

## MISSIONARY ACTION AND MISSION TERRITORY

---

**Msgr. Dimitrios Salachas\***

Msgr. Dimitrios Salachas, deals with 'mission' from a juridical perspective under two main titles: 'Missionary Action' and 'Mission Territory.' He clarifies the concept of Missionary Action under the following subtitles: 1. The Missionary Mandate of the Church. 2. The Juridical Concept of "Missionary" *ad gentes*. 3. The Catechist Missionaries. 4. Missionary Action Proper. 5. The Ecclesial Criterion of the *Implantatio* and of the *Radicalio* of a Church. Under the 'Mission Territory' he focuses on the 'Territory of Mission' and 'Lands of Mission.' He concludes with certain proposals to solve the problem the Church faces in this regard.

### **Introduction**

The effort of missionary action of the Oriental Churches in the entire world is desired, wanted and decreed by the Vatican Council II, OE 3 with the following declaration: "Such individual Churches, whether

---

\*Dimitrios Salachas, born in 1939, Athens in Greece, was ordained priest in 1964. He has been Professor of Canon Law, in PIO and various other universities in Rome. As an expert, he is also a Consultor to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, and Promotion of the Unity of Christians. He was appointed the Apostolic Exarch of the Greek Byzantine Catholic Church in April 2008 and consecrated Bishop in May 2008. As a prolific writer, he has more than a dozen works to his credit, besides numerous scholarly articles in various periodicals. The current article, originally in Italian language, was rendered into English by Cherian Thunduparampil CMI.

of the East or of the West, although they differ somewhat among themselves in what are called rites, that is, in liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline, and spiritual heritage, however [...] They are consequently of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others by reason of rite. They enjoy the same right and are under the same obligation [...], *even with respect to preaching the gospel to the whole world (cf. Mk. 16:15), under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff.*"

This conciliar teaching is translated into juridical norms in CCEO, c. 585 §1: "It is for each Church *sui iuris* continually to take care that, through suitably prepared preachers sent by a competent authority in accord with the norms of the common law, the gospel is preached in the whole world under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff."

The missionary activity consists in the right-duty of the singular Oriental Churches *sui iuris* in sending worthy and suitably prepared missionaries to the entire world without any territorial exclusion for announcing the Holy Gospel, that is to be carried out under the leadership of the Supreme Roman Pontiff, and observing the norms of the universal Church. There are two types of destinations of the missionary activities, in the broad sense and the strict, specific sense.

a) *Missio ad intra* intended as pastoral activities of evangelization or new evangelization in the traditional Christian territories.

b) *Missio ad gentes ad extra* intended as first preaching in places where the message of the Gospel has not yet reached or towards communities of recent evangelization.

It is to be underlined, furthermore, the pastoral mission ordinarily carried out within the singular eparchies (dioceses) fully established for the non believers or for the non-Christians (mission *ad gentes ad intra*), and the actions carried out among the people where there are not yet eparchies (dioceses) fully constituted (mission *ad gentes ad extra*).<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted, moreover, that the missionary action among the peoples not yet evangelized "differs from pastoral activity exercised among the faithful, as well as from undertakings aimed at restoring unity among Christians (AG 6). Under the aspect of juridical competence it is to be distinguished:

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. John Paul II, Lett. enc. *Redemptoris missio*, (7.12.1990), n. 34, in *EV* 12/616; Congregation For the Evangelization of the Peoples, Istr. *Cooperatio missionalis* (1.10. 1998), about the missionary cooperation, "Principi dottrinali," nn. 1-2, in *EV* 17/1415-1419.

a) *Missio ad gentes* in the universal Church which exclusively depends on the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples, safeguarding the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (cf. *Pastor Bonus*, art. 85).

b) *Missio* in the regions, where the oriental rites are present from ancient times, which depend exclusively on the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, even if it is done by the missionaries of the Latin Churches (cf. *Pastor Bonus*, art. 60).

The CCEO in the Title XIV deals with *De Evangelizatione gentium*, followed by the title XV *De Magisterio ecclesiastico*. The separation of the two titles in CCEO is justified from the fact that the Evangelization of the peoples comprises of diverse other specific elements besides that of teaching.<sup>2</sup> The Title XIV "*De Evangelizatione gentium*" comprises of 11 canons (cc. 584-594), inspired by the conciliar decrees "*Ad Gentes*," "*Lumen gentium*" and "*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*," as well as by the M.p. of Paul VI (6 August 1966) "*Ecclesiae sanctae*," n. 3.<sup>3</sup>

## I. Missionary Action<sup>4</sup>

### 1. The Missionary Mandate of the Church.

The Oriental canonical legislation has received the conciliar doctrine, according to which the Church, by her nature, is missionary. Christ sent his apostles so that "in his Name," be "preached to all the peoples the conversion and the pardon of sins" (*Lk* 24: 47). The mandate to the disciples is explicit: "Teach all the nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Mt* 28, 19). "The Church which lives in the time, by her very nature is missionary as it takes its origin from the mission of the Son and mission of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (*AG* 2; *LG* 17). Therefore, the Church is by institution missionary (*Missio-Ecclesia*) (cf. CCEO c. 584). The missionary duty of

---

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *Schema canonum de Evangelizatione gentium, Magisterio ecclesiastico et Oecumenismo, Praenotanda*, in *Nuntia* 12 (1981) 4.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Paul VI, Lett. ap. *Ecclesiae sanctae* (6. 8. 1966), on the Norms for the application of some decrees of Vatican II; *Norme: EV* 2/752-913.

