

THE CATHOLIC MISSIONS OF THE XIX AND XX CENTURIES AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN

Grazia Loparco¹

Premise

A survey of the missions of the Catholic Church in the XIX and XX centuries needs an explanation of the term, since the semantic area has been enriched and articulated, following the change connected to the end of the Christian regime.² Consequently, although it may come immediately to mind the renewal sanctioned in the Second Vatican Council,³ in reality the paradigm shift had already begun in the Nineteenth Century, with the spread of secularization in the West and the presence of new ecclesial subjects who were ready to bring the Gospel in the lands to be evangelized, many of which were to colonial domains. To these geographical areas are added those exposed to de-Christianization and, moreover, masses of transoceanic migrants, often without religious assistance. Don Bosco and other founders, such as Scalabrini, realized that the classic concept of missions *ad gentes* is surpassed by reality and they became agents of change. Many studies illustrate the purpose and the missions, from a theological and historical point of view, with the many related to political, cultural, anthropological, ecclesial and religious issues; here we concentrate only on some aspects that directly concern the commitment of new Congregations to simple vows founded in the Nineteenth-Twentieth centuries, and among them those of women, which constitute a novelty.⁴

Some coordinates of the change in the general frame

The missionary commitment of the Salesians and the FMA began in a period of renewed ardor on the part of the Catholic Church and at the same time in a very complex political panorama with which it must constantly confront. What happened before the French Revolution?

From the XVI century until the XVIII century, the development of Catholic missions depended on governments and is bound by the Spanish and Portuguese patronage rights, with the right to conquer and the duty of evangelization the lands discovered in America, for Spain (except Brazil), and various areas in Asia to Portugal (except the Philippines), passing through the coasts of Africa.

In pastoral methods, mission as an announcement of salvation and the Christian life is connoted from the spirituality of the religious orders that take charge of it: the Beggars (Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Mercedaries, Carmelites...), then the regular clerics (like the Jesuits), or other canonical forms such as the Lazarists. Women are absent, because the apostolate is a male prerogative, because they were the one who could preach and administer the sacraments.

¹ FMA, Professor of Church History at the Pontifical Faculty of Education «Auxilium», Rome.

² This text reproduces the presentation offered on Salesian Thursday by the Auxilium, 10 October 2024, at the opening of the three-year period of preparation for the 150th anniversary of the first missionary dispatch of the FMA. Will be published, completed, in the *Journal of Education Sciences*. Youtube link

³ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the missionary activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7 December 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_it.html

⁴ We are passing over here the ecclesial realities that referred to popular missions in European countries and apostolic missionaries. For a summary, see BROTTINI Mario, *Beginning and legal evolution of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood*. Dissertation on the Doctoral Thesis in Pontifical University of Rome, 2001.

With the spread of the Enlightenment, of jurisdictionalism, with the criticism of the Church and the secularization promoted by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic laws, the missions fall. Suffice to recall the suppression of the Jesuits (1773), the dispersion of religious orders and the confiscation of ecclesiastical property in various countries, to understand how in 1800 about 350-500 missionaries remain. In 1900, one hundred years later, there are about 87,000, and therefore a change substantial is registered.

Some **innovative factors** feed the "*climate*" and *missionary recovery* in the nineteenth century:

- from the economical point of view, geographical discoveries, explorations which have now been completed and commercial movement facilitate travel through steam navigation and lead to gradual transformation in relations between peoples;
- from the political point of view, nationalism in various countries is developing and leading to imperialism and in a Eurocentric colonialism. Deep rivalries give rise to wars and to trade disputes for the domination and control of vast areas of the planet; with the end of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial domains, the new independent countries are trying to retain the privileges of the employer; meanwhile, the colonial expansion of France, Belgium, Germany and to a much lesser extent Italy, and Protestant countries such as The Netherlands and Great Britain are limiting missionary activity, but they do not block recovery;
- from the cultural point of view, the claim to superiority of European civilization remains, which in various moments unleashes violence, for the identification of the Church with the interests of the oppressors;
- the migratory flow from poor populations looking for future, especially in America, stimulates a rethinking of the mission and activity of missionaries, this also happens between countries in Europe, from the South to the more industrialized North.

When the Church, after 1815, recovers from the Napoleonic storm, the European continent is pervaded by a movement of restoration and spiritual rebirth that allows you to reorganize yourself and to rediscover missionary vitality.

