In our time, a series of cultural changes and deep transformations is taking place at a rapid rate. Often this phenomenon is defined in terms of the “post-modern” culture (post-industrial, post-enlightenment, post-Christian). Among its characteristics are found the overcoming of certain socio-cultural barriers on the continental and world-wide levels, the disappearance of ideological blocs, the erosion of certain ethical principles and religious concepts considered up to now fundamental from the socio-cultural perspective, with the so-called “electronic revolution” of its technological base of production and communication. At the same time in which the cultural mentality of economic and cultural globalisation increases, so also the re-assertion of what is local, of pluriformity and the search for unity. With the techno-cybernetic revolution there has also been an increase in the migration of the South toward the North, of religious intolerance, cultural violence, the exploitation of women and children, the number of persons who die of hunger or suffer from HIV-AIDS, of the unemployed or under-employed poor.

Today’s world is not only going through an epoch of changes, but a radical “change of epoch”\(^1\): the way of being, acting and evaluating things and relationships, which until recently gave meaning to one’s personal life, interpersonal relationships, and communication with creation, is now is crisis. We are moving from the industrial age to the age of information and digital knowledge. The genetic revolution is penetrating the secrets of human life with enormous possibilities for the manipulation of life, not always in line with traditional humanistic and evangelical ethics. In reality, we are dealing not simply with a technological change: the human being itself is being transformed by these technologies. Our perception of time and space is changing, our way of life, our approach to others, our relation with the cosmos. The information highway acccents national and international interdependence, solidarity and closeness, but at the same time it creates new dependencies and existential voids.

In this context something new is being born(cf. \textit{Is} 43,18-19) among the warnings (cf. \textit{Apoc.} 12,1-2), the anxiety, the cries and pains of birth of all creation (cf. \textit{Rom} 8,18-23) which seeks a more united and fraternal world; men and women yearn for an interpersonal, intercultural and inter-religious relationship based on respect, solidarity, justice and peace. What is the role of Christianity in general and of the Church in particular with regard to this proposal for unity in the human race? If the Church is by nature missionary in its universal proposal of faith and the practical realisation of the Gospel, how do we overcome the internal contradictions between unity and plurality, between the universal and the local, or the challenges of enculturation and inter-culturality? Is Christianity and the mission of the Church perhaps in crisis, and are its days numbered? What concrete and visible attitudes ought to accompany the apostle of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel? Which experience of God ought the apostle transmit to men and women in continuous transformation? Are there some spiritual constants which are still valid for living the Christian mission today?

Indubitably, one can recognise a new Pentecost which challenges the Church and consecrated religious, who are the vanguard of the mission of the Church, to become capable of communi-

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cating the same Gospel in other languages (cf. Acts 2,4) or better in other cultural, religious, theological and spiritual “languages”, in keeping with the multi-dimensional processes in which the world lives.

An important dimension of this epochal change is the importance of the dimension of interculturality, or better of intercultural dialogue. It is a concept and a vision of reality which derives from the human and pedagogical sciences and challenges theology and mission activity, obliging it to align itself with the new interdisciplinary perspectives which up until now were of interest only to specialists. The relation between intercultural dialogue, mission activity and missiological reflection is beginning to bring about a fruitful enrichment in all those who engage in it, beginning with the awareness of one’s own cultural, religious, theological or missiological convictions. The interaction between interculturality and mission obviously implies the recovery of certain profound spiritual and evangelical dimensions which characterised the activity of Jesus Christ, the apostles and many men and women saints throughout the ages, among whom St. Francis of Assisi. Besides, the theme of this Congress has implications and significance not only for the formation of friars, but should give rise to concrete proposals to respond to mission reality today and which cannot be overlooked in the years ahead.

1. Interculturality, mission and spirituality

1.1. Interculturality

The term “interculturality” is used principally in linguistics, pedagogy, anthropology, sociology and philosophy. In synthesis, one can point out some of its characteristics:

- As a concept, it is a project or way of acting which reflects the exchanges, the relationships and what is commonly referred to as the “dialogue among actors.” Interculturality presupposes the real existence and the dynamic of cultures and presents itself as an alternative to mono-cultural globalisation and multiculturalism. In other words, we are speaking about relationships between persons and groups, within a determined space and time, which allow the cultures to be open to one another for mutual enrichment, beginning with just and equal relationships, in which there are no superior or better or more developed cultures in contrast to those which are inferior or worse.