<sup>4</sup>D. Salachas, *Il magistero e l'evangelizzazione dei popoli nei Codici latino e orientale, Titolo II, L'azione missionaria della Chiesa*, pp. 101-188, EDB, Reprint 2012. Cf. N. LODA, "Il diritto missionario delle Chiese d'Oriente cattolico e il can. 584 CCEO," in *CpR* 79 (1998) 321-366; *CpR* 80 (1998) 5-25.

all the faithful is rooted in the missionary nature of the Church itself to evangelize.

The qualification «missionary» refers first of all to the fundamental general mission of the Church and of each Christian. «The fidelity of the baptized is a fundamental condition for the preaching of the Gospel and for the mission in the world. For manifesting the force of truth and of illumination of the message of salvation before the people, it must be authenticated by the life witness of the Christians.»<sup>5</sup> It is not, therefore, necessary to “go to Africa or to in Asia...” in order to be missionary, but every Christian is duty bound to pray and work according to his condition so that the Gospel reaches to the entire world. Therefore, all the faithful has the duty and right to commit himself or herself so that the divine message of the salvation reaches ever more to all men of all times and of the whole world (c. 14). As far as the laity are concerned, mindful of this obligation, they must know that it is more urgent in those circumstances in which the people cannot listen to the Gospel and know Christ, if not through them (c. 406).<sup>6</sup>

More specifically the qualification «missionary» refers to missions *ad gentes*. As far as the sacred ministers are concerned, in virtue of the sacrament of ordination, the priests participate in the universal mission entrusted by Christ to the apostles. “The spiritual gift which [...] they have received at their ordination prepares them not for any limited and narrow mission but for the widest scope of the universal mission of salvation “even to the very ends of the earth” (PO, 10),” “prepared in their spirit to preach everywhere the Gospel” (OT, 20).<sup>7</sup> On account of this reason the CCEO adds the c. 593, according to which “§1. *As all the presbyters of whatever condition working in a mission territory form one presbyterate, they are to cooperate zealously in the work of evangelization. §2. They are to cooperate readily, in accordance with can. 908, with other Christian missionaries, so that the can render united witness to Chris the Lord.*”

---

<sup>5</sup>*Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica*, n. 2044.

<sup>6</sup>In the Study Group “De Clericis” of the Revision Commission of CIC, it is noted, in fact, that “*ubique quidem Ecclesia est missionaria et Verbum Dei nuntiare debet. Etiam in nationibus veteris christianitatis vere adsunt...terrae missionis,*” in *Communicationes* 6 (1974) 55.

<sup>7</sup>The conciliar decree AG 36-41 deal at length about the missionary duty of all the people of God, of the Christian Community, of the bishops, of the presbyters, of the Institutes of perfection and of the laity.

The Church accomplishes the missionary action proper to the peoples and groups where it is not yet rooted, above all, by sending the preachers of the Gospel for planting the Church. Therefore, the first and foremost recipients of the missionary action are the non-believers in Christ (CCEO, c. 589) or the non-baptized, (CCEO, c. 192 §3), the non-Christians (CCEO, c. 592 §2). In fact, "the peculiarity of this mission *ad gentes* derives from the fact that one turns toward the non-Christians."<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The Juridical Concept of "Missionary" *ad gentes*

"Missionaries," clerics, religious, laity, are those who are sent by the competent ecclesiastical authority to fulfill the missionary action proper, through which the Church is implanted among peoples or in the groups where it is not yet rooted. In this sense the "missionaries" are the *Chirstifideles*, who participate *according to their own nature* in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and are called to actuate, *according to their proper condition*, the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world" (CCEO, c. 7 §1).

The c. 589 refers to the "missionaries either native or non-native," who «are to be qualified in the necessary skills and ability; they are to be suitably formed in missiology and missionary spirituality, as well as instructed in the history and culture of the peoples to be evangelized." Besides, CCEO, c. 591, 1° adds that "the missionaries are to be diligent that vocations to the sacred ministries are prudently promoted among neophytes so that the young Churches may flourish with native clerics as soon as possible."

In the past by the term missionaries was practically understood the religious sent by the West to the places of current Christianity. "One notes, first of all, the missionary dynamism *ad gentes*, which in fact belongs to the Christian history and physiognomy of Europe and it is constitutive of its identity. Although the missionary activity sometimes takes place not without intermingling with the colonial expansion of European countries taking along with it the mark of divisions among the Christians, by the Grace of God, the European Churches have played a providential role in preaching the salvation

---

<sup>8</sup>John Paul II, Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio* (7.12.1990), n. 34, in *EV* 12/615.

of Christ to peoples and in the ecclesial implantation - *implantatio ecclesiae* - in every part of the world."<sup>9</sup>

The CCEO means by missionaries, either foreign or native eparchial priests, members of religious institutes of consecrated life or of the societies of apostolic life and also the lay faithful, both men and women. The mandate by the competent ecclesiastical authority to discharge missionary activity juridically confers the missionary character and function. One deals with "missionaries sent *ad gentes* and to life, through specific vocation,"<sup>10</sup> in the legal sense, and we would say "full time missionaries through profession." The mandate or the sending in the strict and juridical sense consists in entrusting a public mission to be done in the name of the Church.

