tra gli ebrei si diceva che il *ruach* o vento di Dio si fosse librato sul caos nella storia della creazione al fine di generare la vita. Lentamente questo *ruach* si è poi evoluto e si è personalizzato e venne chiamato Spirito. Ma è importante notare che in origine *ruach* era una forza di vita impersonale, un'esperienza di «cosa», non di «chi». Il *ruach* o vento di Dio non era esterno. Era emerso piuttosto dall'interno del mondo ed era inteso come il suo stesso fondamento, la sua realtà vitale.

Questo *ruach* era anche pensato in qualche modo connesso al *nephesh* o respiro umano. Anche questo era ed è un concetto impersonale. Il respiro è una forza che sgorga da dentro ognuno di noi ed era concepito in un certo senso come identico alla nostra vita.

Ancora un'altra immagine impersonale di Dio, che si trova nelle Scritture ebraiche, era contenuta nella parola roccia. Sicuramente non si può concepire un'immagine meno personale di una roccia. Eppure troviamo nel libro di Samuele la frase: «Non c'è roccia come il nostro Dio» (I Sam 2,2), e l'aspetto roccioso di Dio era celebrato nelle Scritture ebraiche. Il Salterio proclama: «Signore, mia roccia, mia fortezza» (Sal 18,3); e più avanti: «Chi è roccia, se non il nostro Dio?» (Sal 18,32). Paolo addirittura chiama Cristo la roccia dalla quale gli ebrei bevvero l'acqua durante gli anni nel deserto (I Cor 10,4).

Se qualcosa di così impersonale come il vento, il respiro o la roccia poteva essere usato dai nostri antenati per concepire Dio, allora sicuramente dovremmo essere più coraggiosi e uscire dalle nostre immagini personalistiche e iniziare a elaborare nuovi significati e figure retoriche radicalmente diverse nella nostra ricerca di Dio.

In altre parole, gli antichi quasi intuitivamente riconoscevano i gravi limiti dei loro concetti teistici di Dio. Era come se conoscessero la loro inadeguatezza e improprietà ma non sapessero bene cosa fare al riguardo. Agli ebrei fu vietato, per esempio, pronunciare il sacro nome di Dio. (...). I musulmani, per la

stessa ragione, non erano autorizzati a rappresentare il Divino in qualunque modo visivo. Si pensava che tali rappresentazioni fossero troppo limitanti.

I mistici di ogni tradizione religiosa hanno sempre gridato contro ogni specifica definizione di Dio. (...). Il misticismo presuppone che tutta la creazione sia alla fine in grado di rivelare il divino dal più profondo del proprio essere. Quindi per il mistico, il Dio di una persona non è mai identico al Dio di un'altra persona. (...). Ogni persona è chiamata al viaggio nel mistero di Dio lungo il percorso della propria personalità in espansione. Ogni persona, perciò, è ritenuta in grado di essere una teofania, un segno della presenza di Dio, ma nessuna persona, istituzione o forma di vita può esaurire questa rivelazione.

Oggi i critici appartenenti ai sistemi ecclesiastici tradizionali del mondo occidentale sono pronti a definire e a respingere queste idee mistiche quasi universali come «panteismo», ossia l'affermazione che Dio non è altro che la somma di tutto ciò che è. Se sono leggermente più sofisticati, lo chiamano «panenteismo», l'affermazione che Dio è in tutte le cose, ma non è necessariamente la somma di esse. (...). Per il mistico, tuttavia, Dio non è da identificare con ciò che è; piuttosto, tutto ciò che è diventa la fonte attraverso la quale può essere visto il Dio ultimamente vero. Dio, per i mistici, si trova nella profondità della vita, mentre lavora negli esseri di questo mondo e attraverso di loro, chiamando l'intera creazione, che rivela il nostro potenziale più profondo, alla trascendenza. Si tratta di un concetto di Dio più facilmente avvicinabile, credo, se ci spostiamo dalla domanda «chi» alla domanda «cosa», e poi da ciò che percepiamo sia Dio a ciò che è la nostra esperienza di Dio.

