

On April 5, 1847, M. Saint Teresa (Claudine Motte) sent a letter from Agra, to M. Saint Andrew, one more among those that she habitually sent, informing her about the situation of the mission and the missionaries in India. In that letter, full of enthusiasm she said: “Oh, what great good can be done in the missions! Oh, how I wish that our dear Congregation could have a great number of missionaries! How grateful I am to God for choosing me for this!”.

The words of M. Saint Teresa pronounced here in this place today, as they were 170 years ago, can help us to reflect on the theological lines and the accents in the way of understanding our missionary service as a Congregation in the origin or beginning, at the present time and, I also hope, to discern and find out the possible missionary paths of Jesus and Mary, to begin walking on these paths in its third centenary.

I will begin this reflection recalling the political-ecclesial framework in which a decision was taken to assume a mission *ad gentes*; I will speak more at depth on the change of focus in the theology of mission which Vatican Council II presented and I will end by pointing out some challenges which at the present moment oblige us to revive or enhance the missionary dimension of our Charism and to give it form in the Global Apostolic Plan with which we inaugurated a new centenary.

M. Saint Teresa writes this letter full of missionary enthusiasm after she had been in India since November 1842. It can be said that she had seen almost everything; the good, the growth of the presence of Jesus and Mary in Agra and Mussoorie; the arrival of Novices and Postulants, the conversion of young people and adults. Also, what was not so good, the bad, (or what was difficult), the death of the newly professed. Saint Vincent de Paul and of the Novice Mary Saint Ignatius; the difficulty of the extreme climate and of the new customs, the distance from Fourvière... Nevertheless, over and above everything, she gave a joyful witness of the service that was being given in the mission; and of her vocation as apostle *ad gentes*, to the point that she desired a Congregation in which that *ad gentes* mission would be relevant charismatically.

M. Saint Teresa, faithful to the spirit of her time, understood the mission as being sent to a concrete “mission” country; that for her had a particular significance and, in a certain sense, different from what she had felt in the first years of her life as a religious of Jesus and Mary (and she had been a teacher in the classroom, directress of the Boarders,

Mistress of Novices...), and being sent, besides, she considered it as a special grace for the Congregation that she loved so much.

As we all know, the call of Mons. Borghi to go out to serve apostolically in India was made in 1841.

The Congregation had existed only a bit more than 30 years, and even if Claudine had already died, the first generation of religious who had lived with her from the beginning were still living, governing the Congregation and were working very actively in the apostolate.

Lyon had been the place in which the whole Project strongly identified with the charismatic intuition of Claudine had been forged, which she herself had embodied in the first draft of the Constitutions: “3rd The aim of the Congregation is to give a Christian education to young girls, conformably to the social position of each one [28]” (*Const.* 27.3). And even if the Constitutions did not limit the field of action to Lyon, the truth is that the expansion of the Congregation was limited to the cities of Belleville, Monistrol and Le Puy (that is to say, not more than 100 km.), and in the foundational texts, in no way, is indicated that Claudine conceived as part of her Project, as other founders of her time did, (Mazenod, Champagnat...), an apostolic expansion beyond the frontiers of France, and much less, in places where even the *plantation ecclesiae* was not thought of.

"42 The Congregation does not limit itself to the diocese of Lyon only, but to spread the cult of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, it will accept proposals made to it to form establishments in other dioceses; but for this it is necessary to have the majority of votes of the General Chapter of the Congregation, as well as the consent of the ecclesiastical Superior and of the bishop [39] of the diocese”.

But the Religious of Jesus and Mary of the XIX century did not live outside of the concerns of their time and the challenges/calls that called to knocked at their doors. That time which has been called “the great century of the missions” and which manifested itself in a brilliant way in the Church of France, also entered Jesus and Mary by the hand of Mons. Borghi, Apostolic Vicar of Agra.

"Being persuaded that zeal for the salvation of souls and the love of our Divine Master burn in your hearts, I come to offer you a grand opportunity of satisfying your holy desires in this respect. I

come to request you to make the great sacrifice of parents and of your country and all you hold most dear, to take up your abode in India, with the sole intention of winning souls for God.

