

The Same Missionary Society. Inspired and Heartened New Ways by Pope Francis

Władysław Madziar SVD

wladyslawmadziar@yahoo.com

Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome (Italy)

Fr. Władysław Madziar (born 1972), a Divine Word Missionary. He began his formation in the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) in 1991. He was ordained a priest on May 26, 2002 in Pieniężno. In September of the same year he left for his first mission assignment to Ghana. In 2008-2010 he did his licentiate studies in dogmatic theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University (PUG) in Rome. In 2010-2015 he lived in Tamale (Ghana), where he was a treasurer, rector of the formation house and lecturer of fundamental and dogmatic theology at St. Victor's Major Seminary. Since 2015 he has been a doctoral student at PUG. He writes his theses in ecclesiology about the importance of mercy in evangelization. In 2018, the *Referat Misyjny* in Pieniężno published his book on the mission experience in Ghana, *Cierpliwość wobec siebie (Patience with Oneself)*.

In the summer of 2017, in a corridor of the Gregorian University, I met a religious Sister who years back worked at the Apostolic Nunciature in Moscow. When I mentioned to her that I am a Divine Word Missionary, she became enthusiastic and wanted to share some of her personal experiences of our Society with me. She did not meet too many SVDs, but those whom she met made a very positive impression on her. While she worked at the Nunciature, the nuncio from 1994 to 2000 was our confrere Archbishop John Bukovsky. She described him in a few words: "he was so human". This incident comes to mind as I want to present in general terms the vision of the Church, not only taught, but even more represented, by Pope Francis. Based on my own experiences,

I intend to combine that vision with what our Society represents in practical terms. It seems that the most eloquent expression of that is the way that individual missionaries of the Divine Word exercise their various ministries. I hope that this article can provoke new questions in searching for further growth of our undoubtedly great heritage and can continue having a positive impact on many people. This can be understood in line with the words with which Pope Francis reminded the Church on the day of the beatification of Paul VI, 19th October, 2014, using the expression of his blessed predecessor: "By carefully surveying the signs of the times, we are making every effort to adapt ways and methods to the growing needs of our time and the changing conditions of society"¹. While being sensitive to the constantly changing conditions of the world which thereby raise new demands, we should not forget that there are also values, permanently actual and belonging to the essence of our missionary presence among the people. Thus, we should not fall into a trap of concentrating on fast results because we are not the "last chance" for others and we do not need to resolve everything by ourselves². In our dealing with people it is not about giving them a cheap and false momentary excitement but offering them true, though demanding, hope founded on the ever actual truth of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it seems justified to affirm that the missionaries of the Divine Word still authentically strain to imprint a lasting mark on the people entrusted to their care. The author is convinced that they can leave such an imprint by a life profoundly Christian which means "so human" because such life sparked the encounter of many people with Christ in the past and can do so also today. The author agrees with the affirmation of one of the greatest modern theologians, Joseph Ratzinger: "God is known through people who know him, the way towards God leads always in concrete through the person who is already close to God"³. Likewise, Pope Francis through his words and gestures confirms such an approach and can hearten us if we feel disheartened on the missionary journey.

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Homily at the Closing Mass of the Extraordinary Synod on the Family and Beatification of the Servant of God Paul VI*, 19.10.2014 [on-line], Unless indicated otherwise, all following quotations of Pope Francis, other Popes and official Church's documents, are quoted from the official Vatican site: www.vatican.va. [accessed: 7.02.2018].

² Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World "Evangelii Gaudium"* (EG), 24.11.2013, No 223 [accessed: 9.02.2018].

³ J. Ratzinger, *Chi ci aiuta a vivere? Su Dio e l'uomo*, Brescia 2006, p. 33. My own translation from Italian.

1. Pilgrim Church of the People of God

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis reminds us that one should see the Church as more than just a visible expression of our faith because she is “a people of pilgrims and evangelizers, transcending any institutional expression, however necessary”⁴. Thus, the Bishop of Rome emphasises the unity and totality of the People of God. There is no contraposition between the hierarchy and the lay faithful. This image helps us to understand that we are making our life journey together as people of “many faces, one heart” though endowed with different gifts. This expresses the provisional character of the Church that is not the final reality but are the people making their earthly pilgrimage towards the final fulfilment in the Kingdom of God⁵. We are not alone on that journey because there exists a profound union with the saints, people who reached their destination and life’s fulfilment in the Father’s house. Nonetheless, we need to be sensitive not to limit the image of the People of God only to the sociological aspect as if the Church were just as any other human democracy. For a complementary view of the Church one needs to keep in mind that one image does not express sufficiently the complex reality of the Church. Therefore, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21.11.1964), does not limit itself only to one image⁶.

Moreover, it should make us sensitive to the fact that every person plays a unique role in the Church and we should be attentive to not forming an élite of the elected. Through the image of the People of God, we rediscover anew the category of the *sensus fidei fidelium* that demonstrates that the united faithful are sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit and cannot err in matters of faith. “This pilgrim people have always counted on the Spirit to guide them, to sustain them and prompt them from both within and without”⁷. In line with that, every baptised person is called and is enabled to share the Gospel with others:

“All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith is, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization

⁴ EG 111.