The mandate is conferred by the competent ecclesiastical authority. For the Oriental Churches it is the task of each individual Churches *sui iuris* to take care that without interruption the Gospel is preached to the entire world, under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff, through messengers accurately prepared and sent by the competent authority, that is by the heads of the Churches *sui iuris*, by the Synods of bishops, by the Councils of hierarchs and by individual eparchial bishops (CCEO, c. 585).

The relevance of the native and indigenous character of the missionaries, clerics, religious and other lay faithful is to be underlined. Obviously, every baptized, without distinction, can receive by virtue of a mandate the missionary office in the juridical sense. Missionaries can and must be that, the *autoctoni* or natives, but also externals, coming from other nations. A missionary does not identify himself with the stranger, colonizer, nor exclusively with the religious or member of an institute. To tell the truth, the novelty concerns the lay and the native (*autoctoni*) missionaries.<sup>11</sup>

For the lay missionaries who work full time in the mission lands, CCEO c. 409 is applied in a special way:

*Lay persons who are appointed permanently or temporarily to some special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate training*

---

<sup>9</sup>Synod of Bishops, Dich. *Ut testes simus Christi qui nos liberavit* (13.12.1991) (Special Synod for the Europe), in EV 13/646.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. John Paul II, Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio* (7.12.1990), n. 32, in EV 12/612.

<sup>11</sup>J. Garcia Martin, *L'azione missionaria della Chiesa nella legislazione canonica*, Roma 1993, 135-136.

*required to fulfill their function duly; they are obliged to discharge this function conscientiously, diligently and with dedication. §2. They have the right to a just remuneration suited to their condition by which they can, with due regard for the prescripts of civil law, provide decently for their own needs and those of their family. They likewise have the right for suitable insurance, social security and health care to be provided for themselves and their family.*

In the mission regions where the Church has been implanted but not yet rooted, it may not, perhaps, be opportune to entrust to lay missionaries some ecclesiastical offices and assignments which according to the norms of common law could be entrusted in fully constituted particular Churches. But according to the circumstances of times and places, lay missionaries who are found worthy could be assumed by the sacred Pastors, with due cautions, and progressively in those ecclesiastical offices and in those responsibilities which they are able to exercise according to the dispositions of the law. Those lay missionaries who distinguish themselves with adequate knowledge, prudence and honesty, are worthy to render help to the Pastors of the Church as experts or councilors, also in the councils for the coordination of missionary action.

Finally, it is necessary to remember another form of lay missionary commitment on which the Church, above all, today places much reliance: that of lay voluntary work: a service of lay Christians, who commit themselves to offer years of their life to cooperate in a direct way for the growth of developing; but along with the works of human promotion which happen together with other social forces, they, as Christians, dedicate themselves also to missionary activity.<sup>12</sup> Medical doctors, male and female nurses, teachers, social assistants, technicians etc. all volunteers cooperate with the missionaries.

### **3. The Catechist Missionaries**

The functions of the lay catechists in the missionary lands are included in the evangelization *ad gentes*, in the liturgical actions and in the welfare and charitable works. These functions of the catechists, especially liturgical, in the mission territories are the same as those established for the laity in general in the fully established dioceses;

---

<sup>12</sup>Cf. John Paul II, *Messaggio a tutti i fedeli cristiani in occasione della Giornata missionaria mondiale* (18 October), 7 June 1987, in *Enchiridion della Chiesa Missionaria II*, 3636.

but the specificity of the lay catechist missionary is that he is stably assumed by the ecclesiastical authority to carry out these functions, and not only in case of necessity, that is, as complementary works or deputizing (temporary posting) of sacred ministers. One exercises the role of the catechist missionary towards those who desire to join the Church by being admitted to the catechumenate, of which CCEO c. 587 treats.

#### **4. Missionary Action Proper**

The missionary action proper consists in a commitment that the new or young Churches reach maturity as soon as possible and become fully established so that, under the guidance of a proper hierarchy, they can provide for themselves and undertake and continue the works of evangelization (CCEO c. 590).

Regarding the general expression “young Church” or «New Church» (*Ecclesiae novellae*), it is necessary to specify the concept itself of the New Churches (*Ecclesiae novellae*). The new ecclesiastical circumscriptions or areas include those particular Churches on the way to progressive development, as they are not yet endowed with their own [proper] strength and sufficient means. A “new” (novella) Church progressively becomes juridically “mature.” Obviously one does not deal with “biological and psychological,” aspects of “maturity,” instead with “institutional maturity,” with “ecclesial maturity,” with “maturity in the Christian faith” of the new Christian community and of its single Churches that they reach *quampirmum*, that is, when these Churches will be fully established, meaning to say when they will be endowed with proper strength and with sufficient means, through which they themselves will be able to fulfill the work of evangelization by themselves, under the leadership of their proper hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> In a particular way, the presence and work of native missionaries is already a sign of these proper powers; it manifests, at least that the “radicatio” of the Church in those lands is principally entrusted to and based on the proper strengths.