In fact, since the middle of the XIX century, Europe was again looking beyond its frontiers moved by the very rapid progress of communication; the exploration of countries up until then unknown; the process of colonization of the new territories...

In France, the instability of the Revolution and of the Napoleonic wars, began to remain behind, and the French Church became the first one of the Catholic renewal and of the missionary movement. In fact, Mons. Borghi refers to that missionary leadership of the country to exhort the Religious of Jesus and Mary to accept the mission:

"We expect nothing less from the Religious in France. They are not less remarkable for their zeal than the clergy of that realm. This ensemble of religious zeal merits the title missionary kingdom of France with no less justice than that of most Christian kingdom. Give us, dear Sisters, of your superabundance and we shall be satisfied, etc."

To the benefit of the diocese of Lyon, a certain pastoral stability occurred after Cardinal de Bonald assumed the government in 1837. There was a rich religious rebirth in the life of the laity was felt, which was appreciated in a special way, they were very active and committed with the situation of the less favored, and vibrated with the work of the Propagation of Faith in the new territories which had been discovered and were colonized.

Lastly, the universal Church, which since the beginning of the century had again taken the initiative of apostolic action beyond the frontiers of Europe, was governed by Pope Gregory XVI who had been the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, for 5 years. He energetically applied himself to the work of Evangelization in all the corners of the known world, increasing the resources of Propaganda Fide; establishing new Apostolic Vicars, urging in the formation of local Churches and the formation of the indigenous clergy; and opening a theological reflection in relation to the mission, something still in a very incipient way.

How was the mission of the Church understood in the century of the missions?

The word "mission", from the Latin *mittere*, to send, is a term of a clear Biblical flavor that bears in it the idea of sending, charge, delegating and that in all its uses, remits to an object in movement which draws away from the agent. The sending visualizes two

subjects, the one who sends and the one sent, and they are bound by a relation of authority-obedience. That relation authority-obedience is not based on mere caprice, but in the appropriateness of carrying out the charge because of its importance for a third party.

Although, neither in Hebrew nor in Greek do they have an exclusively religious sense, but when they have God as the agent who sends, all missions are related to the design of salvation.

Perhaps because of that dynamic of movement that the term mission involves and that separated the 'one sent' from the agent/person who sent him. Theology did not begin to use the term "mission" abundantly until the medieval epoch, when St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas reflected regarding the question of mission concerning the evangelization of the Barbarians, the Slavs and the Mongolians.

But it is in the XVI century, and in response to the apostolic challenges posed by the geographic discoveries when the term "mission" began to be popular to refer to the activity of the Church precisely in those "new worlds".

This conception of the mission is explained, in no other way but, as starting from the ecclesiology proper of that time which understood the Church as a perfect society of supernatural character; public and visible "as the Kingdom of France or the Republic of Venice", as said by R. Belarmino. It is founded once and forever by Christ and which possesses in itself the means to carry out its purpose or end.

This ecclesiology denotes a juridical-administrative understanding of the Church which stresses its character of a visible and clearly identifiable society; with a rigid structure in which the groups carry out different and unequal roles; and the principal activity of which is the apostolate which presupposes faith already preached and accepted by believers.

With this background, it is easy to understand that the mission of the Church in the XIX century has a clear societal, institutional visible direction. What is intended is the expansion of the Church as institution, and, in the framework of this pretension, it is very well explained that it was the Congregations and religious Orders who were the outstanding protagonists.

Besides, the mission of the Church participates, in a certain way, of what has been called “doctrine of the manifest destiny”, by which the European nations felt called to lead the unique destiny of peoples. Because of this, it is not strange to notice in missionaries, on some occasions, a certain idea that to evangelize and to civilize go hand in hand.

On the other hand, theologically, the mission seeks the conversion of the pagan, of the heretic, (“to pull out of idolatry and error”, M. St. Teresa will say many times) and, therefore because of this it has a clearly apologetic tone.