⁵ Cf. EG 111.

⁶ Cf. LG 6-7.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Video Message to Participants in an International Theological Congress Held at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1-3 September 2015)* [accessed: 9.02.2018]. Cf. LG 12.

to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized"⁸.

As SVD missionaries we can boast of active collaboration with our lay partners. The term «partners» describes the attitude expected on the part of each group and the relationship that we have with lay people⁹. They are the people who actively participate in our missions. From the beginning of our Society, the need was recognized for the collaboration with the lay people and sharing with them the task of the spreading of the Good News. At times it can call for more humility on the part of everyone to accept that the Holy Spirit works in all the faithful¹⁰.

2. Motherhood of the Church

Pope Francis describes the Church as “the Mother with an open heart”¹¹. That name originates in the truth that the Church gives birth to her children in Baptism and at every time of their life is concerned about their whereabouts. This expresses the Church’s openness to the people who are on the fringes of her life and she wants to bring them into the community of the believers not because of the numbers but because of its care for every single person. In this image a special attention is given to the people who are in complex life situations so that no one is forgotten¹². The Pope’s expression *las periferias existenciales* points to

⁸ EG 120.

⁹ Cf. A. Miotk, *The General Chapters of the Society of the Divine Word (1884-2012). The Historical Journey in the Footsteps of the Founder: The Response to the Challenges of the Times*, Roma 2016. This author gives many references which portray well how our collaboration with lay people looked in different historical moments.

¹⁰ Cf. EG 119.

¹¹ EG 46-49. Cf. H. de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, London 1979², p. 42.

¹² The “margin” originates in the Latin *margo* which may be used to denominate the physical edge of a surface and in a figurative way it may be applied to a position on the edge, in a situation that is not a “normal” one. Therefore, the word can express well inequality. This can refer to inclusion or exclusion from a group. The Latin term may mean also a scar of a wound on the body. Hence, under the Church on the margins (peripheries) we can understand a vast range of situations. We speak about peripheries as the areas of human life, from which God is excluded. Likewise, it may refer to any human organization which is dehumanizing or may be the cause of human misery and suffering. Moreover, peripheries can refer to the human condition of lost hope and faith.

the demand of the Gospel to search tirelessly for what is lost (cf. Lk 15,1-32). No Christian can be satisfied with his own life of faith, closing him/herself off in her/his “own comfort zone” but she/he needs to reach out to those at the “peripheries” of existence: geographical, psychological or social¹³. The concept of “peripheries” covers a vast range of meanings and can be used to describe various situations of sin, pain, injustice, lack of faith, ignorance and everything which can be described as human misery¹⁴.

The foundation for going forth to *las periferias existenciales* is based on the very event of the Incarnation and the way demonstrated by God himself (cf. Jn 1,1-18). The Son of God enters the world as one of us among the people but far from the centre of the world; rather He comes to the “existential peripheries” of the marginalized people of that time (cf. Lk 2,1-20). Obviously it should be the same way for the Church. She cannot allow herself to be limited by frontiers. She is for the whole of humanity and is in continuous search for every individual. In this regard the changing historical context does not change the Church’s missionary quality and she never fails to pursue the people “on the outside” and who do not form part of the Christian community¹⁵.

Another aspect of the motherhood of the Church is the transmission of faith which most effectively occurs through the authentic life of the community and can be compared to a mother’s fertility. The faith is passed on not so much by the formal instruction and intellectual assimilation of doctrines as by the Christian life-giving closeness to another person. That points to the particular value of the relationships which we have with the people to whom we are sent as missionaries. Our mission involvement is certainly not founded on the “virtual” and disposable relationships so common in the era of communication but it takes place in the concrete and stable encounters. Likewise, the means of virtual contact cannot replace physical presence by another person¹⁶. Thus, it calls the Church to be attentive to every person and be patient with those who burden us with their difficult life problems. Then, it is not about the numbers but about the wellbeing of each single

¹³ Cf. EG 20, 29, 46, 53, 59, 63, 191, 197, 288.

¹⁴ Cf. EG 20, 22. J.M. Bergoglio, *A Diagnosis of the Problems in the Church. Bergoglio’s Intervention* [accessed: 16.02.2018]; H. de Lubac, *Catholicism. Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, San Francisco 1988, p. 14. Notice the paragraph in which H. de Lubac states that the Christian cannot make his way to salvation separate from other people.

¹⁵ Cf. H. de Lubac, *The Splendour...*, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁶ Cf. Pope Francis, *Message for Lent 2018*, 1.11.2017 [accessed: 7.02.2018].

person and their highest good, salvation. This puts a lot of strain on the missionary because he gets involved in the life situation of another person. He needs to offer his own life in order to give life to others. If a missionary lacks that attitude, his life becomes sterile (cf. Jn 12,24).

The Church as the mother pays special attention to the people who do not count for much in society: "the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others"¹⁷. Likewise, a missionary needs to have eyes which see those people and in his heart is sensitive to their condition. Therefore, he does not permit himself to be surrounded only by his fans and provide only for the needs of those cheering him. However, showing the concern for the needy people, a missionary does not intend to bind them to himself but leaves them autonomous.