“The missionary activity is traditionally seen as the means which the Church makes use of for extending the Kingdom of God in those places where the Word of God was not yet preached. Today, with a

---

<sup>13</sup>The missionary juridical criterion prevailing must be that the young Churches soon “*plene constituentur ita ut, sub ductu propriae hierarchiae maturitatem attingant,*” that is, their “*plena constitutio in suis structuris hierarchicis,*” in *Nuntia*, 17 (1983) 9.

much broader sense, it is considered as the means through which the Church is implanted among peoples or in groups where it is not yet rooted. Besides this sense let us consider the so called popular missions, which are used in traditionally Christian ambience, and which have as goal the betterment of the doctrine and the life of the faithful."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the missionary action has been traditionally seen as a means of "implanting" the Church in *regiones infidelium*. Today, without excluding such a finality or end, in a much broader sense, it is considered the means through which, even if implanted in nations and in groups, it has not yet taken roots, that is, it is still "neofita." The missionary action, whether in the strict sense or in the broad sense, distinguishes itself from the other pastoral activities of the Church regarding the recipients and regarding the proper finality: evangelization, preaching of the Gospel, foundation of the local Church. However, "the confines between pastoral care of the faithful, *new evangelization and specific missionary actions* are not clearly definable, and it is not thinkable to create among them barriers or watertight compartments."<sup>15</sup>

Besides, as it is already said, the missionary action among the peoples not yet evangelized, in so far as action for the *implantatio Ecclesiae* in a non Christian territory, differs from the pastoral activity to be carried out with respect to the faithful in traditionally Christian lands. The so called "popular missions," that are carried out in a traditionally Christian ambience, and which have as goal that of bettering and perfecting the doctrine and the life of the faithful are not considered "missions" proper in the senses of the Code.

CCEO c. 590 describes the end of the missionary activity as activity so that the new Churches achieve "the maturity" at the earliest, intending by "maturity" that they be fully established in such a way as to provide for themselves, under the guidance of a proper hierarchy, and of being able to assume and continue the evangelization works. In fact, CCEO c. 591, n. 1 adds that, "missionaries are to be diligent in ensuring that vocations to the sacred ministries are prudently promoted among neophytes so that the young Churches may flourish with native clerics as soon as possible." A Church is fully established when it has a proper

---

<sup>14</sup>Italian Group of the Teachers of Canon Law (a cura), *La funzione di insegnare della Chiesa*, XIX Meeting for Study, Passo della Mendola - Trento, 29 June - July 1992, Milan 1993, 53.

<sup>15</sup>John Paul II, Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 34, in *EV* 12/616.

hierarchy, proper seminary, proper native clerics and proper educational institutions.

Therefore, in the prospect of the '*implantatio et radicatio Ecclesiae*' in missionary lands, the Council declares solemnly that "the Church is more radically rooted in any given sector of the human family when the various groupings of the faithful draw from their own members ministers of salvation in the orders of bishop, priest, and deacon. As these come to serve their brethren, the new Churches gradually acquire a diocesan structure equipped with its own clergy" (AG 16).

In the Latin Church, as regards the hierarchical institutions in the mission territories, where the ecclesiastical hierarchy commonly called missions, is not yet fully organized, the Apostolic Vicariates, the apostolic Prefectures and apostolic administration are stably established and the *sui iuris* Missions. It is dealing with ecclesial structures erected on account of the "special circumstances," (CIC, c. 370) or "peculiar" (CIC, c. 371), that is, because of the still insufficient preaching of the Gospel and the non maturity of the Christian life and consequently, the non establishment of dioceses with ordinary and proper hierarchy, presenting a situation even of general emergence, not being able to be counted among the common or ordinary regime, because of the scarcity of native clerics, lack of proper institutions of the particular Churches formed, of parishes, associations of the faithful, seminaries etc.

As far as the so called "*sui iuris* Missions" are concerned, one deals with those territories of missions which do not form part of any Vicariate or of any Apostolic Prefecture. They are directed or governed by an Ecclesiastical superior on whom the stations and the missionary personnel depend. The "*sui iuris*" Missions are raised with the decree *Excelsum* of 12 September 1896.<sup>16</sup>

### **5. The Ecclesial Criteria of the *Implantatio* and of the *Radicatio* of a Church.**

The criterion of the *implantatio* and of the *radicatio* of a Church in a determined place is not so much a problem of territorial installation or primarily juridical organization, but above all, an objective reality, the result of a long and copious missionary activity *ad gentes*.

In spite of the multiplication of the so called "young Churches" (in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania), the entire people are not yet

---

<sup>16</sup>Cf. *Annuario Pontificio* 2011, "Note storiche," p. 1823.

reached by the gospel preaching and by the presence of local Churches.<sup>17</sup> In those territories, the number of Christian faithful with respect to the population not yet evangelized is in remarkable minority. "In the Asiatic continent, in particular, towards which the mission *ad gentes* would have to be principally oriented, the Christians are a small minority."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in those territories the Church has not taken roots, and the Church carries out there a missionary action proper *ad gentes ad extra*, the recipients of which are the entire people not yet reached by the gospel preaching and by the presence of the Church. But at the same time there is a notable number of non-baptized in the territory of the young Churches, for whom the Church performs a missionary action *ad gentes ad intra*.<sup>19</sup>

According to the decree AG 6, by "missions" proper is understood "those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the gospel are sent out by the Church and go forth into the whole world to carry out the task of preaching the gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. These undertakings are brought to completion by missionary activity and are commonly exercised in certain territories recognized by the Holy See" (AG 6). Therefore, "the proper end of this missionary activity is the evangelization and the implantation of the Church in the nations and groups in which it has not taken roots" (Ib). The dogmatic constitution, LG 17 affirms that "the Church, therefore, makes her own the words of St. Paul: "Curse... to me if I did not preach the Gospel." (I Cor. 9. 16), and therefore, continues to send missionaries uninterruptedly that the new Churches are fully established and they continue the work of evangelization." "However, to say when Church considers herself implanted is a criterion of practical character, that is, not strictly juridical, because sometimes particular circumstance or situations of political or social nature intervene."<sup>20</sup>

In the Study group of the Revision Commission of CIC it is noted, in fact, that "*Non est autem Codicis circumscribere quando et quomodo*

---

<sup>17</sup>Cf. John Paul II, Enc. Let. enc. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 37, in *EV* 12/620.