L'esperienza di Dio in tempi di esilio

Il mondo della teologia accademica professionale è diventato consapevole della propria schiavitù nei confronti dei concetti teistici del passato, che non hanno più potere o significato. Almeno dal XIX secolo i teologi

cristiani di frontiera hanno cercato di liberarsi dal morente Dio teistico. (...).

La fine del teismo iniziò con il collasso del letteralismo biblico in Germania, nei primi anni del 1800. Dagli studi biblici, passò agli scritti teologici, quando fu evidente che le dottrine teologiche dell'antichità non potevano più basarsi sui testi letterali che un tempo le tenevano salde. Rudolf Bultmann, probabilmente il più importante studioso del Nuovo Testamento del secolo scorso, portò questo studio a una maggiore intensità rendendoci consapevoli che tutti i materiali del Vangelo sono racchiusi nella mitologia dell'antichità e che, pertanto, non possono essere presi alla lettera. La comprensione teistica di Dio era parte di questa mitologia. Bultmann però suggerisce che se potessimo demitizzare quei testi potremmo ancora trovarvi le intuizioni di una verità salvifica.

Alfred North Whitehead, che iniziò la sua vita professionale come matematico, espose il quadro teologico per percepire Dio non solo come un essere esterno ma come un processo divino che viene in essere all'interno della vita di questo mondo. (...). Questo Dio era, per Whitehead, la fonte costante di tutte le possibilità. La scuola di pensiero conosciuta come teologia del processo deve a Whitehead il merito di questa idea radicale, sulla quale si basava.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer richiamò il mondo verso qualcosa che lui nominò «cristianesimo non religioso» e suggerì, dalla sua prigione nella Germania nazista, in attesa dell'esecuzione come traditore del Terzo Reich, il bisogno di vivere in questo mondo «come se Dio non ci fosse». (...).

Paul Tillich, mio maestro ed egli stesso un rifugiato dalla Germania nazista, scrivendo nei lontani anni Trenta e Quaranta del novecento, suggeriva di abbandonare le immagini di altezza esteriore con cui il Dio teistico era stato storicamente percepito e di sostituirle con immagini di profondità interiore di una divinità che non è separata da noi ma che è il nucleo e il fondamento di tutto ciò che è. Questo Dio non sarebbe un potere teistico, un essere tra gli esseri, della cui esistenza potremmo dibattere. Questo Dio non sarebbe il tradizionale divino facitore di

miracoli e magie, il distributore di ricompense e punizioni, benedizioni e maledizioni. Nemmeno, questo Dio, sarebbe il capriccioso super-genitore celeste che ci consolava, ascoltava le nostre grida e diventava il terrestre Signor tappabuchi per alcuni mentre lasciava altri a sopportare il loro dolore fino alla fine in un mondo radicalmente ingiusto.

Il Dio al quale Tillich faceva riferimento era l'infinito centro della vita. Questo Dio non era una persona ma, piuttosto, secondo le intuizioni dei mistici, questo Dio era la presenza mistica in cui ogni personalità poteva fiorire. Questo Dio non era un essere ma, piuttosto, la forza che chiamava l'essere in ogni creatura. Questo Dio non era una forza personale ed esterna che poteva essere invocata, bensì una realtà interiore che, quando sperimentata, ci apriva al significato della vita stessa.

Per Tillich, non esisteva la possibilità d'implorare un potere esterno a servizio delle nostre esigenze. Piuttosto, si sperimentava una crescente consapevolezza del Fondamento dell'essere e del proprio rapporto con tutti coloro che pure condividevano quell'infinito e inesauribile fondamento.

