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MISSION ACCORDING TO POPE FRANCIS

THE NEW PERSPECTIVES OF THE MISSION *AD GENTES* AND THE NECESSARY REVIEW OF THE MISSIONARY INSTITUTES' METHODS OF DOING MISSION

In recent decades the classic binomial "Church and mission" expressed the complementary relationship between the two terms. Today, however, in the light of the Second Vatican Council, it may be safely abandoned, since *Lumen Gentium* and, even more explicitly, *Ad Gentes* affirm that the Church is the people that God has chosen to proclaim to the world the wonders of the One "who called it out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pt 2: 9); that pilgrim people in Time which is "by its very nature missionary" (*AG*, n. 2). This means that the Church *is* mission even before *doing* mission. Pope Francis also affirms this, reminding every Christian that to be a disciple of Jesus means to be a missionary at the same time (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 120), and he actually identifies himself with the mission: "I *am* a mission on this earth" (n. 273).

Unfortunately, this truth, fifty years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, has not yet become ecclesial practice. Many Christians, both in the ranks of the clergy and among lay people, consider the mission *ad gentes* an additional duty, attributed to the Church, which could continue to exist without it. The history of the missions proves it, the effort to update methods and missionary personnel gives proof of it, and on the annual World Mission Day it is possible to understand to what extent this commitment is occasional and marginal in the life of many Christian communities and many faithful. Will the celebration of the conclusion of the Council, fifty years later, together with Pope Bergoglio's innovative power, succeed in reawakening the missionary conscience of the Christian communities and make them understand that **mission** is an essential dimension of the ecclesiology outlined by Council?

Providentially, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis insists on the "missionary conversion" of the Church (n. 30) and he invites every member of the faithful to "discern the path that the Lord points out" and "to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel" (n. 20). The current global situation no longer allows the Church to wait, inert and static (cf. n.15).

She must "go forth", leave her boundaries, to meet those who are far away, those who are excluded and those who have lost contact with her (n. 20). Although Pope Bergoglio's use of language is unusual, provocative, it should be said straight away that he has not invented anything new in ecclesiology. He has limited himself to taking up the category of "Church-People of God", which is found in the Sacred Scriptures, a category that has become eclipsed over the centuries, but which the Second Vatican Council recovered (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 9). Unfortunately, during the 1970s, for fear of possible democratic trends, it was abandoned and replaced with: "Church-communion", which the Extraordinary Synod officially adopted in 1985. It cannot be said that there was a "coup de main" and even less a betrayal of the Council by the hierarchy. Meanwhile, having left the category "Church-People of God" in the shade, which removed the Church further from her missionary vocation, the Synod focused its attention on the community and communion aspects.

The return to the category "People of God" stresses the missionary responsibility of each Christian

Even if it is true that the binomial "communion and mission" derived its legitimacy and meaning from the communion of the Trinity and enabled people to understand and live communion - an

essential aspect of the Church, - Pope Bergoglio has clearly opted to return to the category of "the entire people of God" (n. 17). In fact this category promotes and emphasizes the missionary and prophetic responsibility of the Church and of every disciple, without denying the communitarian dimension. This inserts the Church of Pope Francis into the dynamism of history endowed with the superlative epithet of the Kingdom of God, which the Church serves, as he said at the Angelus on Sunday, 12 October 2014: "The goodness of God has no bounds and does not discriminate against anyone.... Everyone is given the opportunity to respond to the invitation to his call; no one has the right to feel privileged or to claim an exclusive right.... We must open ourselves to the peripheries, also acknowledging that, at the margins too, even one who is cast aside and scorned by society is the object of God's generosity. We are all called not to reduce the Kingdom of God to the confines of the 'little church' - our 'tiny little church' - but to enlarge the Church to the dimensions of the Kingdom of God".

"A CHURCH WHICH 'GOES FORTH'" (n. 46) ACCORDING TO POPE FRANCIS

Not by chance or an excess of imagination, Pope Francis considers the Church of Jesus Christ to be "a Church which goes forth", a dynamic Church that opens herself to the world, which does not withdraw into herself and her internal problems, but keeps her gaze fixed on the geographical and existential "peripheries". In fact, a Church that fails to open herself to the world, Francis has said repeatedly, is an "unhealthy" Church (n. 49), which becomes sterile and falls into those "temptations" of which the Pope speaks in Chapter Two of *Evangelii Gaudium*, (24 November 2013).