If the promoters of modernity, revolutionaries, socialists, then elite feminists' movements, aspire to a *regeneration* as a new beginning, autonomy of civil progress, with the condition of emancipation from the control of the Church, promoting the dechristianization, Pius VII and Leo XII want the *re-Christianization* as a return to the regime of Christianity, opposite to religious indifference.⁵ Just "the idea of a romantic matrix of a re-Christianization of world, in contrast to the illuminist and revolutionary mentality, led to a flowering of missionary who saw the emergence of new typically missionary religious institutes and among these also those for women".⁶

⁵ The evangelizing drive is also manifested in the Protestant churches. The term coined post-Napoleon, is still used in Catholic circles in the first half of the '900. G. M. Vian, *Popes and saints between the French revolution and the first post-war. For a history of canonizations between Pius VII and Benedict XV (1800 - 1922)*, «Christianity in history», 18, III, 1997, 579-606. According to Vian, there was a «precise design of the Roman summits», aimed at countering a «modernity perceived as different and hostile»; and Leo XIII, quoted by G. MICCOLI, *Worrying of restoration and impulses of renewal: the multiple faces of the pontificate of Leo XIII*, in A. ZAMBARBIERI (edited by), *The Catholics and the Liberal State in the age of Leo XIII*, Venetian Institute of literal sciences and art, Venice 2008, 1-27 (in particular pp. 18-19).

⁶ BELLUOMINI Flavio, *Congregation de Propaganda fide*, in *Updates Vol. I - Italian Association of Professors of Church History* (online).

The term *regeneration* was used in a very different sense by Daniele Comboni in the *Regeneration Plan of Africa* (1864). In a letter, attributed to Don Bosco,⁷ then to don Rua in 1906,⁸ in mother Caterina Daghero in 1917 who reported it as repeated by don Bosco⁹ and used by scholars who later indicated education as a Salesian contribution to the regeneration of society.¹⁰ This movement of ideas and concepts has to do with the commitment missionary

Missionary revival widespread in the XIX century

The missionary awakening is a "popular" movement in the sense of "born from the people of God", which includes popes, diocesan priests, religious men and women, lay men and lay women. Just restored the government of Pius VII in Rome and with the independence of the American countries, the Congregation De Propaganda Fide, reorganized in 1817, is much more active but does not have the means necessary for the enterprise.¹¹ The Popes Gregory XVI (1831-1846) and Pius IX (1846-1878) take over the initiative of the missions, trying to circumvent the claims of the ancient patronages and to cooperate with governments, but in reality, there are still a lot of difficulties, for example in Argentina and Chile, at the end of the century. Liberal governments, in fact, increasingly marginalize the Church, yet they do not easily give up control over it.

An important contribution to the missions, which combines ideal and concreteness, is constituted by the Work of Propagation of the Faith (created in 1822, approved by the Pope in 1837), whose animator is the lay Pauline Jaricot (1799-1862), with the aim of stimulating and channeling the contributions of Catholics to the missions, creating an impressive network of capillary organization for the collection of small monthly quotas of money, with the involvement of all social classes. The missionary message of Jaricot will be spread in Italy by the Marquis Cesare Tapparelli d'Azeglio, a Piedmontese, considered the first lay apostle of modern Italian society. Based on the French model, there are about 136 similar associations in various European countries. Among these, the Opera of S. Infanzia is founded in 1843 by the bishop of Nancy, Mons. Charles Augustus de Forbin-Janson and approved by Pius IX in 1846 with the aim of redeeming and baptizing the dying or abandoned pagan children. In the middle of the century missionary initiatives are Routes and distant lands.

The founder of the Istituto Missioni estere in Milan in 1850 is Don Angelo Ramazzotti, supported by the Lombard bishops; meanwhile in Rome a Pontifical Seminary of the Holy Apostles Peter and

⁷ Cf BOSCO Giovanni, *Epistolary. Ninth Volume (1884-1886)*. Introduction, critical texts and notes by Francesco Motto, Rome, LAS 2021, IX, 289. In this particular case the letter (19 March 1885) emphasizes the "regeneration of man" is referred to the reading of good books. The material author of the text seems to be Don Giovanni Bonetti, curator of the critical edition.

⁸ Letter to Sister Felicina Fauda, 10 September 1906, in RUA Michele, *Letters and circulars to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1880-1910)*. Introduction, texts and notes by Piera Cavaglià and Anna Costa = Orizzonti 25, Rome, LAS 2010, 337. Stresses that the family is the basis of social regeneration.

⁹ Cf circular letter of mother Catherine Daghero, 24 October 1917, typed. He recalled the importance of the oratory: "Let us remember that the Father used to repeat: 'To regenerate a city or a country there is no better way than starting with the festive Oratory'. So let us commit ourselves to contribute to the moral restoration of society...".

¹⁰ Cf BRAIDO Pietro, *Preventing Not Repressing: The Education System of Don Bosco*, Rome, LAS 1999, 404.