In the same way, it has a clear geographic component because it is developed in determinate territories, all of them far from Europe.

Besides, the mission does not consider the possibility of an interaction between the Gospel and the culture of the place; on the contrary, it has a focus of “tabula rasa” (plain, clean board) – in what refers to the customs and rites of the mission territories.

And, lastly, it constitutes a transitory activity that ends with the conversion of peoples and the *plantatio ecclesiae*, the establishment of the Church with the fullness of its means of salvation (hierarchy, Sacraments...).

This manner of conceiving the Church and its mission, proper of the XIX century which is the century of the first missionary expansion of the Congregation, **begins to change after the end of the Second World War** that made evident the profound transformations of the world and did not leave the Catholic Church indifferent.

The achievement of the political Independence of the peoples marked the decline of the colonial epoch, and determined the beginning of the search by these peoples for a new cultural identity and a different balance. In this framework of structural decisive changes, the worldly realities (the socio-political questions and economy) were gradually acquiring theological relevance in so far as integrating elements of the history of salvation.

On the other hand, examining both missionary encyclicals of Pius XII of 1951 and 1957, we notice that even though they maintained an idea of “mission” that still reflected the model of the Church as a “perfect society”, they incorporated some novelties, the most interesting one regarding the theme we are considering, was the reflection on secular or lay

missionaries of whom for the first time, it was said “they have to be clearly convinced not only that they belong to the Church but that they are the Church”.

On the other hand, the “missions” leave their transitory condition because they begin to take the form of young Churches and, thus in 1959 Pope John XXIII in his missionary Encyclical *Princeps pastorum* offered the following information:

“Then a quick look at the statistics of the territories entrusted to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, tells us that the first Bishop of Asiatic race and the first Apostolic Vicars of African stock were named in 1939. And, until 1959, there were already 68 Bishops of Asiatic stock and 25 of African stock. The native clergy has passed from 919 members in 1918, to 5,553 in 1957, for Asia and of 90 members to 1,811 in the same space of time, for Africa” (*Princeps pastorum* n° 5).

But changes went somewhat farther with John XXIII who in his missionary Encyclical of 1959 already showed a saving optimism which understood the mission no longer as a colonial conquest in the battle against the heretic, but rather as a commitment of the Church in the announcement of the universal salvation of Christ.

On the other hand, the progressive loss of faith in the West, was gradually making the significance of the habitual distinction between mission lands and Christian lands disappear, and therefore, the importance of the geographic element, which until now had been essential in every mission, in a certain manner, had diminished. In this sense the book of Albert Godin-Yvan Daniel, “*France, mission country?*” of 1943, is programmatic, who used the word “mission” no longer to refer, as we have seen up until now, to the geographic zones in which the Church had not as yet been established, but in a broader sense to refer to the pagan and non-Christian zones of their proper Christianity.

Lastly, the effort of theological reflection of the Protestants in the Second Missionary Conference of Willingen in 1952, brought up a radical change of paradigm in basing all missionary activity of the Churches in the “*missio dei*”: that is to say, affirming how the mission of God that comes out of self to communicate to men the fullness of salvation, is previous to the mission of the Church, the reason why it is the mission of God, and not of the Church, the one that has to constitute the center of the theology of mission.

All these factors, among others, explain that gradually theological reflection on the missionary activity of the Catholic Church was gradually moving from “the missions”

toward “the mission” which also in Catholic theology is understood as “*missio dei*” and, like that we can understand the great change of paradigm that Vatican Council II constitutes that with all its tensions it brightened a theology of mission that progressively left behind the perspective of the “foreign missions” proper of the XIX century.

The Council, especially through the Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, legitimized the need for a new self-awareness of the Church which is understood, no longer as a perfect society, but as a universal sacrament of salvation; which allows the insertion of “the missions” in the mission and so in this manner, takes them out from their exceptional nature and, with this from their marginalization.

With this theological foundation, the Decree *Ad gentes*, was able to overcome the juridical-administrative perspective of the mission: societal, apologetic, extraordinary, provisional...to found it theologically on the mystery of a Church that becomes sacrament of a missionary God in the world.

