

MISSIO DEI

COLLANA DI STUDI MISSIOLOGICI E INTERRELIGIOSI

6

*Direttori*

Ambrogio BONGIOVANNI

Pontificia Università Urbaniana

Gaetano SABETTA

Pontificia Università Urbaniana

*Comitato scientifico*

Jesús Angel BARREDA, OP

Pontificia Università Urbaniana

Kathleen MCGARVEY

National University of Ireland

# MISSIO DEI

COLLANA DI STUDI MISSIOLOGICI E INTERRELIGIOSI



L'attività missionaria è un'azione della carità, nella carità e per la carità; esattamente come essa è un'azione di Dio, in Dio e per Dio.

Adam WOLANIN, *Teologia della missione*

Tutta l'esistenza cristiana deve caratterizzarsi come esistenza missionaria o, per dirla con le parole del concilio Vaticano II, "la chiesa che vive nel tempo è per sua natura missionaria" (AG 2). [Di conseguenza,] la chiesa inizia ad essere missionaria non mediante il suo annuncio universale del vangelo, bensì mediante l'universalità del vangelo che annuncia.

David BOSH, *La trasformazione della missione*

L'obiettivo della collana è riportare la missione cristiana al centro della riflessione teologica contemporanea di tutti i cristiani, alla sua dimensione cosmica, in quanto "Missio Dei", al suo profondo valore socio-antropologico. Dio è il primo "missionario", che per amore e nell'amore si auto-comunica, come ricorda il paradigma relazionale trinitario. Ciò comporta un superamento dell'idea di missione come proselitismo.

La missione cristiana non rappresenta un progetto d'espansione delle chiese, quanto il progetto della Chiesa di incarnare e testimoniare nel mondo l'amore di Dio per tutta l'umanità. Nel tempo della globalizzazione cambia il baricentro della missione e con esso anche il concetto di *Missio Ad Gentes*, fino ad ora concepita come movimento dal centro verso la periferia, dalle zone ricche verso le zone emarginate.

La dimensione pluralista — religiosa e culturale — del mondo contemporaneo impone una riflessione più profonda sul rapporto tra missione e dialogo interreligioso e sul ruolo delle altre tradizioni religiose in relazione a Gesù Cristo e al cristianesimo.

La spiritualità missionaria, essendo contemplativa e trasformativa, richiede ai cristiani una testimonianza sempre pronta al confronto e al discernimento dei segni dei tempi. Per tutte queste considerazioni, l'approfondimento missiologico non può considerarsi quale mera specializzazione della teologia ma l'humus di ogni riflessione teologica. Coinvolgendo tutte le altre scienze umane, in particolar modo antropologia, sociologica e filosofia, lo studio missiologico ed inter-religioso si configura quale servizio integrale al mondo, all'uomo e alla Chiesa.



*Web content*

# Challenges to Church's Mission in Africa

*edited by*

Fabrizio Meroni

*Contributions by*

Valentin Dabiré, Antoine de Padou Pooda

Aurelio Gazzera, Fabian Gbortsu

Barly Kiweme Ekwa, Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi

Fabrizio Meroni, Paul Saa-Dade Ennin





Aracne editrice

[www.aracneeditrice.it](http://www.aracneeditrice.it)

[info@aracneeditrice.it](mailto:info@aracneeditrice.it)

Copyright © MMXIX

Gioacchino Onorati editore S.r.l. – unipersonale

[www.gioacchinoonoratieditore.it](http://www.gioacchinoonoratieditore.it)

[info@gioacchinoonoratieditore.it](mailto:info@gioacchinoonoratieditore.it)

via Vittorio Veneto, 20

00020 Canterano (RM)

(06) 45551463

ISBN 978-88-255-2841-1

*No part of this book may be reproduced  
by print, photoprint, microfilm, microfiche, or any other means,  
without publisher's authorization.*