The motherhood of the Church corresponds with the Church with open doors. A mother cannot put any limits on her children to come to her. The Virgin Mary is the model of such a motherly Church. This expresses primarily spiritual openness. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see many of our mission houses open where people can freely come because they are welcomed and feel at home. The openness about which we speak is not laxity that permits everything to happen inside the Church but rather as a virtue imitating the attitude of a mother who has enough love for all her children. Thus, the Church is person oriented. This is another way of expressing what St. John Paul II made the guiding plan of his pontificate: "man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church"¹⁸.

Another aspect of this motherly approach to the people is also found in the way talk to them. Pope Francis stresses the importance of the homily which manifests if the pastor treats his listeners seriously. The Pope writes: "It reminds us that the Church is a mother, and that she preaches in the same way that a mother speaks to her child, knowing that the child trusts that what she is teaching is for his or her benefit, for children know that they are loved"¹⁹. It is very important advice for missionaries who use speech as their main way of communication with the people.

¹⁷ EG 210. Very similar words can be traced in our chapters' documents. Cf. A. Miotk, *The General Chapters...*, op. cit., pp. 116 and 263. The author gives numerous examples showing evidently the great concern of the General Chapters for the people marginalized under various aspects.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter "Redemptor Hominis". On Redemption and the Dignity of the Human Race*, 4.03.1979, No 14 [accessed: 9.02.2018].

¹⁹ EG 139.

In different mission houses the missionaries consider the crucial importance of the places of encounter. They put up, for example, meeting halls or sometimes *palava* huts in order to create space for encountering different people not only officially but also informally. Under many of such *palava* huts children used to study because there was light provided in the evenings. Many of present great people and devoted Catholics began their education in such humble conditions. In Northern Ghana missionaries were not going out to outstations on the market days. They remained in the mission houses, often under the *palava* huts, ready to receive people who came from far and near for the market. Those people used to enter and spend some time with the missionary chatting or sharing on more complex issues. St. Brigit's Parish, Chereponi, provided a subsidized lactogen for mothers who on their own could not sufficiently nurture their infants. Those women belonged to different tribal groups and practiced various religions. They were requested to come always with their husbands to educate them together about their common responsibility for their children. The moment of coming to collect the tins of lactogen was used as a moment of sharing and human encounter. Such examples are probably uncountable and so different depending on the context of the mission situation.

In olden days missionaries often rode bicycles which gave them a good opportunity to greet the people on the way and at times to accompany them in their walking for some distance. For some that was the initial contact with the Christian faith. Thus, the Church with her motherly features permits others to see her not so much through her visible structure, a bit distant from the people and their daily struggles, but in her spiritual dimension. She is the one who searches highways and by-ways to include everybody (cf. Mt 23,37).

Nowadays, air-conditioned cars do not create the same space for contact with the people. Slightly darkened screens create an efficient barrier between the pastor and the people on the way. However, it is not the matter of the modern meeting halls or means of transport that is important but the attitude of heart.

3. Field Hospital

In the interview with Fr. Antonio Spadaro at the very beginning of his Petrine ministry, Pope Francis, probably referring to the epic of the Italian writer Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, spoke about the Church in the following terms: "The thing the Church needs most today is

the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle"²⁰. The imagination can send us to the historical battles where traditional weapons were used. The view of the battlefield can wake up in us profoundly human sentiments. For Pope Francis, this image has a strong pastoral dimension and demands not so much being too meticulous about the rules but putting at the centre the wounded person and his or her life, especially the life of grace. Though this name, taken from literature and applied to the Church, may be the first time it is ever done so, yet such a feature of the Church is not so much the Pope's invention as it was a way of Jesus' acting and approach to the suffering people (cf. Lk 10,30-37).

Pope Francis' apostolic journeys are clear signs of where should we direct our attention. Beginning with his first journey to Lampedusa Island on the Mediterranean Sea on July 8, 2013, there he expressed special sentiments for the situation of the migrants and all those people who are treated as unwanted scraps by the society.

The first European country outside Italy that the Pope decided to visit was Albania (21 September, 2014). He gave an explanation for his choice:

"With this brief visit, I want to confirm the Church of Albania in the faith, and bear witness to my encouragement and love for a country that has suffered for so long in consequence of the ideologies of the past"²¹.

Between 25 and 30 November 2015, Pope Francis travelled to Kenya, Uganda and the Central African Republic. He landed in Bangui, the capital of the CAR, while the country was still in the state of the civil war. In the modest cathedral of Bangui, he opened the first holy door of the Jubilee Year of Mercy. His determination gave both Christians and Muslims a new hope that life together can be possible again. In 2017, from 27 November to 2 December, Pope Francis travelled to Myanmar and Bangladesh. In Myanmar he spoke on behalf of the persecuted Muslim minority group of Rohingya. He spoke to the consciences of the entire human community: "They, too, are images of the living God. [...] The presence of God, today, is also called «Rohingya»"²². Still in prepa-

²⁰ Cf. A. Spadaro, *Intervista with Pope Francis*, 21.09.2013 [accessed: 7.02.2018]. First published as: *Intervista a Papa Francesco*, "La Civiltà Cattolica", no 3, 2013, p. 449-477.

