

## Preface

The *Extraordinary Missionary Month, October 2019*, announced by Pope Francis was a “providential occasion”<sup>1</sup> to foster a wide theological and cultural reflection in the Church on the essence and the actual significance of the Christian *mission*. Through formation programs, study seminars, publications, and interaction with the media, the *Baptized and Sent* across the world could deepen their knowledge and understanding of *mission* not only as the very nature of the Church (cf. *Ad Gentes* 2), but also as its “origin, purpose, and life.”<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) fulfilled a special role, since they were engaged in accompanying the Christians of the particular Churches during the preparatory phase that led to the celebrations of the Extraordinary Missionary Month, culminated in the World Mission Day on Sunday, October 20, 2019. To support their missionary efforts, the PMS General Assembly held at Fraterna Domus in Sacrofano (Rome), from May 27 to June 1, 2019, provided a platform for discussion and exchange on “how to render the work of the *missio ad gentes* more effective.”<sup>3</sup>

The highlight of the proceedings was reached with the *lectio magistralis* delivered by Dr. Fabrice Hadjadj, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toulon, and Dr. Fr. Eloy Bueno de la Fuente, Professor at the Faculty of Theology of Northern Spain in Burgos.

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<sup>1</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, 1 June 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180601\\_pontificie-opere-missionarie.html/](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180601_pontificie-opere-missionarie.html/).

<sup>2</sup> F. MERONI, “The Mission of the Church and the *Missio Ad Gentes*: Some Initial Observations”, in CEP-PMS, *Baptized and Sent. The Church of Christ on Mission in the World*, EMMS OCT 2019, San Paolo, Milan 2019, 69.

<sup>3</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*.

From different but complementary perspectives, they provided a thorough and insightful examination of the pneumatological and soteriological dimension of *mission*, drawing attention to the theological rationale that should guide the pastoral ministry and the overall missionary endeavour of Christians.

The two lectures greatly contribute to meeting the need for a renewed understanding of what *mission* is about, which is among the main reasons underlying Pope Francis' magisterial and hortatory insistence in addressing missionary subjects.

The Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) has thus collected them into a single volume, *Life Is Mission*, within the series *Omnis Terra* – PMU CIAM Publications, in order to reach out to a wider number of baptized, both religious and lay, women and men, who can benefit from the reading of Dr. Hadjadj and Dr. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente's works as a source of inspiration for their approach to evangelization and the witness of the faith in missionary territories.<sup>4</sup>

Along the lines of *Laudato Si'*, Dr. Hadjadj maintains that *mission* is the existential form of life for the whole creation. Descending from God, the creation already contains the *mission* as the inherent dimension of the living of all beings, who belong to the ecosystem of the Trinity. That is why *Life Is Mission*, and “everything is interconnected”, as Pope Francis reiterates as a leitmotiv in his Encyclical Letter. The awareness that *Life Is Mission* and of the interconnectedness of all creatures is the theological foundation of a truly *integral ecology*, which fully embraces the metaphysical, transcendental, and spiritual dimension, while rejecting the temptations of “anthropomorphism”, on the one hand, and “biocentrism”, on the other (LS 118).

Missionary conversion leading to salvation and the openness to others are part of our nature, Dr. Hadjadj explains. From the very first moment of our birth, all members of mankind have been *sent* out and, therefore, are in a state of *mission*, non-Christians included. Yet, here the question arises whether the latter can attain salvation. An answer to this is provided in the essay *Salvation in Christ*,

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<sup>4</sup> *Life Is Mission* features the lectures of Dr. Hadjadj and Dr. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente's in the original language, respectively French and Spanish, as well as their translation into English. PMU curated the translations, which were approved by the authors and the Urbaniana University Press.

*the Church, and Other Religions in Light of Vatican II*, which has been republished in this volume because of its correlation with Dr. Hadjadj's work.<sup>5</sup>

The answer is yes, non-Christians can be saved through the human experience of conjugal love (monogamous and indissoluble) between woman and man, where God has instilled the *mission* to generate life. This is the ordinary way for the salvation of those who have not received the Baptism (without having refused it) and live conjugal love authentically, although the manifestation of their union is not Christian in its historical ecclesial form.

Given the ontological dimension of *mission*, Dr. Hadjadj also reminds us that every baptized and member of the Church is “on *mission* on this Earth”, and is called to “pastoral engagement or commitment in the world” (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 27), interacting in listening, at the service to the other, and proclamation.