1<sup>st</sup> edition: December 2019

# Contents

- 9 Introduction  
*Fabrizio Meroni*
- 19 La théologie de la mission et la mission de la théologie en Afrique contemporaine  
*Antoine de Padou Pooda*
- 37 Croissance spirituelle chrétienne, éducation des jeunes, et développement humain intégral  
*Valentin Dabiré*
- 57 Les migrations en Afrique : Défis pour l'Église et pour la pastorale de la mobilité humaine dans le contexte de la République Démocratique du Congo  
*Barly Kiweme Ekwa*
- 77 La crise en Centrafrique, un défi pour la mission de l'Église  
*Aurelio Gazzera*
- 103 Christian Engagement, Secularization, and Politics in Ghana  
*Paul Saa-Dade Ennin*
- 135 Facing Spiritual Insecurity: Christian Faith and the Return of Catholics to the African Traditional Religion  
*Fabian Gbortsu*
- 167 Church's Response to the Impact of Religious Fundamentalism on the Christian Communities in West Africa with Ghana as a Case Study  
*Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi*
- 187 Authors
- 191 Index





Introduction

## Evangelization in Africa: the Way Forward

FABRIZIO MERONI\*

In *Ecclesia in Africa*<sup>1</sup>, John Paul II identified three main phases in the history of the evangelization of Africa: «The first centuries of Christianity saw the evangelization of Egypt and North Africa. A second phase, involving the parts of the continent south of the Sahara, took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A third phase, marked by an extraordinary missionary effort, began in the nineteenth century» (EA 30). The magisterial document did not outline a fourth phase, and this is most probably due to the fact that the third one is yet to be completed. The building of the «Church as God's family» (EA 63) remains indeed a work in progress, where the rise of new challenges and the consequences of past missteps are undermining the growth, development, purification, solidity, and maturity of the faith among the African *Baptized and Sent*.

In *Africae Munus*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI thus pointed to the need to redefine «the principal parameters of mission» (AM 14), knowing the flaws and the failures of the previous modalities of inculturation of the Gospel and evangelization of culture (Cf. AM 36–38) that have prevented the achievement of «a profound evangelization of the African soul» (AM 91)<sup>2</sup>. The Holy Father Francis announced

\* PMU Secretary General / Director of CIAM and Fides.

1. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* was issued in 1995 as output of the work of the *Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, which took place in Vatican City between 10 April and 8 May 1994 on: “The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: ‘You Shall Be My Witnesses’ (Ac 1:8)”.

2. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* dates back to 2011 and was issued along the lines of the *Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, which took place in Vatican City from 4 to 25 October 2009 on: “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace. ‘You are the Salt of the Earth... You are the Light of the World’ (Mt 5:13,14)”.

the *Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019*<sup>3</sup> because the revitalization of the *missio ad gentes*<sup>4</sup> is key to mobilizing the intelligence of the Catholic faith, amid the search for new and effective solutions to the problems of the Church's mission also in Africa.

In this context, the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) continues to devote its utmost attention and care to the promotion of formation and study programs across the African continent, with a view to enhancing the missionary identity, awareness, and engagement of the faithful, as well as to stimulating reflections on the variety of issues affecting the local Churches and concrete initiatives to address them. It is in this spirit of service to the *missio ad gentes* that PMU decided to promote a research project on the *Challenges to Church's Mission in Africa*, whose findings are featured in the chapters that compose this volume, as part of the *Omnis Terra – PMU CIAM Publications series*<sup>5</sup>.

A group of leading African scholars and experts, joined by a prominent Italian missionary figure, was charged with the task to examine selected topics of major relevance to the present and the future of the pastoral work in evangelization and faith witness in Africa,

3. The chosen theme for the *Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019*, "Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World", reveals «the missionary dimension of our Baptism», as being sent on mission is a call that comes with Baptism and is for all the baptized (POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, 1 June 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180601\\_pontificie-opere-missionarie.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180601_pontificie-opere-missionarie.html)).

4. There cannot be replacements for the *missio ad gentes*, which already encapsulates in the scope of its divine mandate any mode of dynamic presence of proclamation and conversion of nations, cultures, religions, and peoples who encounter and open themselves to the Gospel of Jesus and his Church (Cf. MERONI F., *The Mission of the Church and the Missio Ad Gentes: Some Initial Observations*, in CEP-PMS, *Baptized and Sent. The Church of Christ on Mission in the World*, EMMS OCT2019, San Paolo, Milan 2019, 77).