²¹ Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 15.06.2014 [accessed: 07.02.2018].

²² Pope Francis, *Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting for Peace in the Garden of the*

ration is a visit to Molfetta and Alessano in Puglia, the southern region of Italy, which is to take place on April 20, 2018. There lived and worked Monsignor Tonino Bello, simply known as Don Tonino, who devoted his life to the least of the society and strained for peace. In December, 1992 with 500 of the faithful, he travelled to Sarajevo that was at that time under siege. This was a risky visit which showed his determination to search for peace. Not surprisingly during his life time he was not understood and ostracised by many of the hierarchy while he was loved by the people. Indeed, there can be observed many similarities between these two figures, Pope Francis and Don Tonino. According to J.C. Scannone, these are “theological and sacramental gestures”²³.

Likewise, the SVD missionaries are actively involved in working for the marginalized in society. They encounter many people who are wounded and who with difficulty bear up in such a situation. Certainly, we cannot limit ourselves to exclusively social or psychological aspects. There is need to notice also a special role for the sacrament of reconciliation as well as various forms of spiritual accompaniment or closeness to the people which “is not an abstract theory but a lived experience”²⁴. Every gesture of noticing suffering persons and showing sincere concern is of inestimable value. In Poland and India is Fr. Marian Żelazek well-known; he devoted his life to helping people affected with leprosy. In Ghana in the same field still active is Fr. Andrew Campbell. There are similar, though not always known and publicized, missionaries in every corner of the world. In Ghana a few years back, Fr. Joseph Mazur fought for the rights and better life of so-called «witches», that is women and men accused of harming other people with their spiritual evil powers and thus causing sicknesses and deaths. For that reason they have to hide themselves in “witch camps”, a type of refuge villages of miserable existence. Fr. Jose Boening in Amazonian Region of Brazil, instructs the indigenous people about their rights and helps them to protect their lands. Many more missionaries are involved in protecting the single and helpless people often left to their own tragic fate. In the year 2003, I witnessed how Fr. Fred Timp in Chereponi defended a small girl beaten by her “uncles” and left lying on the floor with a broken hand. If left on her own, she would have surely met death. However, helped by the then parish priest, she was rescued. Fully recovered, she continued her

Archbishop's Residence (Dhaka), 1.12.2017 [accessed: 21.02.2018].

²³ J.C. Scannone, *Il Papa del popolo. Bergoglio raccontato dal confratello teologo gesuita e argentino. Colloqui con Bernadette Sauvaget*, Città del Vaticano 2015, p. 69.

²⁴ Pope Francis, *Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting...*, op. cit.

education and now lives a normal life. Yet, the signs of the treatment in her painful childhood still remain. Such involvement in our missionary ministry is indispensable. Even if they do not involve a great number of the people, yet helping a suffering individual is evidently a “Samaritan act” in our missionary life.

4. Poor Church for the Poor

In 2015 was the fiftieth anniversary of signing the so-called “Pact of the Catacombs”²⁵. The SVDs in Rome celebrated that occasion in a special way. Besides different events, a symposium was organized at the Urbanian University. Without doubt the intuition of those above forty signatories of the pact at the close of the Vatican II corresponds to the attitude represented by Pope Francis today who on different occasions stressed that the spirit of poverty should permeate the entire life of the Church and calls for a “poor Church for the poor”²⁶. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he explains his approach:

“For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor «his first mercy». [...] the Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a «special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness». This option [...] «is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty»²⁷.

Three years after the above-mentioned event, one of the confreres recalled that jubilee celebration. He commented that it looked like we now have to wait for the centenary celebration since we no longer hear about that event. Indeed, it is evident that it does not just go about the celebration of the successive anniversaries but it is a reminder about the style of life which should characterize Christians. The poor are not only those who expect some help from us but they are people characterized by the receptive quality in front of God. They teach us how to receive from God his unmerited gifts (cf. Deut 6,4-9). This is not about being concerned only about materially poor people. It seems that nowadays there are many more people who live in spiritual poverty.

²⁵ About the details of that event see: X. Pikaza, J.A. da Silva (eds.), *The Pact of the Catacombs. The Mission of the Poor in the Church*, Navarra 2015.

²⁶ EG 198.

²⁷ EG 198.

Our concern for the poor spares us from individualism, privatization or limiting ourselves to intimacy in our Christian faith. If we stand on their side, we enhance their dignity by allowing them to participate actively in the life of the Church and being enriched by their own contribution. Our attitude towards the poor manifests our Christian faith and discloses its authenticity. For H. Wustmans it is “a kind of litmus test for every mission and evangelization”²⁸.

5. *Tender Flesh*

The contemporary world is characterized by the amazing possibilities of communication. However, it would be too optimistic to draw a conclusion that because of that we became closer to each other in the human family. Daily observation shows that the opposite rather is true. The number of people affected by loneliness is constantly increasing and depression has become the most common sickness nowadays.