<sup>18</sup>*Idem* n. 37, in *EV* 12/621.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. J. Garcia Martine, *L'azione missionaria della Chiesa nella legislazione canonica*, 68.

<sup>20</sup>J. Garcia Martin, *L'azione missionaria della Chiesa nella legislazione canonica*, 67.

*novellae ecclesiae plene constitutae habeantur; criteria enim practica pertinent ad auctoritatem.*"<sup>21</sup>

The implantation of the Church in those nations and groups means to arrive at the foundation of particular Churches at individual, social and institutional levels, to render the Church present in its fullness in those places. "The mission of the Church, therefore, is fulfilled by that activity which makes her fully present to all men and nations. She undertakes this activity in obedience to Christ's command and in response to the grace and love of the Holy Spirit. Thus, by the example of her life and by her preaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace, she can lead them to the faith, the freedom, and the peace of Christ. Thus there lies open before them a free and trustworthy road to full participation in the mystery of Christ." (AG 5).

Therefore, the fullness consists in working with all the means of salvation, as the preaching of the Word of God, the administration of sacraments and the ecclesiastical government; all these presuppose the foundation of particular Churches, specific purpose or end of the missionary action or mission *ad gentes* achieved in a progressive way, in diverse phases. The first phase consists "in directing everything to this objective, namely, that the new Christian community may grow into a local Church which will in time be directed by its own pastor with his clergy" (AG 32). The second phase is the achievement of the maturity of Christian life in all its spheres, that is, the self sufficiency in persons and means, in such a way that they can carry out the works of evangelization *ad extra* and send some missionaries abroad, without, obviously disregarding the mission (*missionarità*) *ad intra* towards the non Christians in the proper Church *sui iuris*. Until the achievement of the maturity of Christian life in all its spheres, the process of implantation of the particular Churches is "entrusted to the special regime of the mission *ad gentes* with groups and areas not baptized."<sup>22</sup>

It deals with particular circumstances because of the insufficient preaching of the Gospel and of the non maturity of Christian life; this brings with it a slowing down in the establishment of ecclesiastic circumstances with ordinary and proper hierarchy, presenting a state of even general emergency, not being able to be included in the

---

<sup>21</sup>*Communicationes* 21 (1988) 289.

<sup>22</sup>John Paul II, Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 37, in *EV* 12/620.

common and ordinary regime. The scarcity of native clergy, the absence or lack of proper institutions of the particular Churches formed, that is, the parishes, the associations of the faithful, seminary etc., all this render a local Church still "new."

Concluding, one can affirm that from the juridical point of view, "*Implantatio Ecclesiae quae nondum radicata est*" and "*Ecclesiae novellae quae nondum maturitatem consequutae atque non plene constitutae sunt*," brings with it:

1° a state of precariousness or that of emergency means a general necessity on account of internal order to the Church or an external or political order; in the missions the Churches are not yet endowed with proper powers and enough material means, on account of which they are not yet in a position to carry out by themselves the works or actions of evangelization. All this necessitates a normative of emergency, of flexibility, and of immediate intervention of the supreme authority. Because of the peculiar circumstances, in those territories the ecclesial structures are still precarious. Therefore, an ordinary or common pastoral which characterizes the diocese is not yet possible, but an extraordinary pastoral.<sup>23</sup>

2° in concrete, to say when a Church considers herself implanted in a territory, is a criterion of practical character, that is, not strictly juridical, because sometimes particular circumstances or situations of internal, political or social nature intervene. One is dealing with an objective reality. In those territories where the Church is of recent origin, she is already present, that is, it is implanted, but the number of Christian faithful, with respect to the not yet baptized population, is a notable minority. In those territories, in particular, towards which the *mission ad gentes* should principally orientate itself, the Church carries out there a missionary action proper *ad gentes ad extra*, the recipients of which are the entire people not yet reached by the preaching of the Gospel and by the presence of the Church. But at the same time there is a notable number of non baptized in the territory of the Young Churches, for whom the Church performs a missionary action *ad gentes ad intra*.

3° the planting of the Church among those non Christian groups or peoples aim to achieve its rooting and maturity, that is, the

---

<sup>23</sup>Cf. J. Garcia Martin, *L'azione missionaria della Chiesa nella legislazione canonica*, 50-56.

establishment of particular Churches at the individual, social and institutional levels, that is, aims to render the Church present in its fullness in those places. Hence, the fullness consists in working with all the means of salvation, as the preaching of the Word of God, the administration of sacraments and the ecclesiastical governance; all this presupposes the foundation of particular Churches, the specific purpose of the missionary action or missions *ad gentes*, achieving in a progressive way, in diverse phases. Until the achievement of the maturity of the Christian life in all its spheres, the process of implantation of the particular Church is entrusted to the special regime of the mission *ad gentes*. One deals with the particular circumstance because of the non-sufficient preaching of the Gospel and the non maturity of Christian life and consequently the non establishment of dioceses with ordinary or proper hierarchy, and presents a state of general emergency, not being able to be included in the common and ordinary regime, on account of the scarcity of the native clerics, of the lack of proper institutions of the particular Churches formed, that is, of parishes, of associations of the faithful, of seminaries etc., but also because of shortage of economic means.