Tillich pensava che la parola Dio fosse stata catturata, corrotta e distorta dalle morenti immagini esterne del consenso teologico teistico di ieri. Era convinto che quelle immagini dovessero morire prima che la parola Dio potesse essere usata di nuovo con significato. Esortò a una moratoria sull'uso della parola Dio per almeno cento anni. Ma questa esortazione non ha avuto seguito. I discorsi su Dio abbondano, e molti di essi sono ancora teistici. C'è qualcosa però di tipicamente diverso nel parlare di Dio quando si è in esilio. In questo periodo di esilio tutte le idee di Dio sono aperte al dibattito. (...).

Dio è sempre stato identificato con ciò che dà vita. (...). Dietro (...) il contenuto di ogni immagine di Dio c'era il significato di Dio come datore di vita, fonte della stessa vitalità. Perciò Tillich invitava i suoi lettori a esaminare l'esistenza e a scoprire cos'è che chiama le persone alla vita e, una volta individuato, a riconoscerlo come una manifestazione del divino se non la fonte divina stessa.

Un nuovo programma per la vita religiosa

Ad alimentare questo punto di vista teologico hanno contribuito anche intuizioni provenienti dalle nuove scienze psicologiche. Fra queste intuizioni troviamo la considerazione che l'amore è anche fonte e creatore di vita. Senza l'amore noi esseri umani avvizziamo. (...). L'amore apre l'intera creazione alla vita e invita tutte le cose a essere. A livello umano, l'amore è la forza fondamentale che approfondisce i nostri rapporti e, allo stesso tempo, espande la nostra propria umanità. Quanto più l'amore ci rende liberi di essere noi stessi, tanto più siamo capaci di dare la nostra vita agli altri. (...). Quanto più esploriamo le profondità della vita, tanto più scopriamo che la vita è in-terdipendente, interconnessa e indivisibile. Al centro dell'essere umano non esistono cose come la separazione e la solitudine. Ognuno di noi partecipa integralmente di un complesso organismo vivente, i cui elementi costitutivi muoiono e nascono in ogni istante del tempo. Eppure ogni parte di questa totalità viva partecipa all'eternità dell'essere unita a un fondamento ultimo di ciò che lentamente ma sicuramente potremo un giorno imparare a chiamare Dio.

La chiamata quindi di questo Dio interno che troviamo nelle nostre profondità diventa innanzitutto una chiamata a essere. È una chiamata che non ha nulla a che vedere con la religione in sé. È una chiamata che rimette a fuoco ciò che è conosciuto come la dimensione religiosa. Il compito della Chiesa, per esempio, diventa meno quello d'indottrinare o di mettere le persone in relazione con un potere divino esterno e più quello di fornire opportunità alle persone di toccare l'infinito centro di tutte le cose e di crescere in tutto ciò che sono destinate a essere. In questo modo potrebbero scoprire che nella loro stessa personalità il Santo Dio, che è il Fondamento del loro essere, si rivela come qualcosa di diverso dal Dio teistico del passato. (...). Questo modo d'intendere Dio aggiunge qualità alla vocazione della Chiesa, quella di opporsi a qualsiasi legame che ci vincoli a qualcosa di meno della piena espressione della nostra umanità. (...). Con

questa nuova visione di Dio, compare allora un nuovo programma per la vita religiosa.

Questo programma non è agevole per tutti. La domanda sempre posta da coloro che non riescono a intravedere Dio se non in categorie teistiche sovraumane è se una visione di Dio come il Fondamento dell'essere non sia impersonale, un «esso» al posto di un «tu». A loro sembra un declassamento del sacro. Certamente molto della natura confortante del Dio teistico del passato non è presente in questo concetto. È difficile pregare in modo tradizionale il «Fondamento di tutto l'essere». Non c'è, in questo nuovo modo di pensare Dio, nessuna delle motivazioni esterne per essere buoni o fedeli al culto che era parte del Dio del passato. Il cristianesimo istituzionale perde il potere derivato da un Dio esterno che giudica e che impone motivanti ricompense e punizioni sulla base di quel giudizio. (...). Questa presa di coscienza potrebbe servire a riportarci al credo originario dei cristiani. Era di tre semplici parole: «Gesù è il Signore». Tutti gli altri credo non erano altro che un commento a queste tre parole e furono concepiti per servire i bisogni del potere istituzionale della Chiesa, che si autodefiniva come la fonte di tutta la verità, e destinati a escludere coloro che rifiutavano di assoggettarsi all'autorità ecclesiastica.