It is by opening herself to the world that the Church heals her own troubles

Temptations, such as selfishness, sloth, pessimism and above all spiritual worldliness, are so many pathologies from which the Church must keep away and which, if necessary, must be treated, because they compromise the joy of evangelization. The "Church which goes forth" can only be an extrovert Church, listening to the world and its hopes. "Being Church means being God's people", says Francis, "God's leaven in the midst of humanity", "a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged" (n. 114). The Church is "the house of the Father, where there is place for everyone", "the Church is not a tollhouse" that selects who can enter and who must remain outside (n. 47), but "in her maternal concern, tries to help them experience a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a commitment to the Gospel" (n. 15, cf. n. 139).

Here, it is not possible to trace the full identikit of the Church according to Francis. Actually it is not the Pope's intention to introduce innovations in this field, but only to apply the Council's Teaching consistently. However, once having recalled the Traditional face of the Church as God's Pilgrim People journeying in the world, Francis draws the consequences for all Christians whom he considers to be "*missionary disciples*" (n. 120), not disciples *and* missionaries, but real missionaries *because* they are disciples to the *extent* they want to be faithful to themselves and to their Christian vocation.

The disapproval of certain conservative missionary circles

As on the occasion of the promulgation of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation on the evangelization of the contemporary world (8.12.1975) – as well as on the occasion of the publication of *Evangelii Gaudium*, which symptomatically quotes Paul VI's document several times, certain conservative missionary circles that still favoured the classic style of the mission *ad gentes*, reacted negatively, fearing that widening the mission to the whole activity of the Church might further weaken the already weak specificity of the mission *ad gentes* and compromise it at a time when missionary personnel were affected by its numerical decrease. Perhaps they did not

realize that isolating the mission *ad gentes* would only close it in a past that could no longer be revived and confine it to a model that was neither current nor feasible today.

Instead I think that Pope Francis, with this programmatic document of his pontificate, offers to mission *tout court* and therefore also to the mission *ad gentes* three new elements that can renew it and enable it to respond to the expectations of today's world. He actually calls the Missionary Institutes to continue to revise and up-date the model of the mission *ad gentes* which, after the end of colonial period, became irreparably outmoded and outdated.

A MISSION BASED ON WITNESS

The first affirmation expresses a novelty that shocked and scandalized the traditionalists, who were afraid to call into question what had always been done: "It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but 'by attraction'" (cf. nn. 15, 131). This affirmation, which Pope Francis borrowed from Benedict XVI, invalidates the way of doing mission that characterized the mission *ad gentes* of the last two centuries. Then, when missionaries from the Western hemisphere exported the Gospel message it was inevitably coated with Western cultural forms and they inadvertently introduced themselves with an – albeit unconscious and often unwanted - complex of superiority and conquest to non-Christians. With this affirmation Pope Francis suggests a new way of doing mission. However it is not new because it was the mission of the first Christian Community, the "mission in action"³ or the mission by irradiation or attraction (see Acts 2:47)⁴.

Mission starts from daily, joyful witness

The mission starts with the everyday, joyful witness of a community shaped by the communion of the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist, made up of people whose behaviour radiates the face of the Lord and the charity of the Spirit of the Risen Lord. The Pope certainly does not condemn the generosity and the work of the evangelizers of the past, many of whom paid with their blood for their fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel. Nor does he think that evangelization, as a proclamation of the Gospel, and *plantatio ecclesiae*, has gone out of fashion. Instead, the Pope goes to the root of the mission and invites everyone to do mission by: testifying to the Gospel through their example, offering the Gospel lived, and sharing with everyone, especially those who are far away, excluded, and the poorest, the joyful certainty that dwells in the heart of the evangelizer, that is, "God loves him, that Jesus Christ has saved him and that his love always has the last word" (n.151). And the joy that springs from discovering salvation infects the other and shows him, even before telling him in words, the mystery of the Kingdom, namely, that life comes from the death of Christ on the Cross. The Pope says it at the beginning of *Evangelii Gaudium*: "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.... In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in the years to come" (n.1).