- The protagonists, actors or main agents of the dialogue among cultures are the persons themselves (micro-interculturality), who are in relationship with other human groups, institutions, regions, nations, even on an international level (macro-interculturality). Such dialogue is characterised by sincere listening, the search for truth, mutual trust, the welcoming of the other, all of which are key dispositions in intercultural relationships. Cultural dialogue, then, takes place within a single culture and can be described as “intra-culturality.” This is important because what is exchanges in cultural dialogue are not only practices, customs, belief, rites but

also “cultural life-projects” which manifest themselves in complex world-visions within which are found both firm and flexible values. In effect, in every culture, there exists not only a cosmology (a way of knowing the universe) but also different interactive world-visions (ways of operating within the cosmos).

- Intercultural dialogue necessarily involves an ethical commitment with the assumption of a defined critical role, which begins from the moment that interculturality becomes not simply a theory but a practical way of living.
- It aspires to overcome the rational mono-cultural paradigm based on reason and of Western Greco-Roman origin, in pursuit of a rational intercultural paradigm, capable of harmonising the Western logos with the mythos (or myths) of the Eastern cultures of the South of our world. Out of this should come an intercultural rationality which is more artistic, symbolic and narrative.

1.2. Mission

Before the Second Vatican Council, Catholics were accustomed to use the term “mission” to refer to those territories which had not yet been “Christianised” and where religious institutes operated under the authority of what was called at that time the Congregation De Propaganda Fide. Such territories included practically all of the continents of Africa, Asia and Oceania, certain parts of Northern Europe and North America and the tropical regions of Latin America. Thus missions were defined in terms of geography and legal jurisdiction, though members of the so-called “French school” of missiology preferred the use of situational criteria with regard to mission. The conciliar decree Ad gentes, while continuing to use the traditional term “missions” prefers a new concept, a more dynamic one: “mission activity.” Such missionary activity, different from pastoral activity, is directed to peoples or groups which do not yet know Christ, and are recipients of evangelisation and the implantatio of the Church (cf. AG 6). The encyclical, Redemptoris Missio, takes up this distinction, considering the recipients of specific mission activity or mission ad gentes: those peoples or human groups who do not believe in Christ, “those who are far from Christ”, among whom the Church “has not yet sunk its roots” (AG 6, 23, 27) and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel.

John Paul II offered a new dynamism to the concept of “missionary activity” by insisting on some fundamental aspects: a) the distinction between missionary activity and ordinary pastoral care; b) the respect for the cultural identity of the peoples and human groups toward whom missionary activity is addressed; c) the new understanding of different missionary “ambients”, not only territorial (geographic) ones but also sociological (new worlds and new social phenomena): the large cities, youth, immigrants, the poor) and cultural (cultural zones or modern areopagi). According to this last-named category, one should emphasise: the world of communication; the efforts toward peace, the development and liberation of peoples; the promotion of human rights and of minorities, the defence of women and children, the safeguarding of the environment;

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5 The cultural identity of peoples and human groups which are to be evangelised, implied already in the Second Vatican Council, is made explicit by Pope John Paul II. He had already introduced the term “enculturation” into the Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae (Vatican City, October 16, 1979) n. 53.
scientific research, international relations in their different cultural, economic and political contexts. For sure, as the *Document of Puebla*, of John Paul II almost 12 years before had previously stated: the evangelising preoccupation of the Church is the “integral redemption of both ancient and modern cultures.”

1.3. MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY

Keeping in mind the respect due to the cultural identity of peoples and human groups—an identity engaged in a constant process of transformation, interacting, as it were, with social and cultural phenomena—accordingly, it is possible to consider the urgency and importance of a spirituality capable of accompanying and giving new impulse to the processes of evangelisation and mission activity. A missionary spirituality “ad gentes” considers not only what the Spirit is doing in the Church and in the Christian faithful, but also and especially, what it is doing in the history of all peoples and in the marvels of creation. The term spirituality indicates the “spirit” or the style of life which permeates and being and operation of every person: “it is a style or form or life according to Christian demands, or “the life in Christ” and “in the Spirit”, which is accepted in faith, expressed in love and hope, and leads to a life within the ecclesial community”. For a Christian, the “spiritual” life or “the life according to the Spirit” (Rom 8,9) means “to walk in the Spirit” (Rom 8,4). It involves having one’s whole life led in accord with the Spirit of Christ who fully gives meaning to human reality, with authenticity, depth and integration, in its threefold fundamental dimensions: with the cosmos, with other brothers, with the Transcendent. The *spiritual life*, then, is not an intimistic, subjective or alienating attitude, but rather a way or process of holiness or “perfection” (cf. Mt 5,48) which translates into attitudes of trust, fidelity, generosity, service and concrete commitment beginning with an authentic experience of the God of Jesus Christ.