Soprattutto, questa visione di Dio solleva una domanda fondamentale anche per i credenti in esilio. Il Fondamento dell'essere è reale, o è un'astrazione filosofica che serve solo per attutire il nostro risveglio nella radicale solitudine di vivere in un mondo senza Dio? Sicuramente quell'obiezione sarà sollevata dagli spaventati difensori del teismo. Essi potranno anche chiedersi se si può trovare significato nella vita una volta accantonato l'apparato teologico del passato. Si chiederanno se vi è alcuna base per il comportamento morale in tale visione di Dio. Senza una istituzione religiosa che controlli il comportamento, riterranno che la civiltà affonderà nell'anarchia morale, dove la forza diventerà l'arbitro finale di ciò che è giusto.

Queste sono domande potenti e ansiogene, cui possono rispondere, in ultima analisi, non coloro che le pongono nella paura, ma piuttosto coloro per i quali le immagini

teistiche di ieri non sono riportabili in vita. Possono rispondere solo coloro che vivono in esilio. Tutti gli altri si precipiteranno a difendere le braci morenti delle convinzioni di ieri che si stanno dissolvendo oppure ad abbandonare tutti i sistemi religiosi come inutili chiacchiere, espressione dell'immaturità del genere umano che aveva bisogno di una figura genitoriale celeste per sopportare il trauma dell'esistenza.

Un nuovo canto

Cerchiamo però di essere chiari. Se Dio non è più da concepire come un essere «Altro e personale», vuol dire che il cuore e il fondamento di tutta la vita è impersonale? Questo rende Dio meno personale o, misteriosamente, ancora più personale ma ancora oltre le nostre limitate categorie e comprensioni umane? Queste domande, in ultima analisi, non trovano risposta. Esse, tuttavia, stimolano una serie di altre domande: l'essere di Dio non si manifesta nell'essere intensamente una persona? Si può adorare il Fondamento dell'essere in altro modo se non con il coraggio di essere tutto ciò che si può essere? Si può adorare la Fonte della vita in altro modo se non con il coraggio di vivere pienamente? Si può adorare la Fonte dell'amore in altro modo se non con il coraggio di amare dispendiosamente e abbondantemente? Ci sono eventuali categorie che potrebbero essere considerate più personali di quelle che chiamano ognuno di noi a essere, a vivere, ad amare? Una vita che riflettesse queste qualità non rivelerebbe l'immagine di Dio che è dentro ogni persona? Questa realtà non riflette un nuovo modo di vedere e di capire il detto biblico che «Dio creò l'uomo a sua immagine; a immagine di Dio lo creò: maschio e femmina li creò»? È possibile che portiamo l'immagine di Dio perché siamo parte di ciò che Dio è? Questi sono i concetti che stimolano la nostra riflessione come credenti in esilio.

Sì, è spaventoso pensare che non ci sia nessun genitore celeste in cielo che si prenderà cura di noi. (...). Stiamo prendendo atto che noi esseri umani siamo soli e quindi responsabili di noi stessi, che non possiamo appellarci a un potere superiore per la protezione. Stiamo

imparando che il significato della vita non è esterno ma dev'essere scoperto nel profondo di noi stessi e applicato alla vita con un atto della nostra volontà. Veniamo informati che la vita non è giusta e non verrà necessariamente resa giusta in questa vita o in un'altra. Così che dobbiamo decidere come vivere ora con questa realtà.

