**Redemptorist Religious Life(3)**

**Mission**: **Bearers of the Gift of the Gospel** **to the Men and Women of Today**

*Starting point*

* The Seminar on Religious Life as well as many other forums insist on mission as an essential element of Religious Life.
* Benedict XVI reminded us in the aforementioned audience to the Superiors General of November 26, 2010, that "Mission is the way of being of the Church and, in it, of Consecrated Life; it is part of our identity.“ (Cons.1)
* The Religious stands out for being *called and sent* (cf. Mk 3: 14-15). As such, the Religious is a partaker of Christ's mission, sent by the Father (cf. Heb 3, 1), so that "all other vocations and missions are as constellations placed around the person of Christ ".
* In this way, you cannot understand the mission of a Religious without an existential reference to Christ. (Cons. 1)
* If Jesus does nothing on his own (cf. Jn 8, 28) and if in his ministry there is no reference to his mission – for what is at the center is the Father who sent him, ("My food is do the will of him who sent me "[Jn 4, 34]) – then the same must be said of the Religious called to live in a deep filial anthropology.
* With all that, what I want to reaffirm is that in the life of the Religious – as I mentioned earlier – all, and therefore, also mission, start from that "you alone", of that "You are everything." The mission of cannot be reduced to a religious volunteering, or simply explain it with the paradigms of contemporary thought. You cannot separate the "apostolicity" of the Religious from its Christological meaning with all that this entails.
* However, this aspect is not enough. In the mission, the Religious is called to constantly confront the process of post-modernity and all that it brings with it.
* As a result, an important challenge that is posed in relation to the Religious mission is that of facing the complexity of the current moment.(Art. 6; Cons. 19)
* For all who are consecrated, the world holds a profound theological significance.
* It is not something to be endured or something to be avoided, but a reality that has to be contemplated through the eyes of God and loved as it is loved by God.
* It is a reality that becomes an opportunity to follow Christ more closely.
* In this sense we can say that in the reality of man and woman today, following Christ is not something merely optional – even less so for the Religious – but a characterizing ingredient of that discipleship.
* Reflecting on Religious Life in recent decades has made Religious more aware of the need not to turn their back to the world, especially in these times in which postmodern culture – or as some prefer to call it, post-Christian culture with its wealth of opportunities, but also of uncertainties, disappointment, and skepticism – presents us with many challenges.
* Neither the Church nor Religious Life is foreign to the changes we are experiencing in these times both "delicate and tough."
* Moreover, Religious Life has made a clear choice, at least at the level of reflection, to accompany our world, not because it has ready answers to the questions that people today pose themselves, but because, as men and women of our time, they perceive themselves as *seekers of meaning*.