5. The publication of *Challenges to Church's Mission in Africa* is part of the PMU contribution to the engagement of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in laying the groundwork to the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019 upon request of Pope Francis himself. On 22 October 2017, the same day of the Angelus Prayer held on the occasion of the World Mission Sunday, Pope Francis sent a letter to Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and President of the PMS Supreme Council, entrusting him with «the work of preparing for this event, especially by raising awareness among the particular Churches, the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and among associations, movements, communities, and other ecclesial bodies». The letter is available at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2017/10/22/0727/01588.html#ing/>.

such as the theological foundations of the mission; the nexus between education and human integral development; the migration crisis and the response of the Church; the role of Church leaders in conflicts resolution; the secularization of African societies and the civil–political engagement of Christians; the Catholic faith facing the traditional religious practices and the rise of neo–Pentecostalism. Case studies were drawn from Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic<sup>6</sup>.

The insights and policy proposals provided by the authors aim to allow the representatives of the Church, dioceses, congregations, pastoral agents, catechists, lay Christians, women and men in Africa, to better read the signs of the times and offer effective responses effective responses to the social, cultural, political, economic, moral, and spiritual matters calling for guidance and urgent interventions. The goal is to open new missionary perspectives conducive to a more fruitful evangelization of the African societies and within the Christian communities themselves<sup>7</sup>.

To complete the third phase of the Church’s mission in Africa, an inculturation that evangelizes is needed, «as a process that includes the whole of Christian existence — theology, liturgy, customs, structures» (EA 78). A faith that has solidly been inculturated is able to disclose the reality of *the sacramental logic of the event of Jesus Christ*, of his Incarnation and Passover<sup>8</sup>, which makes the Church the «universal sacrament of salvation» (*Lumen Gentium* 48; *Ad Gentes* 1; *Gaudium et Spes* 45)<sup>9</sup>. Mission in Africa has the experiential and theological

6. The publication of this volume was coordinated by Mr. Emiliano Stornelli, Chairman of the Religion & Security Council.

7. PMU promotion of this book does not entail the endorsement of all the statements, approaches, and proposals featured therein.

8. The Paschal Mystery and the historical mission of Jesus highlight how the need for love, the need for salvation from evil and death, sin and pain, hatred and division, is constitutive of the human person who, through creation in Christ, longs for divine sonship. Interest in dialogue, peaceful coexistence, social and economic justice, ecology, and otherness, must be profoundly configured and built upon the superabundant offer of salvation the heart of which is the Paschal Mystery (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

9. Mission makes the Church because it designates it to be much more than an instrument for salvation. It constitutes the Church as a community of the saved, since it is truly a family of God, sons and daughters in the only Son — an eschatological design of all creation (Easter, Baptism, and Eucharist). The Church, the «universal sacrament of salvation» is much more than a means or a sign that will one day be discarded. Cf. MERONI F. (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church*, Aracne Editrice, Canterano (Roma) 2017.

demand to rediscover this logic in a way that fully encompasses the African cultural particularities. The nature, life, and structures of the local Churches have to be re-determined accordingly, in order to address the spiritual and identity insecurity that keeps driving a number of Catholics away from the Church (Cf. AM 89–92).

Today, Africa presents a very complex and demanding scenario. The long-established African traditions and ethos find themselves interwoven with a postmodern and increasingly secularized<sup>10</sup> metropolitan culture, encompassing a plurality of expressions<sup>11</sup> and the confusing combination of rural and digital, especially in the slums. Added to that, existential and family troubles, poverty and unemployment, sickness and life dissatisfaction, contribute to trigger crises of faith that question the belonging of many African Christians to the Catholic Church. The ensuing estrangement does not necessarily entail a formal abandonment and the conversion to other religions, such as Islam (Cf. AM 94), or a total shift to neo-Pentecostalism; it may take the shape of syncretistic movements (Cf. AM 91) or of the return to old practices (Cf. AM 92), as well as of the adoption of a life-style and postures inspired by the Marxist-consumeristic materialism that is making its way also into African societies.