In effect, the Christian life is a new life in Christ (cf. John 6,56-57; Gal 2,20), and embraces a call to an encounter (cf. John 1,35-51) toward union and a personal relationship with Him (cf. Mt 11,29), in a configuration or continuous transformation (cf. John 1,16; Rom 6,1-8) which is expressed in a constant mission (cf. Mt 4,19; 28,19-20). It is a new life in the Spirit which, with the Father and the Son, dwells in the heart of every person as in its paternal home (cf. John 14,17-23), enlightening him about the mystery of Christ (cf. John 16,13-15) and transforming him to become a witness of the Gospel (cf. John 15,26-27). Therefore, the “spirit” of Christian life has, on the other hand, a theological-trinitarian dimension (christological, pneumatological) and ecclesial, in so far as the group of believers on the way form a single family or community “gathered together” by the same Spirit. At the same time, we are speaking of an anthropological and socio-historical spirituality, as it impacts on the concrete human situations and on the processes alive in the world in which the Christian community is inserted (incar-

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nated). In a special way, it also has a contemplative and liturgical dimension, in so far as it is fed by meditation on the Word of God and by the celebration of the Paschal mystery. It is precisely this experience of God, lived and celebrated in agreement and in dialogue with the particular ambients of Christian insertion, which is announced and communicated to all peoples and which can be defined as the missionary dimension “ad gentes” of Christian spirituality.

2. Theological Foundations of Missionary Spirituality

As John Paul II indicates: “missionary activity demands, above all, a specific activity”, which can be described as a “full openness to the Spirit” and “intimate communion with Christ”(RM 87,88). The contents of “missionary spirituality” (the word was used for the first time in the conciliar document, Ad Gentes) can be best expressed in the following themes: fidelity to the Holy Spirit, intimacy with Christ (or experience of Christ), missionary vocation, the virtues of the missionary, prayer and contemplation, fidelity and love for the Church, the maternal figure of Mary (cf. AG 23-25; EN 75-82; RM 87-92). The point of reference is the figure of the Good Shepherd and the imitation of Him on the part of the different missionary figures throughout history.

The concrete living-out of missionary spirituality is then conditioned by the particular context and theological vision of each local church. What ought to be the theological-spiritual context which is best suited for living fully the missionary spirituality in the context of intercultural, post-modern dialogue?

2.1. A SINGLE HISTORY OF SALVATION

Each spirituality, consciously or not, is bound by a determined theological vision of the cosmos, a structure of thought or model of the Church that a particular “reading” of Christianity in general and of Catholicism in particular. Synthetically, it is possible to distinguish four theological paradigms of Christianity, with their respective theological visions:

- The theological-doctrinal reading: Christianity is above all a truth revealed which saves the human person; if it is welcomed in faith and with intellectual commitment and without heretical deviations; it is a truth absorbed and communicated in mission;
- The moralistic reading: Religion is a moral trial which God has imposed on mortals, who are responsible to decide between good and bad, between sin and grace, in order to obtain the eternal reward (salvation) or punishment (condemnation);
- The ontological-metaphysical reading: Salvation is found on a plane apart, in the beyond. Access to it is given by the Church through the grace of the sacraments;
- The historical–eschatological reading. Reality is in effect a history of salvation; God has a dream: he began to make this dream reality with creation and proposed it to human beings as an utopia and a duty, and this dream is the Kingdom of God already existent in this world; The incarnation and eschatology are in tension in a single history of salvation (holy and profane at the same time).

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9 AG 29; cf. RM 87.
Every theological reading or ecclesiological model will have a corresponding missionary spirituality. In practice, two or three readings can be found together.

Each reading or ecclesial model will have its corresponding missionary spirituality. Although two or three readings can possibly be integrated together, what is important is the specific accentuation each gives to concrete spiritual practices. For many centuries mission was conceived mainly as “the communication of truth” and a proposal for salvation of a rather metaphysical type (in the Eternal Kingdom). Obviously, there were some alternate experiences (the Franciscan and Jesuit compounds in Latin America, Matthew Ricci in China...), but none of them fitting into the same theological framework. In today’s context, the *historical-eschatological* reading tends to be more in keeping with the concrete reality in which people live in the big cities, villages and countryside. What is most important is to accompany the processes of migration, the social, cultural and political transformations, as well as the religious “re-definations” and the efforts to understand once again the national, regional and indigenous identities. The drawing close to and dialogue with other peoples, religions, and religiosities will be possible and will bear fruit beginning with this theological vision.