After the Council, Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of 1975, as well as John Paul II, fundamentally in *Redemptoris missio* 1990, activated the missionary impetus of the Church in the light of the theology of the Council. And it is in that environment of a new reflection and of new impulse in which we have to situate the General Chapter of 1983 and the document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Jesus and Mary of Mother Thérèse Poulin in 1984.

What are the outstanding characteristics of this new manner of understanding theologically the mission in the XX century?

I believe that trying to be pedagogical; we can affirm that the great theological pillars that sustain the new theological reflection on the mission *ad gentes* are three.

In the first place, the starting point of the reflection of the mission of the Church is on the *missio Dei*, that is to say, in *the contemplation of a God - Trinity of persons*, who gets out of Himself and communicates to the world His design of salvation, as Father in creation; as Son in the redemption and as Spirit in sanctification.

That Trinity is a dynamic movement outward and inward, because from the love of the Father is born the Son who opens himself to the love of the Father and their mutual relationship of gift and acceptance breathes out the breath of the Spirit.

The Trinity is then in the origin of the mission which is no longer the mission of the Church, but “mission of God”. The mission of the Church has to be linked, therefore, with the divine missions in the bosom of the Trinity because the love that circulates among the divine Persons, like every love, generously overflows beyond them and convokes men and invites them to participate in that company and communion of love.

But yes, by the Incarnation, the mission of the Son becomes the paradigm of every mission in the Church.

In this way the mission constitutes the part itself of what it means to be a Christian and to be Church. The mission is not an obligation imposed on the faithful, it is not an additional ecclesial strategy, but rather it is what makes their lives and the life of the Church beat. Humanity called to participate in that mystery of love recognizes the gift of God and, in faith accepts that love and communicates it to others, the mission is born there.

From these above affirmations, the following consequences follow:

1. The Church is essentially missionary. It does not have a mission but, in the image of the Trinity, it is mission, or as Pope Francis says, it is always “Church going out”.
2. The universal saving will of God is not limited to humanity, it is not only *missio salutis or missio redemptoris*; it is also *missio creationis* because from its origin, God counts on the human being, who is His image and likeness, as collaborator in the work of creation.
3. The mission of the Church is one and unique, but with different modalities of exercise and, for this reason, apostolic action in non-Christian regions does not come from a different nature of the mission or from a different vocation of the missionaries, but rather from the different conditions in which it is exercised.
4. Besides, this logic of communion of the Trinity introduces into the mission the dynamic of universal fraternity and, therefore, of respect for those who are different, for justice, for solidarity... but it warns about the danger of converting the Church into a mere agent of social change.

5. **In the second place**, the Church no longer understands itself as a perfect society; it is no longer like the Republic of Venice or the Kingdom of France; the Church broadens the perspective and understands itself as *people of God pilgrim and sacrament of the mystery of salvation*.

From these affirmations it follows that what is fundamental or essential is the Kingdom of God, and the announcement of the vital force of the Gospel which has the capacity of giving sense to life and to history.

The Kingdom of God, the signs of which are already recognized in the word, the gestures and the commitment of Christians, and of the men and women of good will, transcends the frontiers of the Church and, in this way, faith is converted into hope which transcends the expectations of life and sustains the struggle for a better and more just world.

From these affirmations the following consequences follow:

1. The mission belongs to the reality of the pilgrim, historical Church; it is the manifestation in the world and in the history of the divine plan of salvation, and the discernment of the signs of the time is the starting point of every apostolic project in the Church.
2. The eschatological tension; that “already yes, but not yet of salvation”, stresses the liberating activity of the announcement of the Gospel and commits Christians with the establishment of justice, peace and integrity of creation.
3. Human promotion, in which education constitutes a fundamental pillar, is intimately related to the announcement of the Gospel, and religious life has always been understood according to the radical commitment with that promotion (health, education, work...).
4. The Church is a sign of the Kingdom if it listens to the Word, administers the Sacraments, is nourished in prayer and in the practice of charity and not only of welfare.