¹¹ SACRAE CONGREGATIONIS DE PROPAGANDA FIDE. METZLER Joseph (curated by), *Memoria Rerum. 350 years at the service of missions. 1622- 1972*, Rom-Freiburg-Wien, Herder 1972 In the Introduction, p. 7, the author writes: "The new dicastery had the task of promoting and coordinating and directing the missionary activity of the Church throughout the world. Its program, drawn up by the founder Pope Gregory XV himself, can be summarized as follows: to make the transformation of the missions from a colonial phenomenon into a purely ecclesiastical and spiritual movement; to free the missionaries from any interference in political activity; To promote the formation of the local clergy and the establishment of national episcopal hierarchies; to respect the culture and customs of peoples by converting them to the faith only through a pastoral method, without any semblance of compulsion, without imposing on them European civilization; Finally, to set up a unitary programme in missionary work».

Paul was founded in 1867, established by Don Pietro Avanzini in 1871. The two institutions were united in 1926 in Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME).

The First Vatican Council (1869-1870) is perhaps the most propitious event for the development of the Catholic missions in the last decades of the XIX century, since bishops from North America, from Africa (9) and from Asia (41) took advantage of the break to meet and intercept clergy and nuns who were going to their own dioceses.

After the capture of Rome, which became the capital of the Kingdom of Italy in 1871, with the end of the papal and "Pope King", Pius IX declares himself a prisoner in the Vatican. This happens two months after the approval of *Pastor aeternus*, the conciliar constitution that defines as dogma the infallibility of the Pope and his universal jurisdiction over the Church. In a nutshell, the papacy is now politically irrelevant on the international political scene, but at the same time acquires the force of aggregation and centralization quite unique among Catholics.

The Church is poorer overall, deprived of the ancient privileges and support of various governments, at the same time strengthens its universal, Catholic mission/extension and therefore its task of the evangelization of peoples. Once the temporal power ceased, the Holy See has strengthened its commitment to the spread of faith and communication. Frequent travel, the press and migratory waves have made known peoples and distant races. The Gospel has not yet reached everyone. But on which means can we count? The poorest missions and only gradually freed from colonial laces, especially in the twentieth century, rely more on the trust in Providence and on the generosity of the faithful and missionaries. Of course, it cannot be generalized, because the situation is different in Latin America compare to that of the Middle East, of non-Christian Asian countries, where missionaries cannot count on local benefactors.

The relationship with the authorities that must grant permits varies according to the situation and the existing political agreements. A typical case is that of France, which while it promulgates anti-congregationalist laws and proceeds to the separation between State and Church, abroad favors missions, with an intention of affirmation especially in the Far East, instrumentalizing religion. Also, towards the end of the XIX and early XX century, Africa will pay the costs of a forced partition between the European countries, which cultivate imperialist ambitions and exploit the continent.

Precisely in the complexity of geopolitics, missionary drive must seek new ways, utilizing inevitable supports to fit in the different places and cautious complaints, choices courageous, testimonies that in various cases reach the heroism of martyrdom. When arriving, it's necessary to build churches and works to make the charity announced concrete. To increase the revenue of the Holy See, the obolo of Saint Peter is taken force collected among devout Catholics in Europe and then in the American states, which will serve to fund at least partially charitable works and missions. But alongside material resources, human resources are needed.

Lay people are becoming more and more involved in the faith and feel more and more directly responsible for it, and the fate of the Church and its head, threatened and tossed like a ship in the storm, as stressed the Catholic public opinion. In parish associations the members learn to pray with a wide range of ecclesial breath and not only for personal needs; the missionary magazines spread knowledge of distant scenarios, which ignite the souls of those who feel ready to dedicate their lives to know the Savior of all.

With knowledge, a missionary spirituality develops, of which becomes the paradigm Saint Teresa of Lisieux (1873-1897), a cloistered nun whose prayer, silence and contemplation are made apostolic and reach all the earth, until she was declared Patroness of the missions in 1926: "If my Desires are granted my heaven will be spent on earth until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my Heaven

doing good on earth... No, I will not be able to rest until at the end of the world, and as long as there are souls to be saved".¹²

In this lively nineteenth-century setting the ancient religious orders are renewed and set off again for the mission, after overcoming the crisis of suppression and dispersion, while a dynamic and motivated component of the Religious Congregations, with young resources, oriented to the future more than retreating to the past. Often the nursery is made up of parish associations. Already born during the persecutions of the French Revolution, but spread in the Eight-twentieth century, various simple vows Congregations have the purpose of spreading the Kingdom of God even among pagans, infidels. They are founded on the active apostolate of a multiform charity, on the work of members and no longer on privileges, are supported by the "missionary" Popes, who seek strategies to send effective evangelizers in respect of the propaganda interests of the motherland.