*To be formed in order to form in and for the mission*

* Let us discuss a principle that seems basic, elementary, and probably, therefore, critical.
* As a component of the mission of Religious Life, it is necessary that formation should help discover life as a mission, as Jesus lived it, an entire life given to proclaiming the Good News.
* This leads me to make my own Lola Arrieta’s statement, who said, "Life in mission is discovered by walking after Jesus, by familiarizing oneself with his pedagogy, and methods, even though it may take time to learn." If we want to be "missionaries" and "apostles" we have to attend the school of Jesus and learn from that school how to look at our world. (“Following the example ….” Cons 1)
* The current situation is characterized, among other things, by its complexity. This means that those who want to be bearers of the gift of the Gospel here and now have to acquire the necessary wisdom and courage *to deal* with the *complexity*, without thereby giving up on the search for the founding or essential experience and the pursuit of the *“only thing necessary.”.*
* John Paul II stated: "Formation is a vital process by which a person converts to the Word of God and learns the art of seeking for signs of God in the world's realities.“ (VC,68)
* The world, history, economics, politics, the various arts, the lives of the people around us, and our life are all strewn with traces of the presence of God. (Cons. 19)
* Today we cannot think of formation in and for Religious Life that puts us or our *formandi* in the condition of inhabitants of a besieged city.
* If mission is always to be *inter gentes*, then formation, must be carried out in an ongoing dialogue with reality, in an attitude of respectful listening to everything that comes from the complex situation that our world is going through without, however, suspending a critical judgment about it.
* A defensive formation, or what would be even worse, a formation full of negativity in relation to the world today would have tragic consequences in evangelizing mission to which we, Religious, are called, for that would prevent a fruitful dialogue with the current culture.
* It would, consequently, prevent *restoring* the gift of the Gospel [as center focus] to the men and women of our time.
* A defensive formation and one that is full of negativity would make us foreign to our world, leading us to present a God foreign to the history of humanity, with the risk of contributing to build a world without God.
* For Religious life, and more particularly for the Apostolic Religious Life, an inserted formation is required that is both well accompanied and close to the joys and sufferings of our brothers and sisters, the men and women of today. (see Cons. 86 2a and 87)
* It should be a formation that allows us, as disciples and missionaries, to place ourselves in "a reality which changes many times at a frenetic pace";
* An appropriate formation to continue with the hand on the plow, despite the harshness of the land and the inclement weather;
* a personal formation for this time because the road ahead may be too long (1 Kings 19).
* A formation that responds not only to a time of changes – like many of those in history where novelty abounded – but also to a time of change, in a historical moment where changes are so complex and accelerated that it is easy to get the sense that we do not know where to step.
* It should be a formation full of *kindness* and *empathy* toward the world as God loves and criticizes it (cf. Jn 17.9). (Cons 81)
* It should be an outlook that doesn’t stop from projecting a positive and evangelical outlook regarding the contexts and cultures in which we find ourselves, while discovering the unprecedented opportunities of grace which the Lord offers us.
* Formation should help "set out to sea", delve fearlessly into the *new Areopagus*, (VC 96-99) and remain, in the words of Benedict XVI, as *outposts of faith.*
* In a society like ours in which a man thinks he has reached "maturity" and, therefore, believes not to need God; in a world in which man comes to occupy the central position, which until recently God occupied, and in which God becomes a useless hypothesis and a competitor, not only to be avoided, but even eliminated, the "missionary" and "apostle" cannot fall into the same trap to proclaim, without God, his own message and which ends up being a pure ideology.
* This enables us in Religious Life to have to be formed and to form for a healthy harmony between being and doing, without subordinating elements of the way of life that each of us has embraced, and which are specific to our charism and to the work we have to do. (Cons. 11)
* Formation should be responsible for the fundamental structure of the individual and the personalization of faith.
* Only on the basis of a Trinitarian faith and spirituality can we enter into the dynamics of the logic of the gift, which is the logic of the "missionary" and "apostle."
* It is faith in the Triune God that makes us less self-referential and to go out of ourselves, in order to go to the other and bring him/her the Good News of the Gospel.
* Moreover, given the new situation we are living in and which is born of the socio-cultural changes that are occurring, even in traditionally Christian societies, what is required now is a “new evangelization,” which is far from being a simple re-evangelization.
* This evangelization should be new because it is about making a second proclamation, though, in reality it is always the same one; an evangelization that is "new in its ardor, its methods, and its expressions."
* Therefore, being formed and forming are required for an evangelizing mission which, without neglecting the ordinary activities of evangelization, gives priority to new initiatives in response to the challenges that come from the increasingly secular world we live in, but with particular attention to the new frontier areas. (Cons. 15)
* In this sense the formation we give and receive must be very careful to read the s*igns of the times and places* and life events that mark a particular period of history and through which, the Religious, should feel challenged by God and called to respond from the Gospel.
* These signs, moreover, should be flashes of light present in the dark night of our lives and the lives of our peoples; lamp posts of hope to be able to discern and interpret (cf. Lk 12, 56).
* One of these challenges is that of language.
* Opting for a *new language* to be understood by men and women today is a requirement which cannot be ignored in mission.
* Today more than ever it is necessary to open the cage of language, so that communication of the Gospel may be more effective and fruitful.
* This requirement must be a concrete commitment in ongoing formation and should be present since initial formation – if we wish that evangelization be truly new.
* Another requirement of formation for the mission is *passion for the truth*.
* It is certainly true that dialogue is the new name for mission, and this is a round trip which entails giving and receiving.
* It is, therefore, essential to be formed and to form for dialogue in its various meanings (ecumenical, interreligious, and with culture).
* However, it is also true that this does not mean we have to give up proposing the truth, which, for us, has a face, that is, Jesus Christ. (Cons. 11)
* Without passion for Truth, evangelization would fall into mere rhetoric and would become insignificant with the risk of falling into relativism.
* Passion for truth is essential if we don’t want to be "children, tossed here and there and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles." (Eph 4, 14).
* When we have the experience of Paul that Christ lives within, we will feel how Christ himself urges him to give of himself to all (cf. 1 Cor 9, 19-22) in the logic of 2 Cor 5, 14, i.e., of the love of Christ which impels us.
* One last note. Mission cannot be understood today unless it is a *shared mission with the laity*. In the varieties of ministries, all Christians are called to be bearers of the gift of the Gospel both *inter gentes* and *ad gentes*.
* The lay person is an evangelizer by his/her own right, not by a gracious concession or even less by way of substitution over shortages of clerical or religious personnel. Hence, there is a need for the Religious to enter into an *ecclesiological conversion* to give the laity the rightful place in evangelizing mission.