Witness to the encounter with Jesus

The proclamation of the Gospel arises therefore from the joyful witness of the encounter with Jesus and the newness of life that he has produced in the missionary disciple, of the love aroused in him by the experience of mercy and gratuitous love that Jesus offers to all and from the desire to share this happy news with those who have not yet received it. Living among the people and sharing: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1; 7 December 1965), the missionary disciple *shows* by his behaviour, even before speech, the face of Jesus and the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Hence it is important not to confuse this image with that of a technician or an entrepreneur of works however holy and beneficial, but that

the missionary disciple remain above all the seeker of God, as a poor and supportive pilgrim of the people in whose midst he lives and with whom he goes on the joyous worshipful search for the "seeds of the Word" (*Ad Gentes*, n. 11) that the Spirit has sown in furrows of history.

A MISSION IN DIALOGUE WITH CULTURE

The second novelty the Pope introduces in understanding the Church's mission today is the importance of culture and therefore of dialogue⁵ with the world at all levels and with all the interlocutors and of the process of inculturation at the moment of evangelization. In fact, this is not a novelty but it stresses the permanent dimension of the mission that is presented as the *style* of the Church's mission.

The importance of dialogue and culture

In the past, dialogue was perceived as a confrontation among experts. Today the Pope presents "evangelization" as an unavoidable "path of dialogue" (n. 238), part of the daily life of the faithful who, before emphasizing cultural or religious differences, try to share the common factors in life and in faith. The Pope affirms the duty to dialogue with everyone, to enter into every possible form of dialogue after the example of Jesus in the encounter with the Samaritan woman (cf. n. 72 and n. 120) and we could add with Nicodemus, with the man born blind and in general with the disciples. This approach was characteristic of Jesus' style, especially in the Fourth Gospel.

Dialogue with everyone always

Dialogue, as a commitment and *style* of the Church, was already authoritatively formulated fifty years ago by Paul VI in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*. In it, Pope Montini affirmed that "The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. The Church has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make", (*Ecclesiam Suam*, n. 65). Dialogue means positive reciprocal encounter, sincere listening, esteem and respect for the interlocutor; it also means a wish to learn and not just to teach. Pope Francis takes up this modality of the mission and insists on the need for the Church to dialogue with everyone and always, "with States, dialogue with society - including dialogue with cultures and the sciences - and dialogue with non-believers" (n. 238). Dialogue is a necessity for the Church because she does not have all the solutions but knows she can identify them and consider them to be the result of research undertaken jointly with all men of good will. Pope Bergoglio writes: "Neither the Pope nor the Church have a monopoly or the interpretation of social realities or the proposal of solutions to contemporary problems" (n. 184, cf. 241).

Listening to the Spirit and observing the signs of the times

Secondly, the Church in dialogue means that she also listens to others who listen to God, because "the Church is herself a missionary disciple. She needs to grow in her interpretation of the revealed word" (n. 40), by listening to the Spirit who speaks to everyone, not only to the Churches, throughout history, attentive to the so-called "signs of the times" (n. 51). Finally, dialogue is necessary for the Church's mission, it is not an accessory need but a feature of her style, because it is inscribed in the identity of the Church, which is made in the image of the Trinity, of a God who is dialogue. "In faithfulness to the divine initiative the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women" (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, 19 May 1991, n. 38). In the vision of Paul VI and the Council, the purpose of dialogue is not to convince the interlocutor, but the way the Church is ready to listen to others in the certainty that God speaks to everyone, Christians and non-Christians; so the Church can learn from everyone and not only teach.⁶ Unfortunately, many Christians still consider dialogue to be an *optional* aspect of the mission or an area reserved to certain experts. The fact that Pope Francis refers to it again and states that it is important and necessary in its various expressions, such as a dialogue "related to the concerns which the person

may have expressed" (n. 128); as dialogue with the various religions (nn. 242-258), reinforces the Teaching of the Magisterium and removes the suspicion - unjust and offensive - that missionaries yield to the temptation of Irenicism in order not to disturb the conscience of others by proclaiming the Gospel and Christianity's demands.

THE COMMITMENT TO INCULTURATION

Another aspect of mission, although already spoken about for decades, is still new or, at least, little implemented: namely, the mission of a "Church going forth". This is what the Pope is asking for today, as well as the commitment to inculturate the faith.