In this sense the Roman Curia entrusts directly the pastoral mandate to Vicars and Apostolic Prefects, before erecting dioceses to circumvent local claims, although they encounter difficulties, as experience Mons. Cagliari and other Salesians in Patagonia, and then in other areas. With this strategy, large territories are assigned to one or a few religious congregations. The initiative of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide must manage problems of jurisdiction and relationship between religious institutes, while the growing presence of Protestant churches, favored by religious freedom or by dominating countries, creates conflicts, competitions and in the end counterarguments between those who are facing a Christianity of which they cannot understand the historical reasons for the divisions. This does not happen early in Latin America, first bound to the state religion, but certainly in the United States and Canada, as in Asia, Africa and Oceania, where Catholics often arrive later, after the Protestants.

Missionary vitality of religious institutes

In Europe new Institutes are founded, explicitly missionary, or with a great and original projection missionary, the numbers of religious are growing, but in several cases, prejudices remain on Christian maturity of the local candidates about the possibility of persevering in the vows. This has repercussions in the access of natives to many orders and religious congregations, at least up to Benedict XV's *Maximum illud*, 1919, which pays much attention to the renewal of the missionary style. Already in the nineteenth century, however, some founders had understood the importance of having local cultural mediators to effectively announce the newness of the Gospel, as well as sending missionaries at a young or very young age, with great acts of trust, to facilitate their integration, adaptation to local customs and languages and to make them feel attached to the second homeland, taken as their own. It was also the case of the Salesians and the FMA: among the first missionaries of 1877, three out of six were 17 years old.

Many missionaries recognize in the field that the help of religious is indispensable for evangelization, so the male congregations are supported by a similar female. A lot of missionaries recognize in the field that the help of religious is indispensable evangelization, whereby the male congregations are joined by a similar female.

Some typically missionary foundations

1814 Congregation of the Picpus (Coudrin), in Oceania

1816 Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Mazenot): Africa and Canada

1822 Marist (Colin), in Oceania

1841 Cor. Mariae (Libermann), merged with the fathers of S. Santo, towards Africa

¹² *Novissima Verba*, may-september 1897.

- 1849 Children of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claret)
- 1850 Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) (Msgr. Ramazzotti)
- 1855 Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (Chevalier): New Guinea
- 1862 Missionaries Scheut (Verbiest): Mongolia, Congo, Philippines
- 1867 Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus (Comboni)
- 1868 White Fathers (Lavigerie): North Africa, Sudan, Sahara
- 1869 Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa (White Mothers)
- 1872 The Mothers of Nigrizia (Comboni): Egypt, Sudan
- 1875 Divine Word Fathers (Janssens): China, Africa (New Guinea)
- 1889 Servant of the Holy Spirit (Janssens)
- 1896 Servant of the Holy Spirit of perpetual adoration (Janssens)

New seminars are open for missions and lay religious congregations to work mainly for the education, as the Marist Brothers, the Marianists. From the mid-1800s foundations started and grew in countries outside Europe or with a Protestant majority. The Congregation of Propaganda Fide since the 1880s has directly approved many Constitutions of Congregations of simple vows which fall under its direct control, even before such a type of Congregation obtains full canonical recognition from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1900. These are some formally missionary Congregations founded in Catholic countries, but also institutes founded in non-Christian populations or a majority of non-Catholics and therefore under the jurisdiction of Propaganda (England, USA, Holland, Canada...). These, after 1908 with the reform of the Roman Curia, pass under the Congregation of Religious. The Constitutions tend to be standardized first with those approved by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and then with its Norms of 1901, while taking into account some specific cultural customs, for example in the United States.

One important aspect monitored by Propaganda fide, among others, concerns the trend to safeguard the link of the Institutes founded in mission lands with the Holy See, limiting the link with the bishops, where there are, since sometimes they aim to interfere in control even of the communities outside their diocese, if the Mother House falls within them. Relations between Religious congregations, bishops, the Holy See and civil authorities constitute the coordinates within which the work of missionaries is given space, and not infrequently they also represent the nodes that bind the mission of the religious according to situations and periods. Obviously, much depends on politics and the typology of governmental relations with the Holy See, as well as other factors concerning the institutional model.

Here comes as a new component the contribution of women in the direct apostolate, weak ring, politically uninfluential compared to the great Orders, yet that manages in many cases to find the crossing new frontiers of the Christian community. Certainly, as long as faith was imposed by the colonial powers as the only state religion, there was not much choice. When religious freedom comes into play, in Latin America and elsewhere too, missionary frontiers are opening or reopening, but in populations with other religious traditions, especially in Asia, conversions become more difficult, with the burden and the suspect that the missionaries are emissaries of threatening foreign powers. Unarmed and disarmed figures are needed, convincing first by how they live and operate and then by what they say; that they speak the common language of families, before that of the new catechism or together with that, to make it understandable. The care of people of all social conditions, with clear advantages on human level, becomes the persuasive mediation that opens to the highest horizons of dignity and responsibility, setting the conditions for change through concern for health, education and training for all, including women, the proposal of means to overcome poverty and poverty.