When Pope Francis speaks about the Christian doctrine, he senses that it should not become rigid and insensitive to the human being but rather to have “tender flesh”. He clarifies his stand: “Christian doctrine is not a closed system, incapable of raising questions, doubts, inquiries, but is living, is able to unsettle, is able to enliven. It has a face that is supple, a body that moves and develops, flesh that is tender: Christian doctrine is called Jesus Christ”²⁹. The practical exemplification of that appeared in *Amoris Laetitia*, especially in chapter eight (Nos 291-312) treating among other things the communion for divorced and remarried people, which raised numerous controversies and heated discussions. This shows again that every such couple should be treated individually and the situation of each individual discerned separately.

Though some SVD confreres got shocked by the Pope’s teaching, “alien to the Catholic orthodoxy”, but as missionaries we can find many examples, in our own life, of showing the approach of “tender flesh” in the concrete pastoral situations. The primary feature of that approach is in the fact that there are situations where general rules do not provide an adequate solution.

²⁸ H. Wustmans, *Mission as Evangelization, or: Everything Starts with Jesus*, [in:] K. Kraemer, K. Vellguth (eds.), *Evangelization. Sharing the Joy of the Gospel*, Freiburg im Br. 2016, p. 76.

²⁹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Address at the Meeting with the Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church, Florence, 10.11.2015* [accessed: 9.02.2018].

A missionary cannot have an icy heart. Such a heart causes isolation from others and consequently is not a way of sharing the Good News with the people³⁰. However, we should not forget that the important quality of a missionary is prudence. If he is prudent he will also know how, in the best way, to “emulate Jesus, our king, by making his kingdom present with gestures of tenderness, understanding and mercy”³¹.

5. Conversion

Conversion is a very important element in the missionary life. If we did not mention it, one could get the impression that what counts is the sociological aspect of our ministry. Let’s listen to the words of Pope Francis: “Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought of how the Church may render more clear her mission to be a witness to mercy; and we have to make this journey. It is a journey which begins with spiritual conversion”³². That includes both the individual as well as the communitarian conversion³³. However, we need to be aware that it is not an automatic process which happens outside our participation. Rather, this is concrete cooperation with God’s grace and a voluntary daily effort. Being attentive also to such words of the Pope, we can avoid being too selective in assimilating his message. It is so fundamental because it stands at the base of the authentic sharing of the Good News. Only the person who is configured to Christ can manifest him to others. It is unimaginable that we can attract people to Jesus with whom we are not in a profound personal relationship. These words of the Pope apply also to the missionaries: “anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or a lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus”³⁴. It seems self-evident that if we intend to teach another person “Our Father”, he or she needs to experience that God is really a father in our own life. During the meeting with the professors, students and staff of the Gregorian University, Pope Francis sensitised the listeners in the following words:

³⁰ Cf. Pope Francis, *Message for Lent 2018*, op. cit.

³¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 22.11.2015 [accessed: 9.02.2018]; id., *Homily during the Holy Chrism Mass*, 13.04.2017 [accessed: 15.02.2018].

³² Pope Francis, *Homily during the Celebration of Penance, Communal Reconciliation Service with Individual Confession and Absolution*, 13.03.2015 [accessed: 9.02.2018].

³³ Cf. EG 49.

³⁴ EG 120.

“The theologian who is satisfied with his complete and conclusive thought is mediocre. The good theologian and philosopher has an open, that is, an incomplete, thought, always open to the *maius* of God and of the truth, always in development, according to the law that St. Vincent of Lerins describes as: [...] it is strengthened over the years, it expands over time, it deepens with age. This is the theologian who has an open mind. And the theologian who does not pray and who does not worship God ends up sunk in the most disgusting narcissism. And this is an ecclesiastical illness. The narcissism of theologians, of thinkers, is disgusting”³⁵.

The words concerning the theologians are relevant also about the missionaries who do not consider themselves immune to the tendencies of the present world. They can be also affected by consumerism, seeking pleasure and an easy life. However, if they permit themselves to be conquered by such attitudes they will gradually concentrate their attention on themselves and forget those to whom they were sent³⁶. It is not just an abstract or highly spiritual view. It is enough to observe the main concerns the missionaries have or on what they put the emphasis in preparing the annual budgets.

6. Not Only Givers but also Receivers

In June, 2015 I was leaving the Common Formation Centre in Tamale. Our community used to help the needy students from the nearby villages who often could not effort paying their school fees. One of the girls got to know that I was leaving and came to say good bye to me. With eyes full of tears, she said to me: “Father, I don’t have anything to give you”.

Pope Francis is very sensitive to the reciprocity of the Christian life. He sensitises the Christians not only about the need of sharing with others but also about the way how it is done. No person should feel humiliated by the benefactor: “when you give alms, do you touch the hand of the person you’re giving alms to or do you throw the money to them?” We are speaking of attitudes here. “When you offer alms, do you look in their eyes or do you look the other way? This demeans the poor person”³⁷. And he continues:

³⁵ Pope Francis, *Address to the Community of the Pontifical Gregorian University*, 10.04.2014 [accessed: 19.02.2018].