2.2. THE CENTRALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Biblical-theological category of the Kingdom of God, re-discovered in the world of the North, has acquired citizenship as a living theology and incarnate spirituality in the world of the South, particularly because of the Latin American theological reflection. Along this line, Paul VI wrote: “Christ, as evangeliser, proclaims first of all, a kingdom, the kingdom of God—something so important that in relationship to it, everything else becomes something additional, given as an extra. Only the kingdom is, then, absolute and everything else is relative” (EN 8). Probably, this centrality of the kingdom of God in theology and in spirituality represents the very deep theological change which has taken place in Christianity in these latter times. It overcomes the ecclesial-centrism which has dominated for many centuries in favour of a theological-spiritual opening in keeping with the new realities of today’s world. The Church itself is at the service of the Kingdom of God and its communitarian and institutional credibility depends to a great extent on it. It is clear that the Kingdom of God is directly related to the person of Christ and in dialectical tension with the eschatological Kingdom, as John Paul II affirmed: “the incipient reality of the Kingdom can be situated even outside the confines of the Church, in humanity as a whole, as long as it lives the “Gospel values” and is open to the action of the Spirit who blows where it wills (*John 3, 8*); but I must also say that his temporal dimension of the Kingdom is incomplete, if not in synchrony with the Kingdom of Christ present in the Church and in tension toward its eschatological fullness” (*RM* 20).

In any case, a missionary, kingdom-centred missionary spirituality accompanies, inspires and stimulates the ecclesial community which is seeking a Christian presence of quality in dialogue with the ongoing socio-cultural and religious processes. “Conversions” to Christianity are not excluded, but are not the priority or unique justification. On this subject, one author notes: “The ongoing mission of the Church is not the *quantitative* expansion of the Church, as if it were serving its own purposes. It is rather, in dialogue with all men and women of good will, to reveal and promote the Kingdom of God which begins to be inaugurated from the first moment.

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of creation and does not cease to be present on the pages of history beyond the Churches which men can see.\textsuperscript{11}

2.3. THE CLOSENESS TO AND ENCOUNTER WITH THE HUMAN PERSON

A spirituality centred on the Kingdom of God in history takes as one of its principal concerns the work of creation \textit{par excellence} of God Himself: the human being created in His image and likeness, as man and woman (cf. Gen. 1,17). Man, in all the dimensions of his personal, communal and social existence, is “the first road which the Church ought to take in the fulfilment of its mission,”\textsuperscript{12} it is the way taken by Christ Himself with his Incarnation which leads to the redemption, to Easter and to His glorification. In his final years, John Paul II always put his faith in man, was near to him, sharing his deepest concerns, his moments of nostalgia, his searching, his bitterness, his crises, the “dark nights” of God. This same Pope set out along the “highways of the world” as a true missionary to “proclaim the Gospel”, to “affirm the brethren” in the faith, “console the Church” or simply “encounter his fellowman” (RM 63). Man and woman of today feel “in the depths of their heart (…) the desire and nostalgia for God”\textsuperscript{13}, the desire to encounter an Absolute who gives full meaning to their other searching, the desire to encounter a personal truth in whom to place one’s full trust. The response of Christian faith is Jesus Christ, way, truth and life for every human creature (cf. John 14,6). The missionary is the person who has found in Jesus Christ the response to his deepest longings and ultimate questions, and consequently, is able with the grace of God to propose his own life, his own experience of Jesus Christ as the “one and only response to problems of mankind” (FR 104; cf. RM 29). Like Jesus Christ, the missionary encounters the human person to offer pardon and mercy, reconciliation, life in abundance, Love in its fullness.

2.4. THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR AND MARGINALISED

The theological-spiritual perspective places at the centre of its concerns the human person, in particular the poor and marginalised. In a world filled with iniquity, injustices, misery, hunger, exploitation of children, corruption, sicknesses which strike mostly the poor, among whom many babies, the Christian mission re-affirms its commitment to put into practice the social teachings of the Church. Like Jesus Christ, who “crossed the whole of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and curing every sort of infirmity and the pains of the people”\textsuperscript{14}, the Church continues its mission of human liberation and of struggle against the injustices and oppressions, “proposing interventions which can give to the social, political and economic structures a more just and fair formulation” (EA 18; cf. 58). The history of Christian mission, particularly in Latin America, is filled with authentic models of those who offered their very lives in the service of the Gospel to the poor, following the approach of Jesus who came “to announce to the poor the