Such a vulnerability of the faith calls for renewed missionary efforts to strengthen the process of Christian conversion, along with the conviction regarding one's personal faith and membership in the Church: «The Church in Africa, in order to evangelize, must begin

10. «The secularized world, in fact, even when it is receptive to the Gospel values of love, justice, peace and sobriety, does not show the same willingness to the person of Jesus: it neither regards Him as Messiah nor as Son of God. At most it considers Him an enlightened man. Therefore, it separates the message from the Messenger and the gift from the DONOR» (POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*, 3 December 2015, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151203\\_plenaria-propaganda-fide.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/december/documents/papa-francesco_20151203_plenaria-propaganda-fide.html)).

11. «The Christian faith that penetrates this interculturality opens new horizons, transforms relationships and peoples, transfigures matter, bodies, and the world for the glory of God and the full life of man and woman. Dialogue between people, cultures, and religions and the indispensable respect for each person's religious freedom represent the natural and necessary context of carrying out the Church's mission in the world. The peaceful and orderly coexistence of different and mutually respectful religious communities must always include the free possibility of mission, of conversion, and of religious and community membership» (MERONI F., *The Mission of the Church and the Missio Ad Gentes: Some Initial Observations*, 77).

“by being evangelized herself”» (EA 76)<sup>12</sup>. The result will be a deeper personal encounter with Jesus Christ, an absolutely free giving up of oneself to him, a spiritual discernment, and a lifelong vocational commitment, which engender a firmer belief in shaping the whole of life, human relations and work, in the midst of diversified and highly technological societies, plagued by rampant atheism, agnosticism, and hedonism. The main goal of Africa’s Christians is to develop a *faith in action* that reaches out to the various facets of real everyday life, so as to transform the world beginning from oneself, and in harmony with the African traditional traits and habits.

This applies also to areas of crisis, where many Churches are bathed in the blood of massacres and many Christians — faithful, priests, nuns, bishops, and missionaries — have lost their lives as victims of power, ethnical, ideological, and confessional conflicts. Yet, in politically tense and militarily insecure circumstances, religious and lay Christians continue to be engaged at the service of «reconciliation, justice, and peace, after the example of Christ» (AM 34), in a relentless work of prayer and of social reconstruction, without ceasing to believe in the strength of God’s love that with his mercy can rebuild countries that seem humanly gone astray.

An essential component of the strengthening process of the Christian faith in Africa is education. «The synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith. [ . . . ] A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not faithfully lived out»<sup>13</sup>. Jean Paul II’s emphasis on the faith–culture continuum clearly identifies the current greatest shortcoming of the Catholic universities and academic institutions. Faith formation, besides literacy and sciences,

12. An evangelizer by nature, the Church should always begin by evangelizing herself. This is the only way to ensure that she is able to preserve her freshness and the Apostolic courage to be re–created and reformed with new modes of Christian presence and witness (Cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate* 130–132), so as to continue to effectively respond to Jesus’ command «to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear» (*Evangelii Gaudium* 23).

13. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse to the participants at the National Congress of the Movement of Cultural Commitment*, 16 January 1982, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1982/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19820116\\_impegno-culturale.html/](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1982/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820116_impegno-culturale.html/). The translation of the quote from Italian into English is drawn by Pope John Paul II’s letter to H.E. Cardinal Agostino Casaroli on the establishment of the Pontifical Council for Culture, 20 May 1982, [www.cultura.va/content/cultura/en/magistero/papa/JohnPaulII/fondazione.html/](http://www.cultura.va/content/cultura/en/magistero/papa/JohnPaulII/fondazione.html/).

used to be the core of the learning programs of the educational system established by the Church from the very beginning of its missionary effort in the African continent. In recent times, however, Catholic schools have become less focused on the fundamental principles of the Catholic education, values, and social teaching, and more on high-stakes public examinations and grades, competition and final tests, the same way as secular schools. The building up of the Catholic personality in terms of adult lay membership in the Church has been reduced to the mere distribution of some religious information during the preparation of the first sacraments<sup>14</sup>. Whereas life and existential issues are usually overlooked by teachers and instructors, justifying the perception of the youths that the Gospel<sup>15</sup> and evangelization are unrelated to their real life, and that their concerns are not a matter of interest to the Church.