³⁶ Cf. EG 2.

³⁷ Pope Francis, *Address during the Meeting with Representatives of Civil Society*

“It is not appearances that count, but the capacity to stop in order to look in the face of that person asking for help. We can each ask ourselves: «Am I able to stop and look in the face, in the eye of that person who is asking me? Am I able?» Thus, we must not identify almsgiving with the simple coin offered in haste, without looking at the person and without stopping to talk so as to understand what he or she truly needs. At the same time, we must distinguish between the poor and the various forms of begging that do not render a good service to the truly poor”³⁸.

We can construct a just human society if we are equal partners; every person is a giver but also a receiver. Missionaries exercise their vocation in relationship to others which in its authentic expression always includes reciprocity. There is a real trap for a missionary to fall into: an attitude of being ready to “give everything” without giving himself (cf. 2Cor 12,15). That includes the evil of “spiritual worldliness” which takes a form of exquisite human strategy searching for ecclesial authority, social prestige or one’s own glory among the well selected people. In such a way a missionary can be constantly a benefactor of the people but never ready to receive from them. This is another form of self-referentiality against which the Pope speaks³⁹. This is in line with the Christian understanding of faith: “The Christian faith is therefore the favored option of a receiving that precedes doing; without for this reason diminishing doing in value or even declared superfluous. Just because we have received, we are also in a position to «do»”⁴⁰.

Thereby, Pope Francis warns against substituting doing for the poor what they can do themselves. They should feel autonomous and empowered to assume their responsibility and follow their aspirations.

(*Paraguay*), 11.07.2015, No 3 [accessed: 22.02.2018].

³⁸ Pope Francis, *Jubilee Audience*, 09.04.2016 [accessed: 15.02.2018].

³⁹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Homily during the Holy Chrism Mass*, 2.04.2015 [accessed: 15.02.2018]; id. *Spiritual Retreat. Third Meditation*, 2.06.2016 [accessed: 15.02.2018]; R. Guardini, *Der Gegensatz. Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten*, Mainz-Paderborn 1998, p. 67 (“This staying-in-oneself, this inward orientation can lead to paralysis”); H. de Lubac, *The Splendour...*, op. cit., p. 210: “A Christianity which deliberately takes up its stand in a wholly defensive position, closed to every overture and all assimilation, is no longer Christianity”; M. Antonelli, *Il prete nel magistero di papa Francesco. I: La prospettiva di fondo*, “La Rivista del Clero Italiano”, no 12, 2017, p. 847. Pope Benedict XVI, instead of “self-referentiality” spoke about the “self-secularization” which means explaining and justifying Christian actions in mostly secular terms. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Brazil*, 7.09.2009 [accessed: 15.02.2018].

⁴⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Chi ci aiuta a vivere?*, op. cit., p. 39 (my own translation from Italian).

Likewise, our joy comes from the intimate relationship with the people and sharing their life⁴¹. In the homily on Ash Wednesday, the Bishop of Rome, reminds us about that healthy distance to oneself and noticing good things which we receive gratuitously: “Pause for a little while, refrain from the urge to want to control everything, know everything, destroy everything; this comes from overlooking gratitude for the gift of life and all the good we receive”⁴².

7. Living the Diversity

Pope Francis understands “culture” above all as the “soul of the people”. Unfortunately, often their voice is hardly heard because of their marginalization and oppression by the powerful of this world⁴³. The Pope affirms that one should not be deluded as if the Church had only one cultural expression. The human being is always linked to some culture and faith without any cultural expression does not exist. Thus, faith and culture are inseparable⁴⁴. He goes so far as to say that “[g]race supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it”⁴⁵. Therefore, the Pope sees special value in the different cultural expressions:

“that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, «remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root». In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her

⁴¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Homily during the Holy Chrism Mass*, 17.04.2014 [accessed: 15.02.2018].

⁴² Pope Francis, *Homily during the Holy Mass, Blessing and Imposition of the Ashes*, 14.02.2018 [accessed: 15.02.2018].

⁴³ Cf. D. Fares, *The Heart of Pope Francis. How a New Culture of Encounter is Changing the Church and the World*, New York 2015, p. 31.

⁴⁴ GS 53.

⁴⁵ EG 115. This affirmation recalls the Scholastic axiom: «*gratia supponit naturam et perficit eam*» which appears in a few formulations, especially in St. Thomas Aquinas (cf. STh., I,1,8 ad 2; II-II, 26, 13, sed contra, I,2,2 ad 1). The concept «*grace supposes culture*» reminds us about Argentinian theologian, Rafael Tello who initiated a new theological understanding of the Christianity of the people in the context of Latin America. He wanted to avoid any personalism and affirmed that only the pastoral dimension counts. His point of departure in doing theology was Christianity as lived by the people. See also the article: D. Albarello, *La grazia suppone la cultura. Ordine culturale e pensiero della fede alla luce di “Evangelii Gaudium”*, “Teologia”, no 41, 2016, p. 222.

genuine catholicity and shows forth the «beauty of her varied face”⁴⁶.