In the third place, a *new understanding of the non-Christian religions* is produced that the Council defines as preparation for the acceptance of the Gospel. The Church is not

constituted as a starting point, a previous preparation and because of this the urgency of the *plantatio ecclesiae*; the Church is the anticipation of a future reality; the recapitulation of all things in Christ, the proclamation of Christ as the center of human history.

From these affirmations the following consequences follow:

1. The need of a solid formation of the faith for missionaries who, in seeing themselves in constant contact with the challenges of the cultures and of religions different from the Christian ones, will allow them to clearly identify the fundamental elements of Catholic faith and be able to give a reason for them.
2. The need of a strong spiritual experience of Christ, and strongly rooted in Scripture, which can explicitly announce the truth of the Gospel without imposing it but without diminishing its importance.
3. The need to establish relationships of respect and trust with persons of all religions, and the urgency of cooperating and dialoguing with other religious communities for the defense of justice and the common good and, when possible, be in solidarity with those who are in a situation of conflict.
4. The plea before the governments, so that they guarantee respect for religious freedom.

In the light of all this theology which the Church has already taken as its own; and that it is mature; **what challenges does the mission of the Church have to face in the XXI century, how do these question beckon the Religious of Jesus and Mary at the beginning of the third centenary?**

The Lebanese writer A. Maalouf says in his book “Murder Identities”, that we are all depositories of two inheritances: one, vertical, it comes from our ancestors, and the other one, horizontal, is the product of the spirit of our time. This second one is the more determinate and, nevertheless, says Maalouf, we tend to cling to the other one. Those axes, vertical and horizontal are the ones that shape or form our identity and, as Congregation, our identity is also depository of those two inheritances.

From the past, because of that “vertical inheritance”, the Congregation is always ready to serve in the most varied countries [...] and develops the missionary spirit that has characterized it from the very beginning” (C 6) and, as the historian August Viatte writes, the decision to leave for India was for the whole group of the religious of Jesus and Mary much better than if they had remained with their families, those “good families of Lyon”, good but somewhat closed up in themselves; thanks to the mission in India, the religious of Jesus and Mary discovered the world”.

For the first religious, in the “century of the missions”, that decision was an expression of the fidelity to the spirit of their time; for us, nevertheless, constitutes an inheritance that like any inheritance, has to serve us to improve life, to invest, to dare to do things that were impossible for us.

The question today is, how are we profiting from our inheritance in the discernment of the fidelity to the spirit of our time; how do we discover the heart beat of the world... and how are we going to think of mission in the third centenary of the Congregation.

The response to the call of India, when the Congregation was only a little over thirty years, was an authentic shock for the first generation of religious which had not considered that challenge in relation to the mission. They were few they had no money, they did not speak English, they were going to a territory, India, not only unknown, not only far way; it was a territory that besides, in the perspective of the colonial distribution of that time, had **nothing to do with France**... Nevertheless, it enriched the understanding that the Congregation had of its own mission.

- It globalized its look and, in doing it, globalized also its structure, its members and its concerns.
- It ceased being a “perfect society”, and it became multicultural and permeable to the customs and traditions of the peoples where it went.
- It became a platform of women who educated women, and promoted the role of them within the family and of society.
- It gave them institutional agility or adaptability and allowed them to revise the proper right to adapt the government to the new reality modifying the

Constitutions, first in 1843, before the presentation for their approbation; and later the definitive approbation, in 1854.

In order to be able to initiate this venture then, they needed much detachment of self, much institutional liberty, and a great capacity to discern the things of God in the new world in which the Congregation was taking root.

Our challenge today is to define once again that axis of the identity that vertically is rooted in the past, and horizontally invites us to imagine the future.

I think that when the Church is governed by a Pope who, as he himself said the day of his election, “they had gone to look for him almost to the end of the world...”, and who from the first days invites the faithful to a new evangelizing stage marked by the joy of the Gospel, we can reflect around three challenges with which to undertake our mission at the beginning of the third centenary.

