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The mission according to Pope Francis

The new perspectives of the Mission Ad Gentes  
and dutiful rethinking of the way of doing mission of the missionary institutes

"Church and Mission" in recent decades has been a classic combination expressing the relation forced between the two terms. Today, however, in the light of Vatican II, could safely be abandoned, as *Lumen Gentium* and, even more explicitly, *Ad Gentes* affirm that the Church is the people whom God chose to proclaim in the world the wonders of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2.9), the pilgrim people in the time that is "by its nature" missionary (AG 2). This means that the Church is mission before making mission. It also says Pope Francis, who reminds all Christians that being a disciple of Jesus means to be at the same time also a missionary (*Evangelii gaudium* n. 120), and an autobiographical section identifies with the mission: "I have a mission on this earth" (273). Unfortunately, this truth, fifty years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, has not yet entered into ecclesial practice. Many Christians, both in the ranks of the clergy among the laity, believe the mission ad gentes activity added, given to the Church, which could quiet the mind-even exist without it. The history of missions is proved, the effort to update methods and missionary personnel is going to prove it, and every year on the occasion of World Mission Day, you can realize how this commitment is occasional and marginal in the lives of many Christian communities and of many faithful. One can hope that the celebration of fifty years after the Council, along with the proposal force of Pope Bergoglio, is able to recover the missionary conscience of the Christian communities and to finally understand that the mission is an essential dimension of ecclesiology drawn from Council?

Providentially Pope Francis with his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* points to a "missionary conversion" of the Church and invites all the faithful to "discern what is the way which the Lord asks him" and to "step out of your comfort to reach all the suburbs that need the light of the Gospel" (20). The current world situation no longer allows the Church to remain inert and stops to wait; He must "go out" its borders to distant, the excluded and those who have lost contact with her (20). As the language of Pope Bergoglio is unusual, to be provocative, it must be said that he did not invent anything new in ecclesiology. Merely resume the category of "Church-People of God", which is in Sacred Scripture, one-way category in eclipse over the centuries, but recovered by the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium* 9). Unfortunately, in the course of the seventies, for fear of possible democratic tendencies, it was abandoned and replaced with that of "Church-communion" officially employed during the extraordinary Synod of 1985. One cannot say that there was a "coup hand" and even less a betrayal of the Council by the hierarchy, but he left to go in the shade the category "Church-people of God" has further distanced the Church from her missionary vocation, focusing on the community and communion. And if it is true that the combination of "communion and mission" has its legitimacy and its meaning from the Trinitarian communion, and allowed in recent years to understand and live the communion - an essential aspect of the Church - however Pope Bergoglio He has clearly opted to return to the category "people of God" (17), because this promotes and highlights the missionary and prophetic responsibility of the Church and of each disciple in it, without denying the communal dimension. This puts the Church of Pope Francis in the dynamism of history and gives the size unattainable kingdom of God, in whose service the Church is, as he said all"Angelus of 12 October 2014: "The goodness of God does not boundaries and does not discriminate anyone (...) everyone is given a chance to respond to his invitation, to his call; no one has the right to feel privileged, or to claim an exclusive (...) We must open ourselves to the suburbs, recognizing that even those at the fringe, even one who is despised and rejected by society, is the subject of the generosity of God. we are all called not to reduce the

Kingdom of God within the confines of the "church" - our "little one church" - but dilate the Church to the size of the kingdom of God. "

A "Church in output" according to Pope Francis

No coincidence or excess of imagination Pope Francis considers the Church of Jesus Christ a "Church on exit", a dynamic church that opens to the world, that does not withdraw into itself and its internal problems, but keeps his eyes on the "periphery" geographical and existential. In fact, a Church that does not open to the world, has repeatedly said Francis, is a "sick" Church (49), which becomes sterile and falling in the "temptations" mentioned by the Pope in the second chapter of *Evangelii gaudium*.

Such temptations, that is, the selfish indolence, pessimism and especially the spiritual worldliness, are so many diseases from which the Church must stay away and of which, possibly, care should be taken because compromise the joy of evangelization. The "Church in output" can only be an extroverted church, in the world and listen to his hopes. "Being Church means to be God's people," says Francis, "a leaven of God among humanity", "place of the free mercy where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged" (114). The Church is "the father's house where there is room for everyone", "is not a customs" that selects who can enter and who should stay out of it (47), but "as always attentive mother agrees that [all] live a conversion that returns them the joy of faith and the desire to engage with the Gospel "(14 and 139).