## II. MISSION TERRITORY

### 1. The Concept of "Territory of Missions," of "Lands of Mission"

CCEO c. 594, considers mission territories (*territoria missionis*), those that the Holy See has recognized as such. As far as the missionary action carried out in them, CCEO c. 592 establishes that suitable forms of lay apostolate are to be fostered with special care, in mission territories; institutes of consecrated life are to be promoted, taking into consideration the particular qualities and character of different peoples; schools and other similar institutions of Christian education and cultural progress are to be established as needed. Moreover, with diligence and prudence dialogue and co-operation with non-Christians are to be fostered.

The canon declares in a formal way, without specifying the criteria and wanting to give juridically safe working criteria that "mission territories are those that the Holy See has recognized as such."<sup>24</sup> In fact, according to the decree AG 6, "the special initiatives, with

---

<sup>24</sup>Cf. *Nuntia*, 28 (1989) 77.

which the preachers of the Gospel sent by the Church, going to the entire world, fulfill the mission of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church itself among the peoples and among the groups which do not yet believe in Christ, are commonly called "missions:" they are realized with missionary activities, and they take place generally in determined territories, recognized by the Holy See. The proper end or goal of this missionary activity is the evangelization and the implantation of Church among peoples and groups in which it has not yet taken roots."

"The geographical criterion, even if not much precise and always provisional, still is valid for indicating the frontiers towards which the missionary activities are to be carried out."<sup>25</sup> The territories of missions are those geographical parts of the universal Church where the evangelization is already begun or is about to begin. Mission territories are those geographical parts of the land, where the Church is already present, while the gospel message has not yet reached to the entire peoples. It remains, therefore, clear that the practice and the doctrine, with the intervention of the supreme authority, will say in each specific case which, in fact, will be the places of mission, and to whom is to be entrusted such missionary action.

As is already mentioned, there exists a concept of missionary action in a strict sense and another in a broad sense, and the richness of the term "mission" can effectively serve for both.<sup>26</sup> There exists a missionary action in places of ancient Christian customs, but the term is strictly devoted to history.<sup>27</sup>

The Ap. Const. *Pastor Bonus* (28.6.1988), art. 85, states that "it pertains to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to direct and coordinate throughout the world the actual work of spreading the Gospel as well as missionary cooperation, without prejudice to the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches." The artt. 88 §2, 89, and 90 deal with the mission territories subjected to it, whose evangelization it entrusts to suitable institutes and societies, as well as to the Latin particular Churches.<sup>28</sup> As far as the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches is

---

<sup>25</sup>John Paul II, Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 37, in *EV* 12/621.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. *Communicationes* 15 (1983) 98.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Italian Group of the Teachers of Canon law (a cura), *La funzione di insegnare della Chiesa*, XIX Meeting for Study, Passo della Mendola - Trent, 29 June - July 1992, Milan 1993, 58.

<sup>28</sup>*EV* 11/920.921.

concerned, the Ap. Const. *Pastor Bonus*, art. 60 states that “in regions where Oriental rites have been preponderant from ancient times, apostolic and missionary activity depends solely on this congregation, even if it is carried out by missionaries of the Latin Church.” In the art. 60 nothing is said about the evangelization work carried out by the oriental faithful outside the territories specified in this article, as instead, the conciliar decree OE n. 3 and CCEO c. 585 §1, declare.

In the *Annuario Pontificio* it is affirmed that “today the territories depending on the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples comprise some regions of the Southeast Europe and of America, almost all of Africa, the Extreme Orient/the Far East, the New Zealand and the Oceania, to the exception of Australia and of almost all the Philippine islands.”<sup>29</sup> Certainly, all these regions are not lands of mission. It remains, therefore, clear that the practice and the doctrine, together with the authority, will tell in each specific case which, in fact, will be the places of mission and to whom to entrust such missionary action.

In the meanwhile, it is necessary to conserve the classical distinction between “mission territory” (*territoria missionis*) and territory of common law, in which the particular Churches are fully constituted. An attempt to define the juridical concept of the classification of “mission territory” would be the judgment of the supreme authority of the Church: *territoria missionum ea sunt, quae ut talia a suprema Ecclesiae auctoritate agnoscuntur*. The decree AG 6, affirms that the missionary activities “takes place generally in determined territories, recognized by the Holy See.” Therefore, CCEO c. 594 declares in a formal way, without specifying its criteria and wanting to give juridically safe operative criteria that “mission territories are those that the Holy See has recognized as such.”

This problem – especially in India – is presented under two aspects:

- a) The vast territories destined for evangelization are in general of exclusive competence of the Latin hierarchy.
- b) The oriental religious who are already working in the territories entrusted to the Latin Bishops are called to carry out the evangelization in the Latin rite.

---

<sup>29</sup>*Annuario Pontificio*, 2011, “Note storiche,” p. 1840.

a) As far as the first aspect of the problem is concerned, since “mission territories are those that the Holy See has recognized as such,” it would be, perhaps, necessary to review, first of all, the question of “mission territories” and of the mandate given without distinction from the part of the supreme authority of the Church to the various Churches, Latin or Oriental, to carry out the properly missionary work in them.