\textsuperscript{11} CLAUDE GEFRÉ, “La crisis de identidad cristiana en la época del pluralismo religioso”, Concilium 311 (Estella, Navarra 2005: 307). The ultimate objective of mission is not the “\textit{plantatio Ecclesiae}” as Pierre Charles had already indicated in the first half of the 20th century, the founder of the famous Belgian missionary school.
joyful message” (Luke 4,18) even to identify Himself with them: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and in prison and you came to visit me” (Mat 25,35-36). The missionary spirituality manifest in the preferential love for the poor is not only “not opposed to the social dimension of the Christian commitment” (EA 29), or a “simple invitation to charity”, but is precisely “a page of Christology which throws light on the mystery of Christ” and by which “the Church verifies its fidelity as the Spouse of Christ, as just as it does in the area of orthodoxy” (NMI 49). Orthopraxis, then, represents an important criterion of spiritual fidelity to the mission of Jesus Christ. In any case, it is good to recall what the bishops of Asia had written: “the work of justice, charity, compassion is intimately connected with a life of authentic prayer and contemplation and besides, this same spirituality will be the source of all of work of evangelisation” (EA 23).

2.5. IL DIALOGO ECUMENICO, INTERCULTURALE ED INTERRELIGIOSO

A fundamental horizon in the theological-spiritual reading of mission at the present time is called “dialogue among cultures for a civilisation of love and peace.” In a context of marked cultural and religious pluralism, John Paul II underlined the importance of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue “in order to present a solid basis for peace and to drive far away the ominous ghost of religious wars which have bathed with blood so many periods of human history.” He is speaking of a dialogue which seeks peace and interior harmony, with others and with the entire cosmos, on the basis of a “one and only God” whose name “ought to be always understood, as it already is in itself, a name of peace and an imperative for peace” (NMI 55). In effect, “interreligious dialogue forms part of the mission evangelising of the Church” and “it is understood as a method and means for reciprocal knowledge and enrichment. Not in opposition with the mission ad gentes, it has in fact special links to it and is one of its expressions” (RM 55). He urges us to build up a mentality of tolerance, respect, listening, openness to the “other, which fosters constant and continuous interior attitudes of interpersonal and intra-ecclesial dialogue, which begins with the Christian communities themselves (Franciscans) and from there radiates concrete and credible signs of ecumenical dialogue on the international, intercultural and interreligious levels. In such a way there will be born a new authentic missionary spirituality. Unfortunately, the history of mission bears witness to serious intolerance among missionaries of diverse institutes (and not only there) which have caused deep harm to the Christian witness in territories populated by other religious traditions. It will not be possible to talk about inter-religious dialogue, if within Christianity itself (and Catholicism) work is not done to create a new mentality, more in keeping with global ecumenism so as to be able to construct, beginning with the diverse histories and traditions, a more just and fraternal world

14 JOHN PAUL II, Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace - 1 January 2001 (Città del Vaticano, 8 dicembre 1999).

15 This means to renounce the “culture of an enemy” to allow space for the “culture of the other”, whom one wishes to know, respect, welcome and love; beginning with a “theological reflection open to the cosmos, to ecology, to the totality (cosmic Christology, “catholic” Ecclesiology, sharing of the riches of peoples, etc.) and with a spirituality of incarnation and insertion” (THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION OF THE USG, Dentro la Globalizzazione, n. 24). John Paul II told the African bishops: “the world is becoming more unified, the evangelical spirit ought to bring about the overcoming of cultural and nationalist barriers, avoiding any closing off” (Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa [Yaoundé, Camerún, 14 settembre 1995] n. 130).
according to the prayer of Jesus Christ: “That all may be one! (John 17,21). It is evident that with ecumenical dialogue among Christians, it will be very difficult to proceed toward interreligious dialogue\(^\text{16}\). Without forgetting the Christian identity which considers Jesus Christ as “the way, the truth and the life”,(John 14,6), in daily relations there can begin a “dialogue or life and heart”(EAs 31). Men and women of this new century will be increasingly more demanding with regards to Christians in their friendly relations and in their concrete attitudes toward a life which builds peace, goodness and justice. One thing is certain: “The future of Christianity will depend in large measure on its ability to be transformed into a religion of great tolerance and become a promoter of understanding, capable of creating community in our fragmented world”\(^\text{17}\).

3. Characteristics of an Intercultural Missionary Spirituality

One of the most urgent challenges of Christian mission at the present time is probably represented by the living out of an authentic experience of God which can be shared in a gathering of different religious experiences. In effect, the spiritual attitudes of each apostle ought to be principally characterised by the testimony of their experience of God (translated into intercultural dialogue and services of charity…) as fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit in the world and in the Church, so that the “seeds of the Word” will reach their “maturity in Christ”(RM 28)\(^\text{18}\). Concretely, we can sketch some personal and communal traits which ought to characterise Christian (and missionary) witness in the intercultural context in which we live.