Non ci sono a quanto pare facili risposte. Non ce ne sono mai nell'esilio. L'unica cosa certa è che bisogna andare avanti. Non c'è ritorno ai sistemi di sicurezza del passato ormai abbandonati. Nessun adulto può tornare alla casa dei genitori una volta raggiunta la maturità. Quando lo spirito umano ha raggiunto la maggiore età, non può tornare all'immagine di Dio come celeste genitore. Il cancello verso il passato è sbarrato, se non da angeli con spade fiammeggianti (Gn 3,24), almeno dalla consapevolezza che il Dio teistico di ieri non c'è più.

Quando gli ebrei furono portati in esilio a Babilonia nei primi anni del sesto secolo a. C., sapevano di non potere più cantare di nuovo il canto del Signore, perlomeno non i canti di Sion. Sapevano che Dio non avrebbe mai potuto essere adorato in futuro nel modo in cui era stato adorato in passato. Dovevano imparare un nuovo canto o non cantare mai più. Questo, io penso, è esattamente il destino del cristiano moderno. Credo che il nuovo canto si stia sviluppando e voglio far parte della generazione che lo canterà. L'avvicinamento del Dio teistico del passato con il Dio imprescindibile che è il Fondamento dell'essere è, a mio avviso, il presupposto per far risuonare il possente coro del futuro.

Così inizio da qui. Non c'è un Dio esterno alla vita. Dio, piuttosto, è la profondità ineludibile e il centro di tutto ciò che è. Dio non è un essere superiore a tutti gli altri esseri. Dio è il Fondamento dell'essere stesso. E molto discende da questo punto di partenza. Gli artefatti della fede del passato devono essere intesi in modo nuovo se ci devono accompagnare oltre l'esilio, e ciò che non può essere inteso diversamente dovrà essere messo da parte. Il tempo c'informerà su gli uni e gli altri. (**Ref.: Adista Documenti, 23, 2019, pp.2 – 6; English translation, see website**)

How can we cultivate an interior missionary spirit and zeal?

Lecture given to the Members of the Society of Christian Doctrine in Malta, 2.10.2019.

In the mission document of Vatican II we read that bishops are to “make the mission spirit and zeal of the People of God present and as it were visible, so that the whole diocese becomes missionary” (*Ad Gentes*, n. 38). But how can we do this as an individual?

What is a “missionary spirit?”

With Vatican Council II (1962-65) the Church entered into dialogue with the world, with the problems and movements of society. The view on mission also changed from a one-way out-going activity to a “mission in dialogue”. Terms such as: inculturation, acculturation, and deculturation refer to this dialogical attitude in mission. But Jesus was already a “*dialogical Jesus*”: with the Samaritan women at the well (John 4), with the Canaanite women (Matthew 15), and with the sons of Zebedee (Mark 10). Now, this “dialogical spirit” is the right attitude to do mission today.

But dialogue for what reason? In the latest gathering of European missiologists in Sankt Augustin, Germany, a “dialogue of salvation” was spoken of. What is salvation for Christians? What is it for other-believers? What is it for those without any faith? Being open to what the other is seeking (health, success in life, partner, education, enlightenment), accompanying the person in this, and at the same time offering our view on salvation (being one in Christ’s love), is a great way of doing mission. Another aspect is: what we teach the other, and what we can learn from the other. We cannot always be in the position of a teacher. A good teacher is

also a good listener. We are sometimes very sure of ourselves and do not really listen to the other. As a teacher we can still learn from our students. There is a story in the Muslim tradition that teaches us this humility in dialogue.