In several cases the new male Congregations were joined by a female congregation that shared the same founder and spirit, differentiating in activities according to the of gender, as in the Salesian case, changing the tradition of the second Orders of women of the Medieval male orders,

which were cloistered. Even from the Third orders, of lay people, several congregations, just think of the Franciscan galaxy exploded in the XIX and XX centuries.

The contribution of women's institutes

Igino Tubaldo writes that “we cannot speak of “missionary awakening” in the XIX and XX centuries if one dispenses with the *unpublished contribution of women*”.¹³ The fact of long-term “true religious” only those segregated from the world is in close connection with the condition of women in the Church: up to the modern age they were not devoted to teaching, apart from monastic educandati, nor to the assistance of the sick. Those who wanted to be religious entered a monastery. In the XVI century there was a movement of the cloistered nuns towards the missions; next to the monasteries, the “beaterios”, where native virgins or mixed with (non-solemn) vows joined the nuns. The pope Gregory XIII was the one who allows the mestizos to become religious. For several decades, even native vocations entering a European Congregation can be “conversed”, more rarely fully religious.

Piera Cavaglià recalls that the well-known Jesuit missiologist Pierre Charles identifies *three phases in history of the missions*: in the first, the women were kept away; in the second, the women were tolerated; in the third, the women are in demand precisely for their irreplaceable educational work.¹⁴ In the XVII century, in fact, we are still in the first phase, answering the question: “*Utrum feminae possunt esse missionarii*”, a Secretary of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide answered: “*Negative, quia feminae carent intelligentia*”.¹⁵

Thanks to social evolution in the 18th century, many missionaries are born in Europe. Women, in fact, have climbed the revolutionary barricades and, with the gradual spread of school also among popular groups, their awareness and commitment also grows in the public sphere, Although they are deprived of many rights and discriminated in society as in the Church, for ancient prejudices. With a new vision of their own responsibilities as believers, and through a convergence of factors conducive to it, the resourcefulness of many apostles emerges. In other words, the Catholic missionary awakening, the investment of people sent by the Holy See and the novelty of women's presence are concomitant factors, that mark the new missionary season in which persuasion must replace religious imposition and women's skills and abilities become decisive for a religious proposal that passes through relationships, warned disinterested and not threatening.

Marie Javouhey founded the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny and in 1817 reached the island of Reunion; the daughters of Charity in 1839 left for the missions, followed by the Gianellines, in Latin America; the first, in 1856, and then the Franciscan missionaries of Egypt in 1859, the Sisters of St Anne arrived in India in 1860 and the Canossian Sisters in Hong Kong in 1867; these will be followed by many other religious institutes for women. A particular case is constituted by the Combonians, thought from the beginning in parallel to the priests and lay moretes teachers and laity, led by Daniel Comboni, who leave for Africa in 1867, in view of a plan that sees African women protagonists of evangelization, with the involvement of the Diocese of Verona and others.¹⁶ A few decades later the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Cabriniane, were born in the USA in 1890; the Apostles of the Sacred Heart arrived in Brazil in 1900 and in the USA in 1902; then the Scalabrinians, the Guanellians and others.

Already at the end of the nineteenth century women outnumbered the presence of missionaries, due to the explosion of women's foundations and the role of women in the ecclesial mission, especially in

¹³ TUBALDO Igino, *Giuseppe Allamano. His time, his life, his work III*, Torino, Ed. Missioni Consolata 1984, 93.

¹⁴ Cf AA.VV., *Missions and school. Proceedings of the IV week of missionary studies*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero 1964, 13.

¹⁵ *Ivi* 12.

¹⁶ Cf <https://www.comboniane.org/>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9Gls4U6LD4> (19 september 2024).

the fields of education, the promotion and charity of assistance to the most disparate categories of people. In 1880, 30 new religious institutes have about 10,000 missionaries.

In Latin America the missionaries coming from Europe are welcomed also for the fact that, still in the middle of the XIX century there were almost no active life congregations, so a new model of religious is appreciated, engaged in works recognized as useful for social development, both in the evangelized areas and among numerous ethnic groups and tribes. Once the countries achieved independence and slavery was abolished (e.g. in Brazil in 1888), religious congregations were gradually founded on the model of those in Europe. Local institutes of diocesan law are being established, which promote native vocations and serve the local Churches. It is above all Pius XI with the Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28-2-1926) who promoted the foundation of indigenous religious institutes, also to make the freedom of the Church more visible in relation to foreign interests. He said that “it was necessary to establish religious congregations of men and women in the lands of missions”. In 1937 the Congregation of Propaganda Fide issued specific rules for the foundation and approval of the constitutions of these congregations. Indeed, there are more and more foundations in Asia and then in Africa, while the number of religious women and therefore European missionaries is decreasing.