3.1. “TO ALLOW ONESELF TO BE GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT” (RM 87)

The primacy and centrality of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian and concretely in the life of the missionary \textit{ad gentes}, are clearly found in the ordinary \textit{magisterium} of the Church:

“The Holy Spirit is the principal-agent of evangelisation: He it is who moves each person to proclaim the Gospel and in the depth of conscience to make the Word of salvation accepted and understood” (EN 75); “the Holy Spirit is the true protagonist of the ecclesial mission; His work is most resplendent in the mission \textit{ad gentes}” (RM 21). Concretely, in missionary action, this primacy of the Spirit expresses itself in the docility to welcome “the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are essential aspects of missionary spirituality” (RM 87). The Holy Spirit transforms the apostles into courageous witnesses of Christ and celebrated announcers of His Word, capable of giving witness, of reflecting His image, and of transmitting to others, with

\(^{16}\) John Paul II indicated some fundamental dispositions on the part of faithful Catholics for an authentic and fruitful ecumenism: “First of all, charity, with a view filled with sympathy and a keen desire to cooperate, wherever possible, with the brethren of other churches or ecclesial communities. In the second place, fidelity to the Catholic Church, without disguising or denying the errors shown by the behaviour of some of its members. In the third place, the spirit of discernment, to appreciate what is good an worthy of praise. Finally, what is needed is a sincere will for purification and renewal” \textit{Catechesis during the General Audience}, 26 July 1995, n. 4: L’Osservatore Romano, 28 July 1995. Cf. Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “\textit{Ecclesia in Asia}”, New Delhi, India, 6 novembre 1999, n. 30.

\(^{17}\) FELIX WILFRED, “El cristianismo, entre la decadencia y el resurgimiento”, \textit{Concilium} 311 (Estella, Navarra 2005: p. 317).

\(^{18}\) Cf. JUAN ESQUERDA BIFET, “Nueva Evangelización y Espiritualidad Misionera en el inicio del Tercer Milenio”, \textit{http://www.misiones.catholic.net/nuevyespm.htm}
courage and frankness, the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Today, as yesterday, “one needs to study the mysterious ways of the Spirit and let oneself be guided by Him toward the fullness of all Truth (cf. John 16,13)” (RM 87).

3.2. “A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW OF REALITY” (EAM 29)

The post-modern, cybernetic world, tired of ideology and inclined to the useful, the measurable, and experiential, does not cease in its search for transcendence. Paul VI had already written: “The world needs evangelisers who speak about a God that they themselves know and with whom they have a close relationship, as if they could see the Invisible” (EN 76). If the current religious phenomenon “is searching for the spiritual dimension of life as an antidote to dehumanisation” (RM 38) and religions are seeking to make contact with Christianity to ask questions on its particular experience of God, one can say that “the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation,”; “the missionary, if he is not a contemplative, cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way” (RM 91). It is contemplation which arises out of both personal and liturgical prayer which characterises every Christian and even more so the missionary called to the mission ad gentes.

In effect, prayer leads the missionary slowly “to acquire a contemplative glance on reality, which will allow him to recognise God always and in everything, to contemplate Him in every person, searching His will in the events of life” (EAm 29). This “contemplative view” on the Word of God read in the concrete history of peoples and cultures, in reciprocal interaction and in a constant process of transformation allows the Christian community to discern the way of the Kingdom of God already present in history, beginning with the poor as the privileged recipients of God, in a parallel and yet converging path of peoples, cultures, religions, social movements… under the action of the same Spirit of Jesus Christ. In this context, the missionary contemplates with joy the impenetrable and uncontainable action of the Holy Spirit who acts in people before and along with the arrival of the Christian mission, moving them, leading them, inspiring them. It is capable of contemplating the presence of God in the historical, social, political, religious processes, in the struggles of the poor and marginalised, even in the failures of many Christians or other vain efforts of some many generous militants of good will, very distant from a God proclaimed or from a church or recognised religion. One cannot be a witness of dialogue with creation, if prayer and contemplation do not animate him, “witnessing to the vitality of the great Christian traditions of asceticism and mysticism” (EAs 31). In this sense, it is true for every person of every culture what John Paul II indicated to the Asians about the necessity to “understand the elements of spirituality and prayer close to the Asian soul” in such a way to “allow oneself to become involved more deeply in the search for a fuller life which the peoples of Asia are realising” (EAs 22).