It is unthinkable to be drawn here is the identikit of the Church according to Francis. Moreover, it is not the intention of the pope to innovate in this field, but only apply consistently the conciliar doctrine. But once recalled the traditional face of the Church as a pilgrim people of God in the world, Francis draws the consequences for Christians that he considers all "disciples-missionaries", not disciples and missionaries, but just because they are disciples and missionaries to the extent that they want to be true to themselves and to their Christian vocation. How to mark the publication of the *Evangelii nuntiandi* - the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI on evangelization of the contemporary world (1975) - also to mark the publication of the *Evangelii Gaudium*, which symptomatically mentions several times the Paul VI's document, certain missionaries environments conservative, that is, linked to the mission ad gentes classical, reacted with dismay, fearing that broadening the mission of the whole activity of the Church is weakened and had compromised the already weak specificity of the mission ad gentes in a time when the missionary personnel is suffering for the numerical reduction. Perhaps they do not realize that isolating the mission ad gentes is not that close in a past that now you cannot revive, and in a model that is no longer topical nor feasible. Instead, I believe that Pope Francis, with this program for his pontificate, offer to outright mission and therefore also to the mission ad gentes three new elements that can renew it and make it responsive to the expectations of the world today. Same time, he has spoken to missionary institutes to undertake the revision of the mission ad gentes model, which after the end of colonialism is now hopelessly outdated and outdated.

A mission that points to the witness

The first novelty is expressed by a statement that shocked and scandalized the traditionalists, who fear will put in question what so far has always done: "The Church is growing not for proselytism, but by attraction" (14,131). This statement, which Pope Francis has borrowed from Benedict XVI, sends in archives the way of doing mission that has characterized the mission ad gentes of the last two centuries, when missionaries from the Western world exported the Gospel message inevitably coated with Western cultural forms and presented themselves with an inevitable - albeit unconscious and often unwanted - a superiority complex and conquest against non-Christians. With

this statement, Pope Francis suggests a new way of doing mission, which is not new because it was the mission of the first Christian community, the "mission in progress" or the mission by irradiation or attraction (cf. Acts 2:47). And the mission is done from the working and joyful witness of a community shaped by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist, made up of people who radiate their behavior in the face of the Lord and the love of the Spirit of the Risen One. The Pope certainly does not condemn the generosity and work of the evangelizers of the past, many of whom paid with blood for faithfulness to the Gospel. Nor he thinks that evangelization, as a proclamation of the Gospel and *plantatio Ecclesiae*, has gone out of fashion. The Pope instead goes to the root of the mission and calls for mission to witness to the Gospel with their lives and offering the Gospel lived, sharing with everyone, especially with distant, the excluded and the poorest, the joyful certainty that inhabits the heart of ' evangelizer, namely, that "God loves him, that Jesus Christ saved him, that his love has always the last word" (151). And the joy that comes from the discovery of salvation that infects the other and shows him, before you even tell him with the word, the mystery of the Kingdom, that is, life that comes from Christ's death on the cross. He says the Pope at the beginning of *evangelii gaudium*: "The joy of the Gospel fills the heart and the whole life of those who meet with Jesus. Those who let themselves be saved by Him are free from sin, from sadness, from the inner void, isolation [...] in this Exhortation I wish to address myself to Christians, inviting them to a new stage marked by this evangelizing joy and indicate ways for the Church's journey in the coming years. "

Preaching the Gospel is produced by the joyful encounter with Jesus and witness the newness of life that it has produced in the missionary disciple of love caused him to experience the mercy and love that Jesus provides free to all and from the desire to share this good news with those who have not yet received it. By living among the people and sharing the "joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men, especially the poor and all who suffer" (*Gaudium et Spes* 1), the missionary disciple shows, with his behavior before it with the word, the face of Jesus and the mystery of the kingdom of God. Hence the importance that he does not contaminate the image of the missionary disciple with that of technical and entrepreneur works even holy and beneficial, but remains above the seeker of God, the poor and solidarity with pilgrim people among whom he is and with whom he goes to the joyful and full search of adoration of the "seeds of the Word" (*Ad gentes*, 11) that the Spirit has sown in furrows of history.