The frontiers

In the XIX century, Africa is the new great missionary frontier, where missionaries are protagonists amid many challenges. On this continent it was thought that girls were prevented from becoming religious by the absolute primacy given to their biological motherhood. The great missionaries are heading to this land:

- Fr. Libermann, teacher of missionary spirituality. Renovator and organizer of the missions.
- Card. Lavignerie, with the Institute of the White Fathers. He intended to create a Christian Kingdom in Central Africa, advocating a vertical method: converting Africans with Africans. From this the system of the teacher-catechists was born.
- Card. Massaia, a Capuchin, focuses on the indigenous clergy in Africa and on the qualities of missionaries and catechists. It prefers the method of pre-evangelisation and focuses on school.
- Daniel Comboni, with a great passion for Africa, with the idea that African women should evangelize others and founded the Mothers of Nigrizia; and Allamano, grandson of Saint Joseph Cafasso, founder of the Sisters of the Consolata, aim at the first evangelization.

Asia is a complex frontier, because, with the exception of the Catholic Philippines and the colonial centers of the Portuguese scattered in various countries (India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Indonesia, East Timor...), great lands of ancient and traditional cultures and religions hinder or distrust the missionaries, after the misunderstandings, condemnations and persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Matteo Ricci and many Jesuits who had introduced the method of adaptation to local cultures seemed overcome by the imposition of uniformity of rites, rejected by local governments as foreign interference. The British-dominated India opened up very gradually to Catholic missionaries, in a difficult confrontation with Protestants and Hinduism. In the XIX century new missionaries will know persecution in Korea, Vietnam, Burma, and then China...

But also, in Latin America there are large areas not evangelized in 800 and, besides this, the growing migratory phenomenon increases the missionary urgency. In North America, the missionary spaces are divided up mainly between English, Irish and French. Among other countries that in the nineteenth century sent many missionaries viewed with suspicion, such as France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, the government of liberal Italy, which is not a major power, It encourages the sending of missionaries to certain countries in order to increase the rootedness of their values and interests. All missionaries, according to the case, are variously linked to their mother country and distance themselves from instrumentalization. Nevertheless, at least until the beginning of the

twentieth century missionaries generally have a one-sided vision of development and progress, so they are willing to make any sacrifice in order to "civilize" and evangelize the so-called "savages"; at the same time, they realize that some societies, in some areas, at least, they are well developed, so the proclamation of the Gospel needs appropriate language, greater modesty and patience. In the Salesian case, the National Association to Help Catholic Missionaries (ANSMI), founded by prof. Ernesto Schiaparelli, promotes the works among migrants in America as well as in the Middle East, trying to circumvent government protectorates, The Holy See could not ignore.

Missionary intentionality, which is increasingly prevalent in relation to national conditionalities, facilitates in many missionaries the interest for the development of indigenous peoples, especially through education and health care, a prerequisite for the development of populations. Precisely where political, social and cultural situations are more complex, the female mediation becomes valuable because it has no influence in the eyes of the powerful. In the face of such variety, the study of missions must always be diversified by periods, geographical and cultural areas, avoiding to judge facts and mentalities of the past with current categories and often unilateral, while the aspects and effects to be examined are many and sometimes contradictory, as is usually the case in human things.¹⁷

The proclamation of the Gospel, for example, is not uniform; it takes on features peculiar to women's congregations. The sisters, in fact, are not preachers, nor priests who exercise the priestly ministry, but women who participate in the evangelizing mission through education, instruction, health care, essential catechesis, informal and small group meetings. It is an announcement from below, in the social fabric of the voiceless and disenfranchised, where authority is gained by selfless charity. Yet in various American capitals, open to modernity, colleges are built with the support of local authorities who value the education of modern religious for their daughters, promoting a change of mentality in families or through master's training, powerful leverage of widespread transformation. According to the charisms, for example in the case of the FMA we will insist on associating with works for wealthy families, popular ones, always starting from the festive oratory and the work schools.

From places of origin to missions: institutional features

For the women's congregations present in lands of *mission ad gentes*, it is necessary to distinguish those founded in Europe in the nineteenth century from the more recent ones that arose in the twentieth century on each continent. The first had to open different paths from an institutional point of view.

Several XIX century founders have moved away from their place of origin within a few years, despite having little resources. This entails doubts about the possibility of success and sometimes on the pretension of control by the bishops, so that they soon seek papal approval, or direct dependence on the Holy See. It for its part implements precautionary measures through the cardinal protectors, fixes the duration of the offices of government; specifies the assistance of general and provincial councils, the request of periodic reports to be submitted to the S. Congregation on persons and things, economic, structural and apostolic data. At the time it was unthinkable to support public works by women alone, extended in an international network. For the ecclesiastical authority, the presence of the Council is a way to ensure good female governance, protecting congregations from the feared inadequacy of one superior. In fact, a more participatory government is sometimes realized, which partially attenuates the top-down vision facilitated by the centralized government of the new institutions. They provide for staff transfers and economic solidarity for the common apostolic

¹⁷ Although there are many studies, there are also vast unexplored archival sources, especially related to the Congregation of Propaganda Fide and the national archives of the colonial countries and the countries of arrival, with all political distinctions and real or presumed rights.

purpose, in favor of a more co-responsible environment. And in a community life ideally without differences.