3.3. “WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD, THIS WE ANNOUNCE TO YOU” (1 JOHN 1,1.3)

Like the first disciples of Jesus, the missionary of today accomplishes his mission beginning with the concrete experience of an eye-witness, in the first person. “We have seek his glory” (John 1, 14); “We are witnesses” (Acts 2,32); “The charity of Christ compels me” (2 Cor 5,14); “We announce to you what we have seen and heard, that we have touched with our hands: the Word of life” (cf. 1 John 1,1ss). This relational approach to Christ and with Christ and in Him with the Father by means of the Spirit (cf. Eph 2,18), in terms of the spirituality of the missionary, is the fruit of a personal encounter with Christ, the gift of God which permits the disciple to

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hear the Word of God and live a unique experience of divine life. Without this particular lived experience, a gift in itself, there exists no authentic Gospel proclamation. Mission presupposes experience. “We have known the love of God” (1 John 3,16); “We love God, because He loved us first” (1 John 4,19). This existential reality of personal encounter with Christ which is lived as a “passionate love affair” with Jesus Christ” leads necessarily to the “passionate proclamation of Jesus Christ” to every human creature, beyond space and time. And in this way, one passes from contemplation to mission, the profound communion of sentiments with Christ (cf. Phil 2,5-11) permeates the disciple with an apostolic and missionary spirit that derives necessarily from contemplation (cf. VC 9). This “passion” for “proclamation” is not fundamentalism but a “love-knowledge” or “affective intelligence”, that is a deep conviction of the truth announced by Jesus Christ, the clear motivation of this project on behalf of the Kingdom, a generous offering for the sake of the Gospel. How to present this “ultimate truth” of Jesus Christ? Surely, by recuperating the proper values of post-modernity, or rather a style capable of harmonising the intellectual dimension with the emotional one, the dogmatic with the narrative, theology and art, the person and community, the mystery of the Cross and the feast of Easter, the contents of the Gospel with personal experience…

3.4. “INTERIOR ATTITUDES”22: FIDELITY, AUTHENTICITY, RECONCILIATION

“Christ the Lord, always calls those among His disciples whom He wants to accompany Him and sends them to preach to the nations (cf. Mc 3,13s)”. The same Lord distributes by means of the Holy Spirit the charisms necessary and useful for the community, inspiring the missionary vocation in the heart of each one. It is a “special vocation” which is manifest concretely in having a “character of a particular nature in accord with one’s gifts and intelligence” to be disposed always to undertake missionary work”(AG 23). Those called lead a life which is entirely evangelical, with great patience, long-suffering, mildness and sincere charity (cf. 2 Cor 6,4-6), disposed to give their very blood, if that be the case, after the example of their Master. Equally, they ought to be persevering in difficulties, capable of overcoming loneliness, tiredness, and fruitless labour, with a faith full of life and solid hope, assiduous prayer and the cultivation of the spirit of fortitude, love and temperance (cf. 2 Tm 1,7). This means to cultivate some “interior attitudes” which are always valid in every apostle (cf. EN 74-80): fidelity to truth, to one’s vocation, to the Holy Spirit, authenticity and witness of life, service to truth and apostolic charity. In a time such as the present, characterised by violence and by the “conflict of civilisations”, one is urged to put an end to hostilities by reconstructing the destroyed families and divided society by means of a true witnessing of reconciliation, which represents an important paradigm in missionary spirituality. Evidently, we are speaking of a vertical, horizontal and cosmic reconciliation which is born from a “purification of memory” both

21 Cf. JUAN ESQUERDA BIFET, “Nueva Evangelización y Espiritualidad Misionera…”, citato.
22 EN 74-80.
23 “To participate in the social dimension of reconciliation means to participate in the healing action of God with regard to the societies which have been gravely wounded and damaged through oppression, injustice, discrimination, war, and unchecked destruction” (ROBERT SCHREITER, “La reconciliación como nuevo paradigma de la misión”, Comunicación presentada en Atenas, Grecia, el 14 de mayo de 2005: www.sedos.org/). According to the author, this process of reconciliation involves speaking the truth, and the search for justice (punitive, reparatorym distributive, structural) to reach the reconstruction of relationships. Il presupposes repentence and the conversion of those who had caused the evil to undertake the difficult path of pardon. Cf. S.B. BEVANS-R.P. SCHROEDER, Constants in Context, citato.
personal and institutional-ecclesial. Lo stesso Giovanni Paolo II ha fatto riferimento in diverse occasioni a questa urgenza di essere testimoni fedeli della riconciliazione e della carità.