On the one hand it is affirmed that it is up to the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples to direct and coordinate in the whole world the very work of the Evangelization of peoples and the missionary cooperation; on the other hand it is affirmed that it is the right-duty of the single Churches *sui iuris* to see that, without interruption, the Gospel be preached in the entire world, under the direction of the Roman Pontiff (cf. CCEO c. 585 §1), but at the same time it is specified that the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in matters of missionary action extends only to those regions in which from the ancient time “the oriental rites” are prevalent although ulterior study is being carried out about the territoriality. It is, obviously, up to the Roman Pontiff, the supreme legislator, to furnish a solution to the doubt.

Therefore, as is already said, in indicating a territory as mission territory “the geographical criterion, even if it is not very precise and always provisional, it is still valid for indicating the frontier towards which the missionary activity must be directed.”<sup>30</sup>

The problem, therefore, is if the Oriental Churches can carry out a missionary activity proper *ad gentes* also outside those regions in which from ancient time “the oriental rites” are prevalent. In the concrete situation of India, restricting the pastoral and missionary activity of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches to a very reduced territory does not correspond to the teaching of the Council document OE, n. 3, cited above.

The above mentioned Churches are effectively capable of providing for the pastoral necessity of their faithful all over India and also outside, in an efficient way as well as to carry out a missionary activity *ad gentes* all over India with the same effectiveness as that of the Latin Church.

The legislator of CCEO did, certainly, not want to limit to determined territories the missionary activity of the Oriental

---

<sup>30</sup>John Paul II, Enc. Let. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 37, in *EV* 12/621.

Churches; the consequent exclusive dependence on the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, it seems that it intends to affirm the principle of a reserve to the Congregation itself precisely because of the peculiarity of the oriental faithful in the work of evangelization and of the juridical and territorial structures of their Churches *sui iuris* as well as the recipients of such preaching, seen also the particularity and speciality of the *locus*, ordinary and special delimitative criterion. The same c. 585 §1 of CCEO does not place any geographical limit, but guarantees the right-duty of the single Churches *sui iuris* to see that without interruption the Gospel is predicated in the entire world, under the direction of the Roman Pontiff.

From the administrative point of view the question is, whether in the evangelization work performed by the Oriental Churches beyond the territories specified in the art. 60 of *Pastor Bonus*, should they depend on the Congregation for the Oriental Churches or should they make reference to the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples, according to the norm of the art. 85 of *Pastor Bonus*.

Let us hold that in the case of missionary action and of evangelization from the part of the Oriental Churches *sui iuris* in territories in which from ancient times, the Latin Church is present, the dependence and the exclusive reference belong to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, according to a coherent and uniform directive criterion, in accordance, however, and in cooperation with the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, which, obviously, requires an obligation of relatedness (*relazionalità*) and permanent consultations. This solution was outlined by the same conciliar decree AG 29, which, dealing with the general organization of the missionary action, affirms: "For all missions and for the whole of missionary activity, there should be only one competent Curial office, namely, that of the "Propagation of the Faith." This office should direct and coordinate missionary work itself as well as missionary cooperation throughout the world. However, the law of the Oriental Churches is to remain untouched."

The same decree AG 29 adds in footnote: "If any missions, for special reasons, are still temporarily subject to other Curial offices, it is expedient that these offices be in contact with the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, in order that an altogether constant and uniform policy and regulation may be maintained in the planning and direction of all missions." (cf. ap.

cost. *Pastor Bonus*, art. 21 §2 and art. 58 §2). This absolutely coherent and uniform guiding criterion is necessary because in the missionary action what is primordial and peremptory is the propagation of faith and the implantation of the Church where it has not yet been rooted.

As far as the second aspect of the problem is concerned, the very fact itself that the oriental religious already working in the territory entrusted to the Latin bishops are constrained to carry out the evangelization in the Latin rite, effectively deprives the Oriental Churches of the right to carry out missionary activity. The problem would be resolved by ensuring to each Church the right to evangelization according to the proper ritual characteristic, and guaranteeing at the same time the unity of purpose and the coordination of the evangelization.

CCEO c. 39 affirms that the rites express *the divine unity in the variety of the Catholic faith* and hence they must be *religiously observed and promoted*. The observation and the promotion of the rites cannot be guaranteed with the sole possibility of having the Holy Mass and the other sacraments in the proper tradition, neither with the indulgence of "biritualism."

The catechetical, religious, spiritual and historical formation of the faithful and their organization in the tradition of the proper Church *sui iuris* is necessary and this can be guaranteed only with the establishment of the proper parishes and eparchies. The pastoral care of the Orientals outlined by the CIC c. 383 §2, devoid of proper pastors, would be only a transitory provision, rather than perpetual. Where and when the pastors of a Church *sui iuris* are capable of taking care of their faithful, they should be having the full freedom and possibility to take adequate measures in this respect, without, however, creating an appearance of competition with the Latin Church. This is valid also concerning the missionary activity of an Oriental Church *sui iuris*.