This institutional setting is also experienced in the distant missions, with which the superiors try to maintain contact, by letters, sometimes with strenuous and long trips, and by observing the regulations regarding the permits due about the houses, the works, the staff. Of course, sometimes in mission you have to make decisions without waiting months, between sending letters and response from the superior.¹⁸ Sometimes it happens that a province secede from the Congregation and is founded another, more relevant to local needs, precisely because of misunderstandings of mentality. The later congregations that have emerged in missionary lands since the mid-twentieth century are already taking shape in a context with a limited tradition, where canon law and the centralized control of the Vatican Curia are more distant. They are more concerned with the founders, the bishops, sometimes with the tendency to remain tied to their own territory and a limited context.

Some notes to be deepened in relation to the Women's Congregations

In a short meeting on a complex theme, one risks always the generality and superficiality with regard to the different political and cultural contexts and the differences between both the periods studied and the Congregations concerned. The subject of missions needs to be examined on a case-by-case basis. Here we can only mention some aspects that deserve to be studied in depth, especially among the missionaries, for whom contact with other peoples has long been an extraordinary broadening of human, spiritual and ecclesial horizons, Along with sometimes unimaginable challenges.

1. For the congregations that have emerged in Europe, the impact of the encounter between different cultures should be explored, both in the central government of the Institute, for example, the reflections in the General Council and in the General Chapters, and at local level (e.g. women's self-determination, economic entrepreneurship...). In other words, if and how cultural contamination gradually changes the whole body's mentality. Moreover, it is necessary to study how the native vocations take on tasks of government and formation at all levels in the Institute, how they go to other lands and missionary paths, and how co-responsibility matures.

2. The relationship with the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, at local and central level, having to combine various instances; which influence of political conditionalities but also of one's own mentality, to examine whether and how much the missionaries are executing orders or more creative in the field.

3. At a deeper level, it is better to explore how "the institutionalized charisms" have interpreted the meaning of mission in lands different from those of the origins of an Institute. It would be to say that the mission sometimes does not start with verbal announcement, but the Institutes open schools, hospitals, colleges, train teachers and not only local catechists, aiming at an integral education, transformative of the environment, on a religious and civil level. Sometimes they prefer structured works rather than continuing to visit families in the villages. It is a modern form, proposed and not

¹⁸ Various studies concerning missionary women religious in the USA are collected in the volume of GARRONI Maria Susanna (curated by), *Sorelle d'Oltreoceano. Italian religious and emigration to the USA: a story to be discovered*, Roma, Carocci 2008; among others, D'AGOSTINO Peter R., "I authorize you to take severe measures against them": the dissolution of the Order of the Apostolic Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Boston, 1894-1911, in *ivi* 83-109. In addition, PIZZORUSSO Giovanni, *Blandina and her sisters. Emigration, americanization, modernization: notes on the role of Italian religious in America*, *Migration Studies* 47(2010)180, 974-990; BUFFON Giuseppe - POZZOBON Maria Antonietta, *Un altro francescanesimo. Franciscan missionaries from Genova to New York between immigration and social service*. Milano, Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 2009; CARROZZINO Michela, *Le guanelliane a Chicago (1913-1940)*, in BARTOLONI Stefania, (curate by), *Per le strade del mondo. Laiche e religiose fra Otto e Novecento*, Bologna, Il Mulino 2007, 415-435.

imposed, which aims at the concrete recognition of the dignity of each person and of the whole person, with all its needs, with an added value when we talk about women in cultures of undisputed inequality. Certainly, with the risk of bringing a foreign model, but lived as sharing a spirit felt as a gift and responsibility for the whole Church and for all, without borders. Sometimes this has provoked reactions and misunderstandings, but it is equally true that missionaries have been the people who have promoted local populations most, opening horizons and paths of development, anticipating public interventions.

4. The multiplication of small congregations bound above all to the founding bishop and a diocese, without an international dimension, on one hand facilitates the insertion of religious people and an effective apostolate, on the other hand can sometimes pose problems for continuity, sustainability, community development.

The concept of mission in the Salesian Congregation: an annotation

Bosco did not found a formally missionary Congregation, but from the beginning he had the strong impulse to spread everywhere the Salesian spirit. From *mihi animas cetera tolle*, the desire to cooperate with the Savior and with Mary Help of Christians (not disincarnate!) was the reason for so many sacrifices, so much study and hard work. In a modern language, Don Bosco had in mind a global task, a "Roman Catholic" heart for the Salvation intended for all young people to form "good Christians and honest citizens" everywhere.