Regrettably, the purpose of the Catholic schools in Africa has ceased to be the human integral development of the new generation of Christians. The education system has failed in its responsibility to translate the truths and experiences of the faith into culture, and to accompany the students in internalizing them. This is how the temptation of the “Gospel of prosperity” or of materialistic gains, as well as the lure of the prophetic promises and witchcraft (Cf. AM 93), have been allowed to succeed in overwhelming the rational structures of the Catholic faith, which instead require to be grounded on truly solid cultural bedrocks. To this end, a major overhaul of the curricula and teaching methods is needed, in accordance with the directions already provided by *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africa Munus*.

14. «In Africa today «formation education in the faith [...] too often stops at the elementary stage, and the sects easily profit from this ignorance». A serious deepening of the faith is thus urgently needed, because the rapid evolution of society has given rise to new challenges linked to the phenomena notably of family uprooting, urbanization, unemployment, materialistic seductions of all kinds, a certain secularization and an intellectual upheaval caused by the avalanche of insufficiently critical ideas spread by the media» (Cf. EA 76).

15. «Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people’s hearts: “The missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary’s enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation”» (EG 265, quoting John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* 45).

These magisterial documents show that the Church has long been aware of the crisis affecting the «Catholic institutions of higher education» (AM 136) in Africa, and thus reminded them that their mission is «as pertinent as ever [...] in the proclamation of the salvific Word of God» (EA 103), and «in the patient, rigorous, and humble search for the light which comes from Truth» (AM 135).

«Young people [...] should study the educational sciences with a view to passing down knowledge full of Truth: not mere know-how but genuine knowledge of life, inspired by a Christian consciousness shaped by the Church's Social Doctrine» (AM 134). The accent on the Social Doctrine of the Church is due to its major role in «deepening the faith» (EA 76) on the way to the completion of the process of evangelization and full conversion in Christ: «To make a solid and proper contribution to African society, it is indispensable that students be taught the Church's Social Doctrine. This will help the Church in Africa serenely to prepare a pastoral plan which speaks to the heart of Africans and enables them to be reconciled to themselves by following Christ» (AM 137). At the same time, this pastoral plan, entrusted to the Bishops, must speak to «the intellect and reason so as to foster a habit of rational dialogue and critical analysis within society and in the Church» (AM 137)<sup>16</sup>.

The centrality of education to «foster the development of each man and of the whole man» (*Populorum Progressio* 14) makes addressing the poor record of the African Catholic schools in faith formation not simply a technical matter. It requires an authentic missionary recommitment of pastors, teachers, and instructors<sup>17</sup>. The *missio ad*

16. Formation, both academic and professional, entails a positive critical approach to social media for the sake of the communication and dissemination of the Gospel. All those Christians who are directly and professionally involved in this important field for the life and mission of the Church, cannot be left untrained and for them ongoing formation is also becoming a pastoral obligation. The spiritual and pastoral accompaniment of the Church should be concerned with content, critical awareness of the social and personal impact of this new technological world, together with scientific strategies and highly professional workshops.

17. Mission is a force capable of transforming the interior of the Church even before the life of peoples and cultures. Therefore, mission must become the paradigm of the life and daily work of the Church, as a permanent state of intimate missionary communion with Christ, of personal encounter with Jesus alive in His Church, as the only way to bring about an authentic missionary and pastoral conversion of the disciples of Jesus and of the structures of the ecclesial community (Cf. EG 25, 27).

*gentes*<sup>18</sup> is the «engine and horizon of the faith»<sup>19</sup>, and then also of education, which is a prime instrument of evangelization. Contents, pedagogical approaches and goals, educators' leadership and professional competence, student learning, parental participation, and human relations: all this is intertwined with faith and Church for a sustainable, reasonable, and fruitful educational enterprise.