Nevertheless, he notices that there may be customs which no longer transmit the Gospel and thus do not accomplish their role of uniting people with God. Moreover, they can be an obstacle in our living relationship with God.

Many of our confreres live in diversified societies. Many look at another person as a person who is in need of whatsoever. When they are approached for help they do not ask about the tribe, religion or language but make effort to help the needy person. Living with the people of other cultures is a daily bread to the majority of SVDs. Nonetheless, one can still bear deep inside the resistance on accepting another’s culture fully. At times, the religious communities can be living in hidden divisions according to the national or tribal origin. Nevertheless, one should leave behind human worries because “cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity”⁴⁷ and in the end it is the Holy Spirit who guides evangelization and enriches the cultures by the transforming message of the Gospel⁴⁸. Indeed, not every diversity is legitimate but the one reconciled with the help of the Holy Spirit who “alone can raise up diversity, plurality and multiplicity while at the same time bringing about unity”⁴⁹. The Christian experience does not seem possible to be reduced to one principle, established once for all. It is difficult to imagine that there is faith which is not expressed culturally. Moreover, each believer gives his own response of faith in one’s own context of life⁵⁰. The effort to form unity among people does not mean to achieve it through homologation. This reminds us about inculturation which is guided by the Holy Spirit who is able to form a unity of people in “multifaceted and inviting harmony”⁵¹. For Pope Francis, a model of the Church is the polyhedron in which various faces converge in one form, yet each preserves its distinctiveness⁵². Therefore, in the mission involvement, one should not be aiming at forming the Church which is “monocultural and monotonous” because the faith

⁴⁶ EG 116. See also: John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter “Novo Millennio Ineunte” at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*, 6.01.2001, No 40 [accessed: 15.02.2018].

⁴⁷ EG 117.

⁴⁸ Cf. EG 116.

⁴⁹ EG 131.

⁵⁰ Cf. D. Albarello, *La grazia suppone la cultura...*, op. cit., p. 235-236, 242.

⁵¹ EG 117.

⁵² Cf. EG 236.

cannot be restricted to the expression of just one culture⁵³. Thus, there is a need to overcome ethnocentrism and the Church should learn how to handle diversity and put an effort into bringing together numerous visions of the world⁵⁴. The reconciled unity is so meaningful because evangelization can be accomplished only by the community that is united. Any disunity and discord in the life of the ecclesial community is an obstacle to efficient evangelization⁵⁵.

Conclusion

Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* indicates the aspects which can negatively affect the disciple of Christ and greatly hinder the proclamation of the Gospel. In the Message for Lent 2018, he recalls his own words: “selfishness and spiritual sloth, sterile pessimism, the temptation to self-absorption, constant warring among ourselves, and the worldly mentality that makes us concerned only for appearances, and thus lessens our missionary zeal (EG 76-109)”⁵⁶. In every time we need to strain in order to overcome the worldly logic and spiritually see further than the immediate results and solution to our plans according to mainly human expectations. In like words the Pope spoke during the General Audience: “The demands of worldly logic, on the other hand, do not rise to Heaven, just as self-referential requests remain unheard”⁵⁷.

The recent new missions of the Society of the Divine Word in South Sudan, Liberia, Norway and Bangladesh express the concern of the Society for the last ones what undoubtedly corresponds with the spirit of the present Bishop of Rome. Nonetheless, one should not be satisfied only with the general attitude of the Society. Every missionary deals with the people wherever he leaves. Thereby, one could ask himself if this is his personal attitude towards the person encountered in the missionary ministry?

In the globalized world, which reduces the distances between people but not anonymity and does not produce proximity, which is fundamental for Christianity, a missionary, instead, focuses on the value of each single individual. This corresponds well with the idea

⁵³ Cf. EG 118.

⁵⁴ Cf. D. Albarello, *La grazia suppone la cultura...*, op. cit., p. 226; G. Lafont, *Petit essai sur le temps du pape François*, Paris 2017, p. 27-130.

⁵⁵ Cf. EG 100.

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, *Message for Lent 2018*, op. cit.

⁵⁷ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 14.02.2018 [accessed: 15.02.2018].

expressed years back by E. Schillebeeckx: "Jesus never takes abstractions or general norms as a basis for living: always he sees a man in his most concrete situation. That is why he was able to surprise other people and take them unawares with his profound humanness"⁵⁸.

A missionary needs to have the zeal and desire to always pursue reaching out to every person. This outreach would be much reduced if limited only to the verbal sharing the Good News which can turn into a "mere propaganda operation". On the contrary it needs to include active participation in the life of the poor, the marginalized and all people, but above all those who occupy the peripheries of the human society. This pursuing in going forth to the people cannot be an effect of constraint but a need of the heart. Only in that way missionaries can be happy and their witnessing authentic. Their happiness which is "joy of evangelization" attracts and can be even contagious. Therefore, these new ways that we tried to highlight and then suggested to follow in the practice of life are not all that new because they call to an always more radical life according to the Gospel⁵⁹. Indeed, "life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others"⁶⁰.