Story of the Mullah and the Hermit

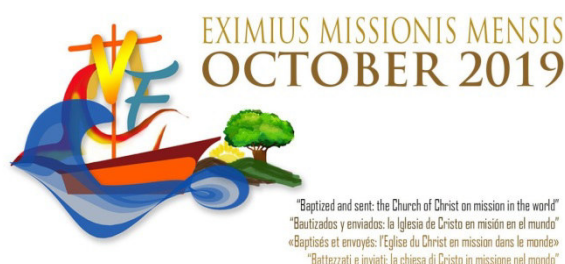
A Mullah, a Muslim scholar, was walking along the river. He was enjoying his walk when suddenly he heard a Hermit on the little island in the river chanting the name of God. He listened carefully, and he noticed that he was spelling it wrong. He was chanting “Al-

Illah”, but it should have been “Al-lah”. So he decided to go over to the Hermit. He took a little boat, rowed over to the Hermit, and said to the Hermit: “Dear Hermit, I really appreciate your deep prayer life, but I’m

afraid you are not spelling the Name of God correctly.” And so he taught him the correct way. They had a very nice chat and some tea afterwards, and the Mullah left. On the boat, as he was reflecting on the good deed he had done for that Hermit, he suddenly saw someone walking on the water in his direction. When he looked harder, he saw it was the Hermit! When the Hermit reached the boat, he asked the Mullah: “Dear Mullah, you were so kind as to help me to spell the Name of God right, but I’m afraid I’ve got it wrong again. Could you teach it to me again?”

This story shows that sometimes we think we are teaching someone something, whereas the other has already a much deeper understanding of it.

At the Conference of European missiologists, the idea of mission as a mission to heal the wounds of society (*mission to vulnerability*) was also stressed: listening to the wounds we



all bear, wounds we carry from the past (Nazism, Shoa) and present wounds (sexual abuse, immigration), and giving meaningful answers through our faith. To fulfill that mission, we also have to be aware of our own wounds and weaknesses (*mission in vulnerability*). The interior missionary spirit is thus on many levels a spirit of dialogue.

How can we cultivate this missionary spirit, this dialogical attitude, in ourselves?

There are many ways. Here we will give three examples:

- 1) The Bhagavad-Gita teaches a three-fold path to salvation: the way of devotion (*bhakti*), the way of knowledge (*jnana*), and the way of selfless action (*karma*). These three ways have a universal aspect and each one of us has a tendency in mission to take up one of these three. But of course, in reality they do not exist purely by themselves but are always intertwined. These three ways can suggest a first answer about how to cultivate this inner missionary spirituality: through study, prayer, and work. If you want to go on mission, you must prepare yourself by: **studying** the people you are sent to, their culture, language, and religion, **praying** a lot to let God work through you, and **working** without being too attached to who, but more to why you do it.
- 2) At SEDOS we have developed an on-line workshop called "*Fountain of Dialogue*". When we meet a poor person, or a person in distress, or a person in need, we should not withdraw but open ourselves up to him or her: first listen with the heart (Month 1: **meditation**), then voice our heartfelt feelings (Month 2: **prayer**), in order to find out how to help the person (Month 3: **dialogue**).
- 3) Dominican Father Jean Druel, in the context of interreligious dialogue, says that **dialogue** is not the same as **polemics** (discussion), nor **proselytism** (aiming at conversion), nor "**discours identitaires**" (talking without listening), but a way to open oneself to the truth of the other. During dialogue one has to be aware of the level one talks. Is it a scientific,

dogmatic, symbolic way of speaking, or sentimental expression? For instance when I, as a Catholic, say that Jesus is present in the Eucharist Bread, another person should not react by saying, "But that is just a piece of bread!". Feelings are not always scientifically correct....

How to cultivate the zeal for mission?

"The Christian zeal for evangelization must be grounded in Charity and Christ's love." (*Ad Gentes*, n. 12) This means that our love for Christ is the basis of our zeal for mission, and that it becomes concrete in our acts of charity. We can say that to cultivate this zeal we should meditate, pray, and enter into dialogue, because all this helps us to let the Holy Spirit work in us and through us. It is the Holy Spirit that pushes us to go "ad extra" (to go abroad), "ad gentes" (to go to the people), "inter gentes" (to be among the people), and not just accept what is or is not. It is like a flame that wants to burn. Because we need to be humble in our zeal for mission. We have become missionaries to make the world more holy, but also to make ourselves more holy. My Jewish Master taught me that human beings cannot give faith, only God can. This precept helped me greatly in my missionary life not to feel disappointed. It makes us be humble in the way we deal with people. We sow the seed, but God will reap the harvest when, where, and how He wants. We only do His Will. However, my Hindu Teacher explained that we can set up the right environment for a miracle to happen. As a lay person, you do that in your own work environment. My mother always told that my father was like a priest behind his desk in the shop. People did not only come to buy things, but wanted to share their experiences in life too. In the centers of the Society of Christian Doctrine this kind of healthy environment is encouraged. Let us look at our own life to see if God can be more present there so that we, as an individual and the Church as a whole, can become a sacrament in this world: namely become a way for God to be present among people.