Moreover, to recover the missionary and evangelizing capacities of the Catholic education system in Africa, the urgency to shore up the key role of the catechists can no longer be disregarded. Catechists, baptized lay men and women, are essential actors in the work of evangelization, transmission of the faith, prayer, preparation for sacramental life, formation of the faith, and community leadership. They are deeply rooted in the territory, live ordinarily in the cultural and social fabric of their brothers and sisters in the faith which they serve in their ministry, ensuring a widespread and stable presence. However, the implementation of sound policies is required to address the lack of human and financial resources, the inadequate formation programs and facilities, the shortage of training material, the lack of transportation and unfair remuneration that continue to deeply affect their fundamental mission and work.

Faith reveals the real meaning of human life out of the personal encounter with Jesus Christ, and the living sacramental membership into his Church. It is a journey that starts with the head teachers, involves all the school faculty, and eventually impacts the lives of the learners, of their families, and of the entire community. Therefore, it is the task of the Catholic universities and academic institutions in Africa to forge women and men capable of dealing with all the challenges of life and of today's world, develop their potential and attitudes, and take up leading roles in the African societies, consistently with their Catholic faith, culture, and identity. Africa needs a new generation of Christians that will bear the responsibility to address the continent's multifaceted predicament, including the migration

18. Every member of the Church should make his/her own the style of the *missio ad gentes*, so that the Holy Spirit will transform habitual faithful into disciples, and dissatisfied disciples into missionaries, drawing them out of fears and closures and propelling them in every direction, to the ends of the earth (Cf. Pope FRANCIS, *Meeting with the Executive Committee of CELAM*, Bogota, 7 September 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170907\\_viaggioapostolico-colombia-celam.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/september/documents/papa-francesco_20170907_viaggioapostolico-colombia-celam.html)).

19. Pope FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*.



crisis, which is causing an unprecedented humanitarian tragedy and depleting many African countries of their best human resources.

African Christians are called to «go forth»<sup>20</sup> and determine the course of events in Africa, where people are yearning for the achievement of «a climate of security and freedom», and the implementation of «programs of development and job creation»<sup>21</sup>. This is also part of their missionary duty as *Baptized and Sent*, as evangelizers in charge of showing the way forward for the salvation in Jesus Christ of the whole African continent<sup>22</sup>.

Vatican City  
June 9, 2019  
*Pentecost*

20. Pope Francis' book titled *Go Forth: Toward a Community of Missionary Disciples* was published in June 2019 by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, within the series American Society of Missiology Series.

21. *Propositio 28 dell'Elenchus Finalis Propositionum of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, 23 October 2009, [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20091023\\_elenco-prop-finali\\_en.html/](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091023_elenco-prop-finali_en.html/).

22. Salvation and eternal life, the cross and its oblation sacrifice, are somewhat absent from certain pastoral and missionary efforts that are too consumed by the present, by the self-gratification of numbers and exaggerated media exposure. The insistence of Pope Francis on *holiness* in the contemporary world prompts us to focus again on the topic of salvation in Jesus Christ by divine grace, as an experience of new life, conversion from sin, victory over death, and eternal life. See the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (March 19, 2018), and *Placuit Deo*, the document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith approved by the Holy Father (March 1, 2018).



# La théologie de la mission et la mission de la théologie en Afrique contemporaine

ANTOINE DE PADOU POODA\*

This essay offers an overview of the theological trends concerning the mission of the Church in Africa. The status questionis on the epistemological and methodological issues is examined, along with the ties linking mission theology to the anthropology of “ubuntu” and to the ecclesiology of the missionary “Church–Family of God”. The case for a renewed African humanism is then raised, while dialogue with and between different religions and cultures in Africa is addressed from the angle of the theology of inculturation and interculturality, and of the challenges to the mission of the Church. The African theology of liberation and of reconciliation is referred to the promotion of human integral development, with a predilection for the poor, and of conflict resolution, for a more humane and more Christian Africa. The future of the mission of theology and of the theology of mission in the African continent is also outlined.