Pertaining to this aspect is the problem of the ascription of the catechumens in mission lands - with the reception of the baptism - to the Latin Church or to the Oriental Church *sui iuris*. Both the codes establish the following norm: CIC c. 111 §2: "*Any candidate for baptism who has completed the fourteenth year of age may freely choose to be baptized either in the Latin Church or in another autonomous ritual Church; in which case the person belongs to the Church which he or she has chosen.*" CCEO c. 30 also states: "*Anyone to be baptized who has completed the fourteenth year of age can freely select any Church sui iuris in which he or*

*she then is ascribed by virtue of baptism received in that same Church, with due regard for particular law established by the Apostolic See.”* But CCEO stipulates a norm that is applied in a particular way in the mission lands, and that has no equivalent canon in CIC; CCEO c. 588 states: *“Catechumens are free to be ascribed to any Church sui iuris, in accord with the norm of can. 30; however, care should be taken lest anything should be recommended that might prevent their ascription in the Church sui iuris more appropriate to their culture.”*

This last norm does not impose on an adult that he is baptized to ascribe to a determined Church *sui iuris*, oriental or Latin, but in the prospect of a greater “inculturation” of evangelization and of a better facility for the non-Christians to receive it, that is to guarantee the right of the non-baptized receiving baptism, to choose that Church which is more akin to their culture.

Undoubtedly the cultural and spiritual patrimony of the Oriental Churches is more similar to cultural patrimony of the non Christian oriental people. In fact, the dialogue between Christianity and oriental religions is easier if carried out by catholic missionaries in close collaboration, Latins or Orientals. However, in practice in the mission lands, the non-baptized who embrace the Christian faith are normally ascribed to the Church of the missionaries who have assumed their education in the catholic faith.

As is already said, in the current state of the actual norms and of the consequent practice, it could be held that in the case of missionary action and of evangelization from the part of the Oriental Churches *sui iuris*, in territories outside of the art. 60 of *Pastor Bonus* the exclusive dependence and the reference belongs to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, according to a coherent and uniform directive criterion, in accord, however, and in cooperation with the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, which require, obviously, an obligation of relatedness and constant consultation. The establishment of a special stable Commission within the Congregation for the Oriental Churches for the missions would be considered as the first step of cooperation. Similarly the assignment within the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples entrusted to some suitable officials to promote this collaboration is the solution of structural and practical problems. A juridical-ecclesial planning in a missionary sense is necessary between the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples, according to the requests of

various Oriental Churches *sui iuris* that have the powers and means to undertake a missionary action *ad gentes*.

### Conclusion

The Catholic Church in her missionary action not only does not have the minimum intention to reject all that is true and holy in the non-Christian religions, but considers with sincere respect those modes of acting and of living, those precepts and doctrine that, although in very many points differ from what the Church herself believes and proposes, however, often reflect a ray of that truth which illumines all the men, called by Jesus Christ the Savior to salvation (cf. *NAE*, 2).

It is of particular importance the proposal n. 29 - of the missionary character- of the special Synod of Bishops for the Lebanon (1995), addressed rightly to the Church of Lebanon, but which is valid for all the Catholic Oriental Churches: "The Church is, by her nature, missionary. One of the ways of the renewal of the Church in Lebanon is her opening to the mission "*ad gentes*," the attention to the needs of so many brothers and sisters in the places of mission. The missionary zeal may not renew the youthfulness and vigour of the Church from within. It is proposed: 1) That the Church in Lebanon be ready to share her spiritual richness with the rest of the world; 2) That the missionary vocation of the Church be integrated into the theological and sacerdotal formation and that to this scope a chair of Missiology be erected; 3) To create awareness among the youth in the parishes, in the school etc. about the other Churches of the world and to the needs of other places; 4) To ensure an adequate formation to those (the laity, the men and women religious, priests) that they desire to commit themselves as missionaries in the world; 5) to send the Christians of Lebanon to be listening Christians in the Arab world in view of a mutual help at all levels."<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the IX Synod of Bishops (1994), treating the consecrated life, recommends that "according to the traditional millenary of the Church, the members of the institutes of all the Church dedicate themselves to the mission *ad gentes*, always in the interest of the equal rights and duties of the Churches of every rite."<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>Synod of Bishops for Lebanon: Proposals, *Les Pères* (13 December 1995) (special prop. 29: La vocazione della Chiesa del Libano e la sua missione *ad gentes*), in *EV* 14/ 3565.

<sup>32</sup>IX Synod of Bishops, Propositions *Placet ut* (28 October, 1994), (special prop. 37: La missione *ad gentes*), in *EV* 14/1645.

In spite of all this, the Oriental Churches, especially the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara in India, and in the Gulf countries, there are many difficulties in carrying out a missionary activity properly called “*ad gentes*,” because such activity is performed from centuries exclusively by the Latin Church.

In the Special Synod for the Middle East, October 2012, the Synodal fathers in their proposition n. 19, (*Propositio* n. 19) referred to the situation of the Catholic faithful in the Gulf countries wishing, in a spirit of communion, to form a commission comprising of the representatives of the competent Roman dicasteries, of Apostolic vicars of the region and of the interested Oriental Churches *sui iuris*, with the mission of studying the situation of these faithful, as well as the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and of proposing to the Holy See the solutions that will judge to be useful to foster the pastoral action.<sup>33</sup>

Concluding, let us repeat that the effort of missionary action of the Oriental Catholic Churches in the entire world is solemnly wished, wanted and decreed by the Vatican Council II, OE 3 with the following declaration: “These particular Churches, both of the Orient and Occident, although they are in part different by reason of the so called rites, that is, by the liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline and spiritual patrimony, however [...] they enjoy equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others by reason of rite, and enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligations [...] *even with regard to the preaching of the Gospel in the whole world (cf. Mk. 16: 15), under the direction of the Roman Pontiff.*”

---

<sup>33</sup>Cf. *La Documentation catholique*, n. 2456, 21/11/2010, p. 1004