The Gospel cannot be spread through a single model

The Church is aware that for the Gospel to be transmitted it needs culture as a vehicle (cf. nn.115-116). For this reason the Pope once again asks missionaries to learn about, respect and promote the culture of every people according to the Teaching of the Council (cf. *Ad Gentes*, n. 22) and of the Ecclesial Magisterium (*Redemptoris Missio*, cf. nn. 52-54). Here too there is no change because, starting from the Incarnation of the Verb, the Word reaches man necessarily through his own culture. "The need for such involvement has marked the Church's pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent" (n. 52), because inculturation is an inalienable dimension of evangelization.

In our multicultural world the urgency to inculturate the faith and the Gospel (cf. n. 115) has become more pressing. The Pope stresses this need, which is not recent, ⁷ because "Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression" to be transmitted because, ... "it will also reflect the different ... cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root" (n. 116). The need for inculturation in mission, formulated back in 1979, appears in all the documents of the Pontifical Magisterium whatever the subject treated. Nevertheless, not many steps forward have been made. Fear of compromising unity and communion has slowed down many of the possible attempts. With Pope Francis the matter of inculturation has once again emerged from the academic discussion to push the evangelizers to implement it at last.

To become incarnate in the world of the poor

One area in which Pope Francis asks the "Church which goes forth" (I, n. 20) to incarnate herself or inculturate herself is the world of the poor, broadly reformulating the theme of poverty and the poor and developing that "option for the poor" which, although present in the Church's Magisterium, had been looked upon with some suspicion in recent decades because of possible ideological manipulation. Today, Francis has overcome this by saying openly: "I want a Church which is poor and for the poor" (n. 198). These words reflect the Conciliar ecclesiology which spoke of a "Church of the poor" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8), a perspective that was forgotten all too soon. Today it appears not as an aspect of ecclesial ethos, but as a "theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one.... The Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a 'special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness'. 'This option', - as Benedict XVI has taught - 'is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty'" (n. 198). The Church is deeply marked by this mission because the poor "have much to teach us" and God's "mysterious wisdom" reaches us through them (*ibid.*). No one can avoid hearing the cry of the poor, "none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice" (n. 201). The option for the poor is a dimension of the mission of the Church and an inalienable dimension of the process of inculturation.

A PLURIFORM MISSION

The third novelty stems from what has been said so far. The Catholic Church in recent centuries, for well understood historical reasons, has sought to bring theological models and pastoral paradigms into uniformity to save unity, but they have served to slow evangelization rather than to stimulate it. Pope Francis has expressly stated that he wants to get out of this rigid framework to promote greater pluralism.

Promote greater pluralism

Pope Francis has identified the basis in the Word's "unpredictable power...The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking" (n. 22). This intention is expressed in many of the quotations the Pope has taken from episcopal documents in *Evangelii Gaudium*, in addition to his insistence on the need for greater inculturation, such as adapting the proclamation of the Gospel to the various and different situations where the Church is; honouring the commitment to leave more room for local pastoral initiatives. "Nor do I believe that the papal Magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises on their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization'" (n. 16). Francis does not overlook the risk of plurality in the Church, rather he foresees that the Church will be "A people of many faces" (n. 115), which "will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is revealed and takes root"...as "the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the 'beauty of her varied face'" (n. 116), because "the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural". One should "not fall into a needless hallowing of our own culture" (n.117).

This insistence on the incarnation of the one Church and her Magisterium in different cultural forms alters the style of the Magisterium as practiced up to now. The affirmation in *Redemptoris Missio*, according to which: "The need for such involvement (inculturation) has marked the Church's pilgrimage throughout her history" (n. 52). However, this expresses a hope rather than a fact. Even in recent years, while theoretically affirming the duty to inculturate the faith, implying different forms of approach to the mission, the Magisterium has above all warned against the risks and dangers inherent in a failed inculturation, thus blocking its realization. It is now time to implement the inculturation of the faith and of the Church in the variety and plurality of cultures. Pope Francis urges the Church to be courageous, creative, and to be open to the world without being hindered by the fear of making mistakes (cf. n. 49). If the Church adopts a plurality of forms, her mission will also become plural. In some circles she will follow the classical canons of the mission *ad gentes*, made up of preaching the Gospel, establishing the Christian community through the sacraments and promoting the values of the Kingdom.