~•~

WŁADYSŁAW MADZIAR SVD

**The Same Missionary Society. Inspired
and Heartened New Ways by Pope Francis**

Abstract

The author attempts to present briefly the image of the Church, which Pope Francis not only proclaims but, more notably, exemplifies with his life. Referring to personal experiences, the author links the practical involvement of the Society of the Divine Word to these images of the Church. It seems that the most visible examples are the concrete lives of the missionaries. In this way, the author would like to provoke new questions in the search for further development of this undoubtedly great heritage of the SVDs. It can also be an incentive to read the «signs of the times» boldly. While being sensitive to the ever-changing situation of the world and emerging new challenges,

⁵⁸ E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus. An Experiment in Christology*, London 1979, p. 203.

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *Press Conference during the Return Flight from Bangladesh*, 2.12.2017 [accessed: 19.02.2018].

⁶⁰ EG 10.

one should not forget that there are tenacious and current values that always belong to the essence of missionary presence among people. Such awareness can save us from the trap of focusing on quick and, therefore, immediate results, because we are not the last instance of evangelization, and it is not on us that the fate of Christianity ultimately depends on. In our dealings with people it is not simply about creating short-lived enthusiasm in them. What matters more is to have the courage to offer them the real hope, grounded in the ever-present truth of Jesus Christ. Therefore, mentioning specific examples, it seems reasonable to claim that the Divine Word missionaries are still genuinely trying to leave a lasting imprint on the people entrusted to their care. At the same time, the author is convinced that they can leave such a trace only through a Christian life with depth, which consequently means "as profoundly human as possible". Such life of missionaries was the beginning of an encounter of many people with Christ in the past and can initiate such a meeting today. The author is not at all original, but he follows the thought of one of the most outstanding contemporary theologians, Josef Ratzinger: "God is known thanks to people who know him, and the way to God always leads by a person who is already close to God". Equally, Pope Francis through his words and actions helps many people in their encounter with Christ. His example may be for some missionaries a confirmation of the validity of their previous way of proclaiming the Gospel. For others this is an inspiration. For those who are discouraged on their way they are in need of help to rediscover the precious value of missionary life.

Keywords: Church, Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), evangelization, images of the Church, mission, Pope Francis.

WŁADYSŁAW MADZIAR SVD

**To samo Zgromadzenie Misyjne. Nowe drogi.
Zainspirowany i zachęcony przez papieża Franciszka**

Streszczenie

W niniejszym tekście podjęto próbę związłego przedstawienia obrazu Kościoła, który głosi i aktualizuje swoim życiem papież Franciszek. Sięgając do osobistych doświadczeń, autor wplata w te obrazy Kościoła praktyczne zaangażowanie Zgromadzenia Słowa Bożego. Wydaje się, że najbardziej czytelny przykład stanowi konkretne życie misjonarzy werbistów. W ten sposób autor chciał zachęcić do nowych

pytań w poszukiwaniu dalszego rozwoju tego niewątpliwie wielkiego dziedzictwa werbistów. Może to być również zachętą do śmiałego odczytywania znaków czasu. Będąc wrażliwymi na ciągle zmieniającą się sytuację świata i pojawiające się nowe wyzwania, nie powinno się zapominać, że istnieją wartości trwałe i aktualne, które zawsze należą do istoty misyjnej obecności wśród ludzi. Świadomość tego może uchronić od pułapki koncentrowania się na szybkich, a zatem i doraźnych rezultatach, ponieważ misjonarze nie są ostatnią instancją ewangelizacji i to nie od nich zależy ostateczny los chrześcijaństwa, także w wymiarze lokalnym. W kontaktach z ludźmi nie chodzi o to, by wzniecić w nich krótkotrwały entuzjazm, ale by mieć odwagę oferować prawdziwą, a zatem i wymagającą nadzieję, ugruntowaną w zawsze aktualnej prawdzie Jezusa Chrystusa. Dlatego, przytaczając konkretne przykłady, uzasadnione wydaje się twierdzenie, że misjonarze Słowa Bożego wciąż autentycznie starają się zostawić trwałe ślad w ludziach powierzonych ich opiece. Jednocześnie autor jest przekonany, że mogą pozostawić taki ślad tylko przez życie głęboko chrześcijańskie, co oznacza także „jak najbardziej ludzkie”. Tak prowadzone życie misjonarzy było początkiem spotkania wielu ludzi z Chrystusem w przeszłości i może zainicjować takie spotkanie także dzisiaj. Autor nie jest w tym spojrzeniu oryginalny, ale podąża za myślą jednego z najwybitniejszych współczesnych teologów, Josefa Ratzingera. Podobnie papież Franciszek poprzez swoje słowa i gesty pomaga wielu ludziom w osobistym spotkaniu Chrystusa. Jego przykład może być dla jednych misjonarzy potwierdzeniem słuszności ich dotychczasowego sposobu głoszenia Ewangelii, dla drugich – inspiracją, a dla tych, którzy są zniechęceni, pomóc na nowo odkryć wielką wartość misyjnego życia.

Słowa kluczowe: Kościół, Zgromadzenie Słowa Bożego (SVD), ewangelizacja, figury Kościoła, misja, papież Franciszek.