(Video is available on Sedos website)

La Mission dans un Monde Pluraliste

Le dialogue est un chemin d'or qu'on désire pour le bien vivre dans toute société humaine. L'être humain doit vivre toujours en dialogue avec tous ce qui est autour de lui. Toute la nature existant dans ce monde parle à l'être humain. L'être humain est appelé à écouter (ECOUTE, Israël, Dt 6 : 4). C'est ainsi j'ai pris du temps en écoutant le témoignage d'une femme à Zinder (Niger) qui a témoigné sa vision de vivre dans un monde pluraliste.

«Nous vivons dans un pluraliste où chaque personne et chaque société est vraiment unique et riche en valeurs qu'elle peut apporter à son prochain», ainsi disait Fati. Elle est une femme qui a fréquenté les sœurs de l'assomption dans le quartier de Kara Kara à Zinder. Zinder est une ville située à l'est du Niger (à environ 900km de Niamey par la route RN 1). Zinder est une ville riche en culture et diversité de ses habitants. Zinder est aussi un carrefour de rencontre qui voit passer de nombreux migrants qui veulent aller vers Agadez pour se rendre à l'occident. J'ai vécu à Zinder 6 ans auparavant. Et maintenant j'y suis retourné pour un séjour qui devait durer 3 jours et je fini par rester deux semaines.

Le lendemain de mon arrivée à Zinder je suis allé visiter Fati et sa maman (qui est d'origine Touareg). Leur famille m'a toujours bien accueilli quand j'étais à Zinder malgré que je sois chrétien et ils sont musulmans. La différence entre nos deux religions n'a jamais été une raison qui soulève mécontentement entre nous. Par contre la différence de nos religions était une raison pour renforcer nos amitiés. Fati a toujours insisté que la différence dans

la création de Dieu est toujours fait pour enrichir l'autre et nous devons nous en profiter. Car les personnes qui ont la même vision du monde, il est possible de manquer à ce qui peut vraiment mener à une vie sainte et bonne. Mais s'il y a une personne qui vient, et qui est différent de toi, il t'apportera toujours une valeur qui te rendra plus épanoui dans ta vie. L'inculturation est voulu par Dieu selon Fati.

Au cours de ma visite chez Fati, elle s'est assise par terre en pleurant. Elle me dit, Musa (Moses), si tu savais ce qu'ils nous ont fait en 2015. (Dans mon cœur je savais qu'il s'agissait des événements de Janvier 2015 où plusieurs églises et biens appartenant majoritairement aux chrétiens ont été saccagés ou brûlés ou détruits). Dans ses pleurs, Fati continue à me parler. Sa plus grande inquiétude est la société de Zinder a reculé en faisant de tels actes qui sont véritable pas en arrière vers le vivre ensemble en paix. Ces attaques contre ceux qui sont différent de nous est un signe du refus de l'autre qui n'est comme moi. Ne trompons pas en disant que ce problème est uniquement religieux mais il touche tous les autres domaines de la vie humaine. Fati a signé que la personne humaine dans son ensemble a besoin d'avoir un grand cœur d'accueillir. Elle a insisté sur la transmission aux enfants de cet esprit.