#### A mission in dialogue with cultures

The second change that the Pope introduces in the understanding of the Church's mission today is the importance of culture and therefore of dialogue with the world at all levels and with all stakeholders and the process of inculturation in evangelization moment. This is not new, but peaking of a permanent dimension of the mission which is presented as a way of the Church's mission. In the past the emphasis was on dialogue as meetings of experts who are confronted. Today the Pope presents the dialogue as "the way" unavoidable, a daily reality of the faithful that before emphasizing cultural or religious differences, try to share what is common in the life and faith. The Pope says the duty to dialogue with everyone, to activate every possible form of dialogue following Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (cf. 72 and 120), and we could add with Nicodemus, with the blind and in general with disciples: a feature of the style of Jesus, especially in the fourth gospel.

The dialogue, as a commitment and style of the Church, has already been authoritatively formulated fifty years ago by Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*. In it Montini Pope states that the Church "must enter into dialogue with the world in which he lives. The Church becomes word, the Church becomes message, the Church has a communication" (*Ecclesiam Suam* 67). Dialogue says desired and awaited meeting, sincere listening, appreciation and respect for the other person; He

says also going to learn and not just to teach. Pope Francis takes up this mission mode and stressed the need for the Church to dialogue with everyone and always, "with the states, with the company - which includes dialogue with cultures and sciences - and with non-believers". The dialogue is imposed to the Church because it does not have all the solutions and know you can come to find as the result of a research promoted along with all people of good will. Bergoglio Pope writes: "Neither the Pope nor the Church possess the monopoly of the interpretation of social reality or of the proposed solutions to contemporary problems" (184, cf. 241). Secondly, the Church talks, ie also listen to others who put themselves in listening to God, because it "is missionary disciple needs to grow in the interpretation of the Word", by listening to the Spirit who speaks to all and not only the churches, through history and by so called "signs of the times." Finally, the dialogue is necessary for the Church's mission, is not a requirement but a cyclical feature of his style, because it inscribed in the identity of the Church, which is made in the image of the Trinity, a God who is dialogue. "To be faithful to the divine initiative, the Church must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all" (Dialogue and Proclamation 1991, n. 38). In the vision of Paul VI and the Council dialogue is not a means to convince the other party, but the attitude with which the Church puts listening to others in the certainty that God speaks to everyone, Christians and non-Christians; then the Church has to be learned by all and not only to teach. Unfortunately, many Christians still believe the dialogue an optional mission or an area reserved only to certain experts. The fact that Pope Francis again and declare the important calls and necessary in its various expressions, as dialogue of life (128) and dialogue with the different religions (242-258), reinforces the doctrine of the magisterium and removes the suspicion - unjust and offensive - that missionaries irenicism succumb to the temptation to avoid having to disturb the conscience of others with the proclamation of the Gospel and of Christian demands.

#### The commitment to the inculturation

Another aspect of the mission that, as we speak for decades, it is still new, or at least, not made, and that the pope today calls on the mission of the Church "outgoing", is the commitment to the inculturation of faith. The Church is aware that the Gospel needs to be transmitted culture (115-116). For this reason, the Pope renews his appeal to the missionaries so that they know, respect and promote the culture of every people according to the teaching of the Council (Ad Gentes, 22) and the Church's Magisterium (Redemptoris Missio 52-54). Also no novelty here, because starting from the Incarnation of the Word, the Word comes necessarily to humans through their own culture, so that inculturation is an unavoidable dimension of evangelization. In our multicultural world the urgency of inculturation of the faith and the Gospel (115) has become more alive. The Pope reiterates this need, which is not today, namely, that Christianity can not be transmitted by "a unique cultural model" (116): the need of inculturation in the mission which had been formulated in 1979, is present in all the documents of papal teaching on any subject they dash. Nevertheless they are not made many steps forward, for fear of compromising the unity and communion has curbed many of the possible attempts. With Pope Francis the inculturation speech comes once again from academic discussion to push the evangelizers to finally proceed to put it into practice.