The mission 'inter gentes'

Elsewhere the Church will exercise what is called the mission *inter gentes* today, which will aim at promoting the values of the Kingdom in dialogue with non-Christian religions even without the need for Baptism. After all, in *Redemptoris Missio* Pope Wojtyla already recognized that there are "many people ... brought up in other religious traditions ... who belong to non-Christian religions ... do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the Gospel revelation or to enter the Church" (n.10). In such situations the Church's mission will aim at promoting those "values of the Kingdom" which are authentic human values, common to other religions, and are part of the Gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus announced. Thus the new evangelization of those who have distanced themselves from the Church will assume varied, flexible forms, ranging from the dialogue of life, to week-day meetings on the street or at work and eventually to forms of informal preaching (cf. n.

127), which even without words seek to communicate, even without an explicit word, the core of the *kerygma*: that joyful proclamation that warms the heart of believers: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you" (n. 164).

Some new paths to take boldly

Pope Francis does not offer the Church a new theology of the mission, nor even a new missionary spirituality, but "some thoughts about the spirit of the new evangelization" (n. 260). He points out to the Church and to missionaries some new paths to be travelled "boldly" (n. 261) and with "creativity" (n. 156). These will renew the Church - and especially the Missionary Institutes - and rejuvenate them more than any structural reform, of which everyone feels a great need, but which may remain only on paper and /or in good intentions.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR A MISSIONARY INSTITUTE

No long speech is needed to highlight the conclusions that a Missionary Institute should draw from Pope Francis' proposals in the field of mission. What is important is to be vigilant and not be guided by the criterion of "we have always done it this way" (n. 33). A first, very frequent temptation is to start by considering structural reforms. In this case nothing has changed in the structure of the Church and in the mission. What must be taken into consideration in view of the "pastoral and missionary conversion" requested by the Pope are the people, their attitudes and the respective Institutions' priorities with regard to mission. Temptations such as self-referentiality, sloth, pessimism and spiritual worldliness affect the individual missionary and his Institute and take away the joy of mission and evangelization. Attention to the on-going conversion of the individual and of the communities and their on-going formation in line with Francis' directions must be the first concern of a Missionary Institute. The risk that an Institute runs is to become set in its own tradition and in its method of mission pursued to date. Since the old missionary model from the past still holds considerable fascination for the Christian people, it may be quite difficult to modify it. Nevertheless, the Pope's directives as well as history demand a profound revision to make it simpler and more elastic. The mission of the "Church which goes forth" requires new attitudes that in turn postulate a new formation of mission and a new style of mission. This requires constant and periodic verification.

The conversion of the missionary is the priority

The first and most urgent element of conversion concerns the evangelical quality of the missionary's *testimony*, which must assume a new more spiritual style of mission, concentrating on *being a disciple* and abandoning the tendency to *do many things* with an entrepreneurial attitude, characteristic of mission in the past. A *spiritual* style does not mean a *disembodied* style or out of context, quite the opposite. The presence of the missionary disciple must be like the Sermon on the Mount: to be "salt of the earth and light of the world", an evangelical presence in the midst of the crowds of people, a fraternal, supportive presence in the name of Jesus. The missionary disciples will be faithful *witnesses* who uphold the truths of the Lord and of his Gospel; shoots and signs of humanization: whose behaviour reveals the truth of their vocation as missionary disciples. They will proclaim with their lives, before preaching the word, the beauty and joy of knowing that they are loved by God, and that it is the mercy and tenderness of God that conquer hearts. In fact, "It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but 'by attraction' " (n. 15).

The missionary is at the service of the local Church and of its Pastors

It goes without saying that the missionary disciple's role, in the "Church which goes forth", is subordinate to the mission, that of a *servant*, not of one who wants to realize his own projects, but of one who is sent out on mission. His charism in the Church is that of *being sent* by the Church

herself; therefore his presence is subordinate, that of a servant. However, this does not imply passivity, but presupposes communion in mission and active and responsible obedience in view of evangelization.

