

Foreword

The Missionary must have a big heart!
Blessed Giuseppe Allamano

*We are the fruit of our past, / We are the very life that has grown within us
Like the trunk of solitary trees / With signs, colours, and imperfections
That winds and rains have impressed / Forever on their bark.
We are also the time spent: / It is ours to choose whether to become new men
Or remain old / Like our years and our memories.*
Romano Battaglia

The Church, which by its very nature is missionary, fulfils its divine mandate when it becomes an “outgoing” Church, that is, when it puts in motion all its energies so that the message of Christ, beginning from Jerusalem, and passing through all of Judea and Samaria, reaches to the very ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1: 8).

The title of this volume by Alberto Trevisiol, “They Went Out to Plough the Field”, is therefore attractive and of high symbolic value for those who care about the mission. To carry out the evangelical commitment, as undertaken by the Consolata Missionaries at the dawn of the nineteenth century, one cannot leave without a specific mandate from the Church. You “go out” in the name of the Apostolic Church, and you do not go alone, but you go out in a group, as the phrase in the title “They Went Out” points out. A group of missionaries set out in distant 1902 to continue the work of evangelization begun by Jesus.

The act of “going out” recalls God’s command to Abraham: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household (...) and Abraham went” (cf. Gen 12: 1.4). Like Abraham, the Consolata Missionaries, too, set out for the unknown, completely unaware of what they would encounter. Nonetheless, they were clear about the purpose of their going: “they went out to plough the field”. Their real goal was to prepare the field entrusted to them.

The second part of the title of the book, “plough the field”, too, becomes paradigmatic as it brings to mind what Paul of Tarsus, employing farming metaphor, said to the Christian communities of Corinth when he was notified of the existence of factions within them: “But who is Apollo? What is Paul? Only Servants (...). I planted, Apollo watered, but it was God who made it grow” (1 Cor 3: 5-6). And again, in its meaning of anticipation and preparation, we can mention the episode in which Jesus sends the seventy-two disciples. The text notes: “He designated seventy-two others and sent them two by two in front of him to every city and place where he was about to go” (Lk 10: 1).

Here the mind of the Lord is clear and precise. He sends “others” to “plough the field”, that is, to prepare it so that when he arrives, he can plant the good seed of the word in the hearts of the crowds. “The going” of the Consolata Missionaries to Kenya must be seen in this perspective as the book describes their deeds in this line of thought. They went out to plough the field, waiting for the Lord to take steps to sow his Word of salvation in the hearts of the peoples.

We are pleased to present this work to the attention of the English-speaking missionaries as a means of remembering, of owning, of inheriting. This volume, as stated in the subtitle, “Pages of History of the Consolata Missionaries in Kenya 1902-1981”, describes with clarity, skill, and competence the important milestones in the Consolata Missionaries’ work in the vast mission fields of Kenya.

It should also be noted that their field of work is remarkably diverse since they have tried vigorously to aim at the integral development of the person. For this purpose, the precise work of “evangelization” of the people is carried out hand in hand with human promotion. Consequently, they did disseminate the field with schools of various types and, in order not to leave any section of the society unattended, they created orphanages for children and built dispensaries for the sick, who were otherwise usually left to themselves.

What is nowadays called “inculturation” and “respect for the cultures and traditions of peoples”, the Consolata Missionaries would put into practice exquisitely in their regular visits to villages to meet everyone, especially the sick. They would talk to everyone to understand each one’s situation and to look for remedial solutions. This immersion in the cultural and environmental fabric was fruitful for the mere fact that all the missionaries would thus become capable of using the local language and, consequently, of establishing a familial relationship with everyone. From the voice of the people would be born the adhesion and commitment to walk together and work together so as to render the field ever more tilled and ready.

In going through the pages of this weighty volume, one clearly perceives the presence of a missionary strategy, which is of great importance. All the Missionaries worked with commitment and enthusiasm so that the field assigned to them could produce fruit. They saw a rich and luxuriant harvest in the making and would not stop to contemplate it but would turn their experience into a generative matrix for other fields that required ploughing. It is the same dynamism that did occur in Kenya. Soon, the Church of Nyeri, now a verdant olive tree with abundant fruit, would be on its way of “going out and ploughing” the field of the Meru area and then that of Marsabit. Even these two plants, which became “sister” Churches, were nourished by the same evangelical sap of the mother Church.

The Consolata Missionaries understood well the saying of Jesus: “The harvest is plentiful”. This is why they set out on the journey because the

Word of Jesus has in itself an intrinsic power that cannot remain closed in a limited geographical area.

Although the Consolata Missionaries favoured the idea of an outgoing and itinerant Church to give rise to new realities, they were also concerned with providing local pastors for the flourishing Christian communities. For this purpose, they had opened a seminary to welcome generous young people who would continue to hoe the field as well as take care of the ripe harvest.

This volume should be read in a diachronic key to discover all the developmental phases of the mission in Kenya. One would not be adequately appreciating this book if he were not able recognize in it the generating principles that characterized the evangelizing work of the Consolata Missionaries or, if he, reading between the lines of the book, were not also able to feel all the passion, perseverance and total and unconditional dedication of the Missionaries who, having left their family, their homeland, their culture and their traditions, went to “to the ends of the earth” to first of all plough the field and then to present an abundant harvest to the Lord.

The volume has a rare appeal for the missionary dynamics it describes, dynamics created by real people who have made mission the meaning and value of their lives. It presents the story of a mission born in Kenya but which has developed and grown, pushing the Consolata Institute and its Missionaries to go out on the paths of the whole world, according to the vision and dream of our dear Founder, Blessed Giuseppe Allamano.

We thank Father Trevisiol for this gift, fruit of careful and intense research, and we implore the Lord Jesus to help us rediscover through these pages the enthusiasm of early evangelization where sacrifice, dedication and donation were total.

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