One area in which Pope Francis asks the "Church in output" to incarnate or inculturate is the world of the poor, largely restating the theme of poverty and the poor and developing the "option for the poor" that, although present in the magisterium of the Church, in recent decades he had been regarded with some suspicion because of the possible ideological manipulations. Today Francesco has cleared openly stating: "I would like a poor Church for the poor" (198). Returns in these words the prospect of conciliar ecclesiology in Lumen Gentium n. 8 spoke of a "Church of the Poor", perspective too soon forgotten. It returns today not as an aspect ecclesial ethos, but as a "theological category before cultural, sociological, political or philosophical ... The Church has made an option for the poor understood as a 'special form of primacy in' exercise of Christian charity, which gives

testimony to the whole of the 'church tradition (198). This option - taught Benedict XVI - ' is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, to make us rich through his poverty ' "(ibid.). The Church's mission is deeply marked because the poor have a magisterium and the "hidden wisdom" of God reaches us through them (ibid.). No one can exempt themselves from hearing the cry of the poor, "no one is exempt from the concern for the poor and for social justice" (201). The option for the poor is a dimension of the Church's mission and a necessary dimension of the process of inculturation.

#### A mission multiform

The third innovation is linked to blackjack. The Catholic Church in recent centuries, for well understandable historical reasons, has stiffened the theological models and paradigms in pastoral uniformity that, to save the unit, has become a brake that one stimulus to evangelization. Pope Francis has expressly declared its intention to get out of this rigidity and promote greater pluralism and it showed the foundation in the "elusive freedom of the Word, who is his to effectively, and in many different forms, such as often escape our predictions and break our schemes "(22). This intention is proved by the many quotes that the pope is the Bishops' Conferences of the documents *Evangelii gaudium*, in addition to the insistence on the need for greater inculturation in proclaiming the Gospel in the various and different situations in which the church is located and commitment told to leave more space to local pastoral initiatives: "I do not think ... that we should wait by the papal magisterium a final or full say on all matters affecting the Church and the world. it is not appropriate for the Pope to replace local episcopates in the discernment of all the problems that lie ahead in their territories. in this sense, I feel the need to proceed in a healthy decentralization "(16). Francis does not hide the risk of a plurality of the Church, indeed expected that the Church will be "a people of many faces" (115), which "expresses its true catholicity and shows the beauty of the varied face" (116), because the revealed message "should not be identified with any" culture, and not fall into forms of "vain sacredness of their own culture" (117). This insistence on the incarnation of the one Church and its teaching in different cultural forms change the style so far followed by the practice of the Magisterium. The affirmation of *Redemptoris Missio* 52, that inculturation is "a need that has marked the entire historical journey" of the mission, expressing a hope rather than a fact. Even in recent years, while theoretically affirming the duty of inculturation and therefore a pluralism of approaches in the mission, the magisterium has especially warned against the risks and hazards in inculturation failed, blocking thus the realization. It is high time that you throw the inculturation of the faith and the Church in the variety and diversity of cultures. Pope Francis urges the Church to the courage and creativity, to open to the world without being trapped by the fear of failure (cf. 49). If the Church is multiform, the mission will also multiform. In some environments it will take place following the classic rules of the mission *ad gentes*, made of preaching the Gospel, the constitution of the Christian community through the sacraments and the promotion of the values of the Kingdom. Elsewhere it will be what today is called the mission *inter gentes*, which will aim at promoting *inter gentes* values of the Kingdom in dialogue with non-Christian religions also without coming to the baptism. Moreover, already Pope Wojtyla in *Redemptoris Missio* recognizes that there are people who belong to non-Christian religions, and "do not have the ability to accept the revelation of the Gospel and to enter the Church" (n. 10). In such situations the mission of the Church will point to the promotion of those "values of the Kingdom" which are authentically human values, common to other religions, and are part of the Gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus announced. So the new evangelization of those fallen away from the Church take on various forms and flexible ranging from dialogue of life in meetings working on the road and at work and finally forms of informal preaching (127), which aim to communicate without words, even without an explicit discourse, the core of the kerygma, joyful that announcement that warms the hearts of believers: "Jesus Christ loves you, has given his life to save you, and now is alive at your side every day, to enlighten, to strengthen you , to set you free "(164). Pope Francis

does not offer the Church a new theology of mission nor a new missionary spirituality (260), but give to the Church and to missionaries some new paths to be followed with "audacity" (261) and "creativity" (156). They will renew the Church - and in particular the missionary institutes - and rejuvenate most of the structural reforms that everyone is waiting and where all feel a great need, but which may remain only on paper and / or in the good intentions.