When he thinks of the missions of southern Patagonia, he has in mind the "savages" or semi-savages, as the ethnic groups were called. He thinks that he can reach adults by offering education to the youths. Meanwhile, with a modern vision of the missions, he also understood the situation of Italians who, as they said, in the Ocean lose their faith. So, the first missionaries go among them, also to have a springboard for missions *ad gentes*. In reality, with the spread of anti-clerical ideologies, the congregations engaged in charitable works at the service of people become the point of strength to bring the street and the church, the taverns and the sacraments closer together. In general, in the foundations in new countries, the FMA follow the Salesians who lead the way and call them.

Women are becoming increasingly necessary, as men are the first to disinterest themselves from the faith and in families, they hardly allow priests to approach their wives, sisters and daughters. Women are needed, with their relational capacities and their care services. In the Salesian case it happens also that the missionaries of the first hour, Msgr. Cagliari, Msgr. Costamagna, affirm that the sisters are "the necessary auxiliary" in mission territories, while for example in Europe it remained evident the asymmetry, in the sense that the priests were preachers, confessors, in some cases teachers in the Women's colleges, but the FMA did not have any catechetical and training tasks in the colleges or seminaries for men. In mission, instead, they shared the apostolate and often the sisters prepared the ground to arrive at the administration of the sacraments, as well as supporting fraternally the labors of the missionaries. The generosity of their service, sacrifice, joyful poverty made the announcement credible and reliable, overcoming prejudices.

In the Salesian case, from the beginning there is an explicit request to go on mission. But what does it mean? Usually, it's enough to leave one's homeland to be considered a missionary. So, from Italy to the Catholic Spain or France you are already going on a mission. At the beginning of the XX century, Don Rua will say that the poorest areas of the peninsula are like Patagonia in Italy, so by connecting the mission not to a physical territory, but to a socio-cultural, economic and religious condition. This idea also spreads among other superiors: India, China in the imaginary indicate environments of poverty spiritual and material also in the homeland and cities. It is alluded to the fact that missionaries bring Civil values and faith, wherever they are lacking. With the departure from religious practice of various social groups, such as workers and professionals, we talk about works of "penetration", for a necessary re-Christianization, which in some way reconfigures the mission.

Obviously, in the impact of the ancient Eastern civilizations, where there is cultural and practical development alternative to the Catholic faith, the concept of mission changes. Social works, in favor of disadvantaged groups, highlight the Gospel values first with gestures that with words and become the mediation of the proclamation of faith reversed by charity. The maternal, patient and sweet face of the Christian God, takes on the traits of many humble religious people who spend their lives, assuming to the second homeland, without wanting to go back to the security of their own origins. Charity becomes language more understandable, universal, expressive, convincing and disarming. It is to be noted that in many contexts the low consideration of women entails for religious the need to earn local authority's esteem by the brim, while at the same time opening the way for the evolution of local women's subjectivity in the family and society.

These few brushstrokes allude to many stories. The study of women's contribution to the evolution of periods and geographical areas is a field to be explored, beyond individual cases of heroic figures and institutions, to grasp the challenges, the resistances, as well as the novelty that they produce in the Church in a real and broad sense, both in the territories of evangelization and in creating networks of solidarity and communion between places of origin and places of integration. The joint study by two geographical sides is essential to illuminate mentalities, conditionalities, motivations and attitudes, knowing that knowledge and understanding of contexts dispel prejudices or further anachronistic perceptions.

Collaboration between missionaries of the same charism has also taken on different nuances. So far, the most informal reports are understood as necessary and inevitable adaptation to the situation and perhaps instead, in the best cases, are to be recognized as something innovative and positive about cooperation, exploiting differences, complementary skills and abilities. In the case of the Salesian Family, with many local Congregations founded by a single and often Salesian missionary, it is equally stimulating to look at another reflection, that is, what exchange is It took place between the new foundations and the missionary FMAs, sometimes involved as trainers or higher. Having been founded by Don Bosco, author of the first Constitutions, as elements of the face the Salesian charism have been transmitted in the new religious families, in the letter and to the I live for formation, community and apostolic life

Thinking about male and female missionaries in general, we are at the beginning of a fascinating discovery of the traces of God's word in many lands; Word translated into words and concrete, ordinary and incarnated gestures; in difficult journeys and unexpected landings to meet people, without private or power interests, but because they are recognized brothers and sisters of the same family of children of God, with the same rights to access salvation.

Grazia Loparco fma

Essential Bibliography

Many accurate studies and authors on the Catholic missions, in various languages.

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Various publications by the Salesian Historical Institute, the Association of Salesian History Cultors (ACSSA) and the Institute of the FMA.

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