Therefore, the service of the missionary to the local Church must be marked by sympathy and empathy for those who are responsible for guiding the community. This attitude is particularly important, since the local leaders, engaged in the process of the inculturation of the faith and of the Church, have the right to expect the missionaries to be catalysts that promote this difficult and delicate operation, not critics.

The missionary must foster in the local Church *the memory of those who are far away* and the zeal to reach them. This altruism tends to fade, even disappear, when problematic internal issues arise within the community which are often urgent.

The commitment to help the poor must be constant

Thus an important responsibility of the missionaries in the local Church is to recall the presence of the poor and the Church's commitment to overcome the situations that produce and maintain poverty. They must make the preferential "option for the poor" of the local community their own, live modestly and contribute to the creation of a "Church which is poor and for the poor" (n. 198), sharing in the communion of goods, reducing any dangerous dependence on economic, financial support from abroad, happy to be instruments of charity for the poor. A "Church which is poor and for the poor" will be distinguished by its basic services, the modest use of resources and employ the simple means usually available to the poor, in keeping with the aims of the mission. They will exercise their prophetic witness by denouncing everything that maintains situations of "inequality" (n. 52) that spawn injustice and violence and, together with the Pope, will say "no" to the "economy of exclusion" (n. 53), to "the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy" (n. 55), 'economic ... inequality... engenders violence,...' to "the 'throw away' culture (n. 53) and to "a globalization of indifference" (n. 54), all of which "prove ... damaging to the social fabric" (n. 60) and are a dangerous deformation of the process of globalization and neo-capitalism prevailing today. And missionaries will adopt a lifestyle that respects the poor and creation.

The missionary will remind the local Church of its universality

The missionary, from his own personal experience, will recall the Church's prophetic duty of "becoming the voice of the voiceless" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 70), of not being ensnared by the local authorities, maintaining the distance that allows her to observe the social situation critically and especially of the poor.

Finally, inherent in the missionary's charism is his duty to remind people that the Church of Jesus Christ is larger than the local Church in which he lives, that those far away are awaiting the Gospel message and that there are those who have lost it. This reality that should not be overlooked, because evangelization comes before the *cure animarum*, as the first task of the Church (n. 15).

Ref: *Ad Gentes*, year 18 (2014), n. 2, second semester, pp. 150-161.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ From now on the numbers in brackets refer to the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*
- ² Benedict XVI: Homily at the inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin-American and Caribbean Bishops' Conference, at Aparecida Shrine, (13 May 2007)
- ³ B. Forte: *La Chiesa della Trinità*, Cinisello Balsamo, 1992, p. 319

- 4 Attraction is the work of God who draws people through the witness of the *koinonia*
which binds the members of the community (cf. Acts 5:14).
- 5 It is symptomatic that the terms *dialogue* and *to dialogue* appear 58 times in *Evangelii*
Gaudium.
- 6 “This missionary duty, moreover, does not prevent us from approaching dialogue *with*
an attitude of profound willingness to listen. We know in fact that, in the presence of the
mystery of grace, infinitely full of possibilities and implications for human life and
history, the Church herself will never cease putting questions, trusting in the help of the
Paraclete, the spirit of truth (cf. Jn14:17), whose task it is to guide her ‘into all the truth’
(Jn 16:13). This is a fundamental principle not only for the endless theological
investigation of Christian truth, but also for Christian dialogue with other philosophies,
cultures and religions. In the common experience of humanity, for all its contradictions,
the spirit of God, who ‘blows where he wills’ (Jn 3:8), not infrequently reveals signs of
his presence which help Christ’s followers to understand more deeply the message which
they bear. Was it not with this humble and trust-filled openness that the Second Vatican
Council sought to read ‘the signs of the times’? This attitude of openness, combined
with careful discernment, was adopted by the Council also in relation to other religions.
It is our task to follow with great fidelity the Council’s teaching and the path which it
has traced” (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 January 2001, n.
56; see also nn. 54-55).
- 7 *Catechesi Tradendae*, 16 October 1979. This Apostolic Exhortation was the first text of
the Magisterium to address inculturation openly: “To offer to all ‘a dialogue of
salvation’ ... we need a catechesis which trains young people and adults of our
communities to remain clear and consistent in their faith, to affirm serenely their
Christian and Catholic identity” (n. 57).