*Mission* is not an optional choice, but the “engine and horizon of the faith”,<sup>6</sup> the very reason for our lives as Christians, even if it may entail that “life is distress”: a critique at the Marxist-consumeristic materialism that has made its way beyond Western societies.

Missionary conversion is intertwined with ecological conversion, but our engagement in the safeguarding of the environment should be conducted “in the name of the Lord” as the source of all living things, not “in the name of Nature” and against “man”. Christians should not fall into the ideological temptation of “ecologism”: out of *love* for the Creator and his creation, *mission* requires their ecological conversion to address the “human excesses”, as well as the destructive course that nature itself can take, and which both can undermine the eco-system of the Trinity.

The theological place where missionary conversion and ecological conversion meet, Dr. Hadjadj concludes, is the Mass during the Eucharist, where “the fruit of the Earth and work of human hands” can “integrate the life of the Trinity”, and “all that has been created

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<sup>5</sup> An earlier version of this essay, titled “Christ’s Salvation, Church and Other Religions in Light of Vatican II”, was published in F. MERONI (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church*, Aracne Editrice, Canterano (Rome) 2017, 197-225.

<sup>6</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*, 3 December 2015, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151203\\_plenaria-propaganda-fide.html/](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/december/documents/papa-francesco_20151203_plenaria-propaganda-fide.html/).

finds its greatest exaltation” (LS 236). From a missiological and an ecclesiological perspective, the centrality of the Eucharist, and more broadly of the liturgy, is also emphasized by Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente. “The liturgy – he says – cannot be separated from the life of the missionary Church”, which the Eucharist makes “not simply a human association”, but a community of the saved, a true family of God, composed of sons and daughters in the only Son.

By stipulating that “the Church acts as [...] a sacrament”, Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente invites today’s *mission* to rediscover its own *sacramental logic*, based on the event of Jesus Christ, on his Incarnation and Passover. *Mission* is the historical and sacramental participation in the missions that God the Father has assigned to the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world. Therefore, the Church is an eschatological design of all creation, the “universal sacrament of salvation” (*Lumen Gentium* 48, cf. 1, 9; AG 1; *Gaudium et Spes* 45), namely the place and the time of the reconciliation with God within history. Limiting *mission* to proclaiming and witnessing Christian values deprives the Word of God and his Kingdom of the concrete historical-eschatological reality of the Incarnation, and of the saving and transforming effectiveness of the missionary work of the Church founded on the Paschal mystery.

Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente defines Jesus’ death and resurrection as “the essential missionary event [...] the source of the Christian mission and the fragrance that all missionaries should emanate”. The Cross, the historical and risen life of Jesus, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, establish the Church in a “permanent state of mission” and all are baptized as “missionary disciples”, called to evangelize and bring the Gospel “to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8). The beginning of evangelization, narrated by Luke in the *Acts of the Apostles*, is the main source of “inspiration”<sup>7</sup> for Christians of all times, to quote Pope Francis, since it provides the pattern for the execution of the mission “at a theological, pastoral and organizational level”, as Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente observes. This is the *missio ad gentes*, the original form of mission adopted by the Church, which must always be adapted to changing historical circumstances.

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<sup>7</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*.

The author brings out the Trinitarian roots of the *missio ad gentes* and its intrinsic connection to salvation (cf. AG 7). In addition, he examines the current challenges to evangelization the Church is being faced with, in light of the writings of St. Paul and of the official documents addressing the modern missionary engagement: Benedict XV's *Maximum Illud*, the magisterium of the Second Vatican Council (*Ad Gentes*, *Dei Verbum*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium*), Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, and Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Three main issues are identified as crucial to the future of the *mission*. Rev. Fr. Bueno de la Fuente singles out the need to outline proper approaches to bring evangelization forth in “new missionary situations and landscapes”, such as the social movements and the media; uphold the *missio ad gentes* “as criteria for the missionaryity of the entire Church”; ensure “the participation and co-responsibility of all”, strengthening the role of the lay *Baptized and Sent* in the missionary outreach. His reference to the need for the “charism of the Pontifical Missionary Societies” in this new evolving scenario, is of further stimulus for the PMS to serve God's Church in fostering the missionary formation of the faithful, the evangelizing efforts of the particular Churches, and the *missio ad gentes* in the world.<sup>8</sup>

Vatican City

November 30, 2019

*100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Maximum Illud*

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<sup>8</sup> The publication of this volume was coordinated by Mr. Emiliano Stornelli, Chairman of the Religion & Security Council.