The consequences for a missionary institute you need not make a long speech to highlight the conclusions that must be drawn from a missionary institute proposed by Pope Francis in the field of mission. What is important is to remain vigilant and not be guided by the criterion of "it has always done so" (33). A first temptation, very often, is to think immediately of structural reforms. In this case nothing has changed structure of the Church and of the mission. What it must be taken into consideration in view of the "pastoral and missionary conversion" requested by the pope are the people, their attitudes and priorities of the institutions in respect of the mission. The temptations of self-reference, of sloth, of pessimism and spiritual worldliness hit single missionary and his institute and take away the joy of mission and evangelization. The attention to the ongoing conversion of individuals and communities and their continuing education as directed by Francis should be the first concern of a missionary Institute. The risk that it runs is to stick in its tradition and in mission models so far pursued. Since the missionary model inherited from the past still enjoys considerable appeal in the Christian people, it can be quite difficult to change it. And however much the signs of the pope as those of history will require a major overhaul to make it simpler and freer, poorer and ductile. The mission of the Church "outgoing" requires new attitudes which in turn posit a new training mission and a new style of mission. This requires a constant and periodic verification.

The first and most urgent of these conversions as the evangelical quality of the missionary's testimony, which must take on a new style of the most spiritual mission, taking care of the more his being a disciple and abandoning the tendency to do many things that are entrepreneurial attitude characteristic of a bygone mission. A spiritual style does not mean a disembodied style or outside history, in fact just the opposite. The presence of the missionary disciple must be that of the Sermon on the Mount: to be "salt of the earth and light of the world", an evangelical presence in the middle of the mass of the people, a fraternal and supportive presence in the name of Jesus. The missionary disciples will be faithful witnesses and true of the Lord and his Gospel, germs and signs of humanization: a behavior that reveals the truth of their vocation of missionary disciples, announce with life, rather than with the word, the beauty and the joy of knowing that God loves and the mercy and tenderness of God that conquers hearts. In fact, it's growing attraction to the Church (14).

It goes without saying that the report of the missionary disciple with the "Church on exit", the subject of the mission, is the servant, not the one who has his projects to accomplish, but the one who received the mission. His charisma in the Church is to be sent by the Church itself; so its presence is a subject, that of the servant that does not involve the liability for this, but presupposes communion in mission and the active and responsible obedience in view of evangelization. The service to the local Church must nevertheless be accompanied by sympathy and empathy for those who have the responsibility of guiding the community. This attitude is particularly important at a time when local managers are engaged in the process of inculturation of the faith and of the Church. They have the right to find in non-critical missionaries unripe but the catalysts that favor this operation difficult and delicate.

The missionary must keep alive in the local Church the memory of the distant and the zeal to reach them, attitudes that are likely to fade until it turns off to the emergence and growth of the internal problems of the community, often pressing and urgent.

So, an important responsibility of the missionaries in the local church is to recall the presence of the poor and the Church's commitment to overcoming the situations that produce and maintain poverty. They themselves must make their own "the preferential option for the poor" of the local community, live soberly, and contribute to the creation of a "Church of the poor for the poor" (198), experiencing the communion of goods, reducing any dangerous economic dependence and finance from abroad, while agreeing to be instruments of love for the poor. A church the poor for the poor "will be characterized by the simplicity of its services, the sobriety in the use of riches and the poor means and normally accessible to the poor, consistent with the mission objectives. will be exercised their prophetic witness denouncing all that keeps situations of "inequality" (52) that produce injustice and violence and, together with the Pope, they will say "no" to the economy of exclusion, idolatry of money, to the economical and all'inequità dictatorship that generates violence, culture of the gap and the globalization of indifference (55-60), dangerous drifts of globalization and neo-capitalism is prevalent today. It will take a respectful way of life of the poor and creation.

The missionary, on his personal experience, recalls the prophetic duty of the Church to be the "voice of the voiceless" (Ecclesia in Africa 70), not to be enticed by the local authorities and to maintain the detachment that allows her to have a critical look on the social situation and especially on that of the poor.

Finally, it is precisely the missionary charism to remember that the Church of Jesus Christ is the most extensive of the local church in which he is located, and that the world of the distant awaiting the Gospel or who have lost is a reality that should not be forgotten, because evangelization is first of the *cura animarum*, the intended target being the first of the Church.