✓ **The understanding of the mission *ad gentes* as mission *inter gentes***

The mission is no longer, like for Mother St. Teresa, a particular vocation that takes us geographically beyond our frontiers. The people are already among us and continue to have the right to know Jesus Christ. Communication and mobility are a fact in our world, and they have to begin to be this in the horizon of the religious of Jesus and Mary. We could profit and take advantage of the opportunity of the Global Apostolic Plan to reconsider and broaden, as Mother St. Teresa did, the geographic horizons of our own vocation. Let us become religious “going out”; let us share the migrant condition of many of our contemporaries..., and let us make the frontiers among our Provinces more flexible from day to day.

✓ **The strengthening of our Christo-centric, Marian spirituality and of Ignatian tradition.**

In the Exercises of Saint Ignatius the retreatant daily asks during the second week for: “a deep-felt knowledge of our Lord, made man for me, that I may the better love and follow Him” [Ex 104]. During the second week the mission constitutes the fundamental key of understanding of his three great contemplations: the Incarnation; the two Standards

and the King. And in all of them, the mission is going out: to go out of the bosom of the Trinity to “make redemption of the human race” [Ex101]; go out on the highways “to imitate the true life of the great and true Captain” [Ex 136]; and to go out to work with the eternal King, “following him in hardships and in glory” [Ex 91]-

We could revitalize the dimension of “exodus, pilgrimage and exile” of our spirituality so that “through the different deserts of life, through the different experiences of hunger and thirst, of truth and justice [...] make man who are thirsty for the infinite, feel his condition of exiled on the way to the final homeland, between the “already” and the “not yet” of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The reflection on the challenges of education in the XXI century

In 1841, Mons. Borghi wrote to the Religious of Jesus and Mary:

“You alone must be the Missionaries here for people of your own sex. All the means attempted, except that of education, have almost completely failed, and you alone can impart this great benefit to the daughters of India.” (February 19, 1841).

In the dawn of the third centenary, let us work so as to become excellent in the reflection on education, certainly, of women, but also of any minority groups to which education will allow to dignify themselves; let us dedicate time to study, think and share in common our passion for education.

Let us recall the Rule of the Mistress of Novices: written by Claudine in which she recommended that she encourages in the young religious:

“...the study of secular sciences with the sole object of being better able to inspire their future pupils with a great love for the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, for whose glory they should be full of holy enthusiasm”. (DOC. XIX, 414)

I am not referring to the challenges in the order of resources, the methodologies... But to education in the classical, Platonic sense, to train the body and soul to discover all the beauty and all the possibilities of which they are capable...

We have begun with the memory of Mother St. Teresa Motte of whom the historian A. Viatte said:

“She personifies the expansion. Tireless, she will travel from house to house to become aware of the conditions in which the new establishments are born, without hardly stopping any place, because an immense amount of correspondence claims her attention [...]. She declares that “a religious of Jesus and Mary should always be ready to go wherever obedience sends her to work for the salvation of souls. She gave the most heroic example”.

We end with the witness of Sister Isa Solá, of whom Sister Monica said after she was murdered in Haiti: “Isa was a breath of fresh air, a woman who had the vision of the future; one of those persons who enter our planet with dynamism, enthusiasm for life, energy and a great missionary spirit”.

Isa, like M. St. Teresa and many other religious in the history of the Congregation, urge us to face the challenges; to believe that it is possible to live and die in Jesus and Mary with the apostolic courage which comes from the joy of the Gospel.

Allow me to end with her last words:

"I have been happy and I have been where I always most wanted to be, in Africa and then in Haiti. To follow Jesus and his Gospel has been the most fascinating thing in my life and I thank my Congregation for having helped me in this. If I madly fell in love with anyone it was of Jesus. And therefore, rejoice; now I am already with Him”.

NOTES:

Page 2: Positio, p. 383 – N° 42 – Constitutions...

Page 2, History of the Congregation of the religious of JM according to contemporary witnesses, p. 136

Page 3, Idem., page 137

Page 13, Idem, p. 136

Page 13, Positio, Doc. XIX, page 414