Le manque d'une bonne éducation des enfants est la base des maux de la société Zinderoise. Fati disait que si les enfants (nos enfants) ont été bien éduqués. Les attaques contre les chrétiens ne seront pas une réalité.



Fati a constaté que la plupart des manifestants étaient des enfants qu'elle dit mal éduquer. Les enfants qui n'ont pas du respect pour leurs parents. Ces enfants sont souvent facilement manipulés. Fati voit une nécessité d'une éducation générale non seulement pour les enfants mais aussi pour les parents aux valeurs de bien vivre ensemble à travers un témoignage de vie des musulmans et musulmanes ainsi que leurs frères et sœurs chrétiens.

Durant ma visite, j'ai vu que Fati a été fortement touché par les événements de 2015 même étant une femme musulmane sans aucun parenté chrétien. C'est un signe de sa grande solidarité et compassion. Cela nous montre que l'affaire dialogue engage tous. Dialoguer est ainsi une affaire de tout le monde à son niveau. Je peux dire que Fati à travers son expérience à participé véritablement à construire un monde plus inclusive, ouverte à l'autre qui est différent d'elle. «Le dialogue est un chemin vers le royaume et portera certainement ses fruits, même si les temps et les saisons ne sont connus que du Père», ainsi disait Saint Jean-Paul II.

***The Future of the Church ... calls for a much more
active engagement on the part of Laity.”
(Pope Francis, Philadelphia, September 2015)***

SEDOS AUTUMN SEMINAR 2019

Discovering Mission in a Lay-context

Friday 8 and Saturday 9 November

At UISG, Rome

**Request by artist Koen Van Loocke (Belgium)
for a Video clip on SEDOS Website**

Dearest Missionary, one and all,

The director of SEDOS has asked me to make a movie of 2 to 3 minutes as promotion material for the SEDOS website. But how can one visualise and translate into moving images the inter-congregational efforts of your work in the missions and to spread the 'εὐαγγέλιον' the Go(o)d news and all your charitable work worldwide?

First, it took me a while to grasp this vast subject which needed research. I was stunned at the numbers, the different initiatives, the hopeful messages of all these Congregations. I then started to set my creative heart and brain into motion. How was I going to condense all of that into 2 to 3 minutes?

The key-image, the key-word that kept coming up was: *the body of Christ*, the collective body of Christ that all of you form a part.

So my idea was **to ask each one of you to send a photo of a part of your body**. This could be any part. For example, you might want to express something through that photo by sending a picture of the soles of your feet, because walking is a profound part in your life being a part of the body of Christ. You might want to send the region of your chest or back that covers your heart, your lips if you feel the word that is important. It might even be a scar on your body which tells of an operation, an accident or a miracle or a tattoo or part of a tattoo. Or you might just send a picture of the part you think is the most beautiful, to glorify that you were given human birth!! Add an explanation to the photo so that I can sense its importance.

Please do not be shy, your body is a divine instrument. The uniqueness of these 'testimonies' will be integrated into a collective work. And the contributions will be handled respectfully and anonymously. The variety of your pictures will merge into one abstract colourful body of Christ.

Practically, I would need the **photo to be as close-up as possible**, not blurry and at the highest resolution possible. A picture taken with your cellphone can certainly work, but check that you export and send it to me at the highest quality. (eg. not via Whatsapp which compresses it).

You can send the pictures to: theaterthes@icloud.be and put 'Sedos movie' as the subject. If you have any questions you can contact me at the same address.

Deadline for sending the pictures is: Sunday, 17 November 2019

Thank you all.

I am really excited by this project!
Bring on the pictures!!

Love and Respect,
yours in God,

Koen

WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING YOU AT THE SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY!

Friday, 29 November, 2019 at UISG
(Piazza di Ponte S. Angelo 28)
from 3 pm to 6 pm



(Photo by Philippe D. on Unsplash)

AND AT THE SEDOS CHRISTMAS PARTY

Friday, 13 December, 2019 at SVD
(Via dei Verbiti, 1)
from 6 pm to 9 pm