3.5. “FROM LITTENESS, POVERTY AND MARTYRDOM” (COMLA VII-CAM II)

The history of Christian mission is often linked with a political and economic alliance with those who were in positions of power at the time. Many people of the South of the world, now christianised, even if not fully evangelised, came to know Christianity in a close relationship with those in power in that epoch (Spain, Portugal, England, France, Holland, United States…). It was a mission which began with economic security and political power, that used arrogant methods and strategies in presenting the Christian faith which insisted on dogmatic truths, on individual morality, on sacramental legalism and on the necessity of eternal salvation. Even though there were exceptions in the great missionary saints, the missionary mentality until just a few years ago (and even today in some places) has not changed that much. In the current context, identified by the fact that the Church has lost (or will lose even more) socio-political power in the new post-modern (post-Christian) culture which is emerging, perhaps mission will need to be presented to the world with new attitudes, even more evangelical ones, certainly with more emphasis on personal and ecclesial faith, but with less socio-political, economic, and technological means at its disposal. It is the perspective adopted by the Church in Latin America, which beginning with the year 1979 has wanted to commit itself to mission ad gentes. The Third Episcopal Conference of Bishops affirmed: “We ought to give from our poverty.”

Offer to the world the “original and important” part of the Church or in other words “its sense of salvation and liberation, the richness of its popular religiosity, the experience of the Basic Christian communities, the flowering of ministries, its hope and joy in the faith” (DP 368). They wanted that these evangelical attitudes lived by the simple people be shared with other persons of different continents. So, the Latin American Mission Congresses (COMLAS), which began in 1990, have re-vitalised and have make themselves promoters of this missionary “spirit” of incarnation and insertion. The COMLA VII, which took place from he 25th to 30th of November 2003 in the city of Guatemala, proposed a style of being missionary which is very Latin American and very Franciscan: “from littleness, poverty and martyrdom” What jumps to mind is the “spirit of the beatitudes” which ought to characterise the Christian mission proposal in the context of today’s world.

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25 “Recalling the significant experience of the Jubilee of the purification of memory, I want to direct a particular invitation to Christians, that they be witnesses and missionaries of pardon and reconciliation, moving the Lord through incessant prayer for peace, the realisation of the splendid prophecy of Isaiah that it can be extended to all peoples of the earth. “That day thre will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will come to Egypt and Egyptians to Assyria, and Egypt shall serve Assyria. On that day Israel shall be a third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land, when the Lord of hosts blesses it: ‘Blessed be my peple Egypt and the work of my hands Assyria and my inheritance, Israel’ (Is 19,23-25)” (Message of His Holiness John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2001, n.21.; “the missionary is a universal brother; he carries with him the spirit of the Church, its openness and attention to all peoples and persons, particularly to the little ones and the poor” (RM 89); intra-ecclesial charity must project itself outwards “until it becomes the practice of an active and concrete love toward every human being, especially to the poorest” (NMI 49).
4. Conclusion: “The true missionary is a saint” (RM 90)

How is one to live the spirituality of Christian mission in the current context of intercultural dialogue? How to cultivate the spiritual formation of friars minor suitable to live in an intercultural setting?

As one can see from this brief(!) exposition, the response lies in the return to what is essential in the Gospel—to the words, actions, attitudes and intentions of Jesus, who taught and transmitted to his disciples how to live the spirit of the beatitudes and of total life even to giving one’s life for one’s friends. This testimony of the life of the Master, was expressed again in the charism of St. Francis of Assisi, “Alter Christus” and in his missionary project (cf. RNB XVI) he presents once again the perennial teaching for the present moment. In this regard, John Paul II said: “The first form of witness is the life itself of the missionary, of the Christian family, of the ecclesial community, which makes visible a new mode of behaviour. The missionary who, with all his limits and human defects, lives with simplicity according to the model of Christ, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities” (RM 42). “Before becoming action, mission is witness and irradiation” (RM 26) which is born from the encounter with Christ in prayer and contemplation (cf. EAs 23).

In this regard, “The missionary spirituality of the Church is a road to sanctity”, mission and sanctity converge in a single Christian vocation: it is not enough to renew pastoral methods, not to coordinate better the ecclesial forces, nor explore the Biblical, theological foundations of faith or of one’s own charism, nor organise mission congresses, “it is necessary to arouse a new yearning for holiness among the missionaries and throughout the Christian community” (RM 90). Such a desire for sanctity means in the mission world enthusiasm, courage, generous self-offering to God and neighbour, acceptance of suffering and persecution, desires for justice and peace, charity, inner joy, hope. In a frenetic world which is unjust, intolerant, stressed and oppressed by its own technology, the friar minor, in so far as he is “announcer of the Good News, ought to be a man who has found in Christ his true hope” (RM 91).

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