*Formative Mediations for mission*

1. Formation for mission is a fraternity/community that feels on a mission. It is not a fraternity/community that is closed in on itself, but open to others. A fraternity/community that wishes to form for mission should be increasingly concentrated on its purpose for existence and always attentive to the spaces that could be opened with regards to witness and the proclamation of the Gospel as Good News of fraternity among all peoples, especially the least and excluded, because they are the first audiences of the Gospel (cf. Lk 4,).

2. Another critical formative mediation for mission are strong experiences of mission. If it is about mission *inter gentes*, then these experiences ought to be a normal part of any formation program. What I said earlier about the fraternity/community that wants to be formative, it must also be said of the persons who live in it. Missionary experiences help when they are really accompanied well; they help the Religious to be less self-referential and to devote themselves to the proclamation and witness of the Gospel. If it is about mission *ad gentes*, then this element must be effectively promoted within the possibilities, while taking into account our own charism – as long as it is not about a simple religious tourism. In any case, it is important to place ourselves and our younger brothers in a position to experience and practice discipleship in the mission tasks entrusted to us and in the development of a work lived out as a mission. I think no risk should be saved in the mission. When taking risks, if we allow ourselves to be accompanied and evaluated, our will is strengthened and we learn to deal with conflicts and to remain faithful, thus purifying our vocational maturity.

3. In formation, we have to guard always the nutrients of our *being sent out,* adhering to Him with all our hearts, souls, might, and mind, as the Word of God calls us to do (cf. Dt 6, 4), so as to be fully identified with him, thus being a "good fragrance of Christ" (2 Cor 2, 15). In all this, it is important not to lose sight of what Jesus did and lived. Only then can we discover mission as being sent out in what we do; only then can we clarify truly the reasons behind what we do.

4. Because mission is primarily about bearing witness to a life totally consecrated to the Kingdom, the vows play an important role in mission. A merely legal and ascetic view of the vows is outdated and the emphasis now is on the prophetic dimension, that is, on those elements of Religious Life that proclaim and denounce, while presenting an alternative way of life to that offered by the world.

Without really forgetting the ascetic and legal requirements entailed by the vows, we must instill a prophetic vision that leads to experience the vows from a firm will to be fully conformed to Christ and be "a living memorial of His way of existing and acting.“ (VC22)

5. We have referred to dialogue as the new name for mission. We have also said that formation for dialogue is a priority today. Yet, dialogue, especially dialogue with culture, requires a good intellectual and cultural formation "according to the times and dialogue with the search for meaning by man today.

Without it, dialogue between faith and culture will not be possible. Formation for mission should motivate – as it does for the proclamation of the Good News – the study of theology and other sciences as a requirement of respect and responsibility for what dialogue entails today with culture and society. Today, perhaps more than ever, the "missionary" and "apostle" is called to support convincingly the knowledge of God.