## 1. Préambule : questions épistémologiques et méthodologiques

S'il est vrai que la mission est la mère de la théologie, nous pouvons affirmer que la théologie africaine est missionnaire de par sa nature. N'est-ce pas en effet l'*exitus* et la révélation du Dieu uni-trine — les missions divines — la création du Père, l'incarnation du Fils et l'effusion de l'Esprit Saint qui rendent l'être humain capable de penser Dieu et de parler de Dieu? Depuis le commencement, Dieu, dans son Fils fait homme est en mission en Afrique où il “ parle africain ” à l'Africain. Fort de cette conviction, il va sans dire que la pensée théologique en Afrique Noire est aussi vieille que le continent<sup>1</sup>, même si la systématisation de la théologie négro-africaine est plus ou moins récente. C'est une théologie incarnée, enracinée

\* Enseignant et chercheur en Théologie systématique de la mission à la Faculté de Missiologie de l'Université Pontificale Urbainienne de Rome.

1. Cf. OBOJJI F.A., *Il cristianesimo in Africa e lo sviluppo della sua teologia*, in « Credere Oggi », 26, 2 (2006), n. 152, 7–46. Cet article est une bonne synthèse de l'histoire de l'évangélisation de l'Afrique et de l'évolution de la théologie africaine.

dans les réalités socioanthropologiques africaines dont les défis sont multiples. Léonard Santédi Kinkupu discerne et analyse un certain nombre de challenges aussi bien politiques, économiques, éthiques que médiatiques et spirituels dans une œuvre de belle facture<sup>2</sup>. Cette panoplie de défis à laquelle on pourrait ajouter les crises écologiques et migratoires, etc. ne fait certes pas de l’Afrique la Terre promise, mais la présente plutôt comme une terre pleine de promesses. Son avenir s’annonce rayonnant et prometteur à condition que les Africains prennent résolument en main leur destin. La théologie africaine se veut justement une contribution qui favorise une appropriation africaine de la foi chrétienne. Sa mission est d’amener chaque fils et fille de l’Afrique à vivre sa foi en restant authentiquement africain et chrétien, c’est-à-dire à oser l’aventure de la *sequela* d’un Christ négro-africain<sup>3</sup>. Dans cette brève dissertation sur la théologie en Afrique nous marcherons sur les chantiers battus par nos devanciers en dressant un bref panorama des tendances actuelles de la théologie africaine. Puis nous indiquerons d’autres pistes que nous jugeons prépondérantes et incontournables aujourd’hui. D’ores et déjà, la porte qui nous sert d’entrée dans le discours de la théologie africaine est cette furtive allusion aux questions épistémologiques et méthodologiques.

L’épistémologie et la méthodologie de la théologie africaine se meuvent dans une dynamique interdisciplinaire en adéquation avec la complexité de la personne humaine et des faits sociétaux. C’est du reste ce que pense Jean Marc Ela quand il affirme que « le théologien africain ne peut se situer en marge des savoirs élaborés par les disciplines qui permettent de comprendre la complexité de la réalité dans laquelle nous vivons »<sup>4</sup>. Bien au contraire, l’œuvre du théologien le pousse à « s’inspirer de sa communauté culturelle pour saisir la nature des questions qui n’en demeurent pas celles du second

2. Cf. SANTÉDI KINKUPU L., *Les défis de l’évangélisation dans l’Afrique contemporaine*, Karthala, Paris 2005.

3. Le thème de la christologie occupe une bonne partie des débats théologiques en Afrique. En dépit de l’importance et de la pertinence du sujet, nous ne nous y appesantirons pas. À titre indicatif, les écrits suivants abordent la question : SIÈME LASOUL J.-P., *Il Cristo nero africano. Una comprensione di Gesù Cristo nel contesto dell’Africa nera*, in « *Crederre Oggi* », 26, 2 (2006), n. 152, 73–89; BUJO B., *La teologia africana e il cristianesimo inculturato*, in « *Crederre Oggi* », 26, 2 (2006), n. 152, 49–55.

4. ELA J.M., *Repenser la théologie africaine*, Karthala, Paris 2003, 101–102.