**Constitution 20 - The Redemptorist Missionary**

* Constitution stands apart (title in capitals)
* Traditional Redemptorist virtues
  + Our genetic code, our CSsR DNA
* Medallion of the Redemptorist, not a summary of Redemptorist spirituality

Virtues – descriptive

* Strong in Faith
* Rejoicing in Hope
* Burning with Charity
* On fire with zeal
* Humble in heart
* Persevering in prayer
* Full of joy
* Self-denial
* Ready for what is ‘demanding’ (available)
  + Love of the Cross
* Simplicity of life and language
* Apostolic men
* Genuine disciples of St. Alphonsus
* Preachers of the Gospel ‘Plentiful Redemption’

**‘TO PREACH THE GOSPEL EVER ANEW’ (ST. CLEMENT)**   
**RENEWED HOPE, RENEWED HEARTS, RENEWED STRUCTURES**   
**FOR MISSION (XXIV General Chapter)**

* **RENEWED HEART FOR MISSION…**
* *‘I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.’*
* (Ezek. 36,26)
* *‘…conversion of heart and continual renewal of mind should characterize their whole daily life.’* (Const. 41)
* We are confident that the Congregation is being called to respond ever more generously and radically to the call of ongoing conversion. Conversion calls all of us back to our first love, (cf. Rev. 2,4) to ‘keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.’ (Heb. 12,2) Conversion is a gift not only to individuals but also to our communities and to the entire Congregation. (Const. 12) It leads to a new solidarity in Christ and a new availability to respond with generosity to God’s call. (7)
* Understanding our vocation through the lens of conver‐sion leads to an impassioned zeal for the mission of the Congregation. It involves a ‘continuing and total’ process of renewal of every aspect of our lives. (Const 11) We feel the need to be more open to newness of heart and spirit in order to be faithful to our tradition. We have become acutely aware of the need to let go of what hin‐ders or limits us in living our charism and the call to grow more intensely in our commitment to the Kingdom of God. The more radical our conversion, the more radical and prophetic our *Vita apostolica*. (Const. 1) (8)

**Restructuring for Mission should stimulate a re‐awakening of our *Vita apostolica*. It should prompt a new availability for mission. (Principle 2)**

* Restructuring for mission is a call to conversion and to a profound renewal of our *Vita apostolica* in all its dimensions. (1.3)
* This conversion and renewal will invite us to deepen our reflection on culture. We are missionaries who come together from various cultures to form communities based on faith in Jesus Christ. This faith calls today’s Redemptorist to esteem and embrace the cultures of others while at the same time recognizing cultural limitations and giving countercultural witness, where appropriate. Restructuring for mission fosters a greater freedom to face the challenges of evangelization in a prophetic way. (1.4)
* Missionary conversion is a challenge to all Redemptorists, irrespective of age. This challenge should be explicit in the directories and in the practice of initial and continuing formation. (1.5)

**Conclusion**

* Formation should be a key that opens us to a passionate present and a hopeful future, and, therefore, to a meaningful Religious Life.
* Formation is "crucial" for those wishing to "reproduce with courage the boldness, creativity, and holiness of their Founders", (VC37) and, at the same time, be "aware of the challenges of their own time," in order to give a suitable response from the Gospel.
* Given the circumstances in which young people come to us, initial formation requires "an extensive period of time“ (VC65);
* they require also experiences to help change lives;
* an attentive personal accompaniment;
* and identifying well-defined itineraries, setting for each of them clear goals and precise mediations to achieve them.
* Among these mediations and crucial to them, is to have properly formed Formators, who are "experts in the ways that lead to God, so as to be able to accompany well others on this journey." They need people who show "the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism in which it is being realized;" (VC66)
* people who are able, through a peaceful discernment, to help test all things and keep what is good (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5, 21); see what comes from God and what does not;(VC69) look for "what is good, pleasing, and perfect to God" (Rom 12: 2).
* Moreover, it should be a discernment that is "free of temptations of number or efficiency, so as to assess in the light of faith and of possible contraindications, the veracity of the vocation and the rectitude of the intention."
* We must not forget that in Religious Life, we are all subjects of discernment, forced upon us due to the continuous change we experience around us and in us.
* I conclude with some words from the document, *Walking* *Afresh from Christ,* that I think are very important, that is, "We must be very generous to dedicate time and the best energies on Formation." Knowing what we are to do, all that is left for us is to be coherent with what we know and say.

*Sources:*

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