

## INTRO

Fr. Matteo some time ago asked me whether I could be the resource person for this retreat in preparation for the renewal of our religious vows. The theme would be 'Mission'. Although I don't consider myself a spiritual master, I have never been, and I don't think I will ever be one, I engaged myself and I tried to put together some thoughts that reflect my approach to mission. How could I have declined that invitation when I myself am a missionary?

I don't mean to use a scholarly approach to mission; that is been done in the faculty of Theology, and you, as seminarians, are in a better position to reflect on mission, to explore different paradigms, listen to what various theologians have to say, analyze the missionary documents of the Church and so on. I am also aware that The Xaverians have an extensive wealth of experiences to share therefore I would like to clarify that this effort is **only a meager attempt** to offer few insights on mission from my subjective **spiritual point of view**, some thoughts which could possibly help us to reflect on our vocation as Xaverians as well. In fact, I would like to bring this reflection to a level that directly touches not only the mind but our life.

This reflection will be backed up mainly by selected references to the Word of God, Conforti's Testament Letter, some quotations from the documents of the Church to the purpose of recalling the spiritual ground on which our vocation is rooted. Nothing really new but doing anamnesis is important to understand the present.

The thread or outline is this

Mission

- As Vocation
- As Discipleship
- As A Call to Holiness

**These concepts are intertwined like 3 strands in a rope.**

## MISSION AS VOCATION

The first observation is that **Mission**, in the way we Xaverians understand it, is **grounded in our vocation**.

Even in the common language of the people there is often an identification between **mission and vocation**; we hear people saying "**My mission in life** is to help the homeless, the marginalized, the sick". In this example we may replace the term "My mission in life" with "**My vocation in life**" thus the statement would become: "My vocation in life is to provide relief, care, help to people in need".

Just this simple observation makes us realize that **when we speak the language of vocation we become more attentive**, we are using a language that addresses and challenges us directly. The word "vocation" in fact, in our missionary context carries a meaning that resonates with our situation in life as consecrated people, we use it in our conversation e.g.:

- "My vocation is being challenged, scrutinized, tested, affirmed".
- "I was asked to share my vocation story".
- We are promoting vocation to the Xaverian Life.
- If our formators tell us something that sounds derogatory or negative we take those words very seriously, likewise any other comments that are touching our vocation, positive and negative alike. We become very, very sensitive on this matter. Not so on ideas on mission.

Such a reaction is understandable since **vocation has to do with ourselves**, our way of being, our life story, our family, our choices, our commitments, our time, our orientation, expectations and our future.

If we talk of mission we are compelled to look at ourselves since for us mission is inseparable from our vocation.

## VOCATION AND CONFORTI

**Let us see what our Founder, St. Guido has to tell us about the purpose of our Institute.**

In the Testament letter, St. Guido Maria Conforti, while reminding us of the **serious and solemn commitment we undertake in the eyes of God and of his Church**, writes:

*"...we must strive to fulfill the **sublime goals** of the Institute, working with ever increasing zeal for the spreading of the Gospel among non-Christians, thus giving our own modest contribution to the fulfillment of Christ's wish: **the formation of a single Christian family embracing all humanity.** Every one of us should be intimately persuaded that **the vocation to which we have been called could not be more noble or greater;** it draws us close to Christ, the author and fulfiller of our faith, and to the Apostles who, leaving everything behind, pledged themselves entirely and without reserve to following Christ. They are the best models for our life. The Lord could not have been more benevolent towards us!"*

Msgr. Conforti speak of "**greatest**" and "**noble**" as attributes referred to our religious vocation.

**Such language is not an exaggeration maybe dictated by personal ambition; it is appropriate since God is the source of our vocation.**

The origin of our missionary religious vocation should be clear, we must be convinced that our vocation stems from a divine call. It should be affirmed that the missionary vocation should come from the Lord.

Any missionary endeavor that we carry out is genuine when it is **profoundly rooted in our relationship with the Lord**. It is the Lord that calls and sends us thus making us participants of his mission.

Quoting Fr. John Paul Brennan:

*"Our religious vocation is a **radicalization of the call to put God above all things, highlights and underlines the eschatological aspect inherent in the Christian Vocation**"<sup>2</sup>*

**We are humbled by God's call of us who chooses us for his mission.**

If our vocation were not be from God, the intentionality of what we do or say would remain confined to a secular or anthropological level that is indifferent to the salvific event represented by Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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2.(Fr. Brennan journal article John P. Brennan The Furrow [Vol. 32, No. 9 \(Sep., 1981\)](#), pp. 610-612 (3 pages)

On the contrary, our being missionaries is from a divine call. Our Mission is not to ultimately to help the poor or cure the sick; many philanthropic organizations or NGOs are engaging in such a good endeavor. The **Mission entrusted to us is to Proclaim the Gospel to non-Christians** of which helping the poor and cure the sick may be a particular expression among the many.

The thing that is most dear to me in this moment is this: Christ is the the reason of Mission; **Christocentrism** is at the core of our charisma.

We are called Christians as followers of Christ, all the more this attribute fits our choice in life. Christocentrism **implies discipleship, a pro active choice to establish** - a bond with the Lord which translates into a life of dedication or consecration to Him for the sake of our neighbor - make the world a single family in Christ. By the way, let us not forget that it is not sufficient to make the world a single family. Globalization and Technology can achieve this goal. The one family which we must envision is a family in Christ.

**Let us see together from the Scripture how this divine connection is expressed:**

In the context of the Farewell Discourse Jesus tells his disciples:

*"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you".  
(Jn 15:16)*

**If vocation comes from God, also Mission happens because of God's call.**

→ true from **Moses,**

**At the Burning Bush:**

*I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you; (Ex:3,10-12)*

→ true for the **prophets**

**Call of Jeremiah**

*The word of the Lord came to me:  
Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born I dedicated you,  
a prophet to the nations I appointed you.  
"Ah, Lord God!" I said,  
"I do not know how to speak. I am too young!"  
But the Lord answered me,  
Do not say, "I am too young."  
To whomever I send you, you shall go;  
whatever I command you, you shall speak.  
Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you  
(Jeremiah 1:4-8)*

→ true for **Mary**

**Call of Mary**

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*

*And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." (Lk 1:26-27, 38)*

→ true for **Jesus**:

### **Call of Jesus**

EVANGELII NUNTIANDI, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI (1975), at No. 6 states:

*"The witness that the Lord gives of Himself and that **Saint Luke** gathered together in his Gospel -  
 "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God" (Lk 4:43a)  
 - **without doubt has enormous consequences**, for it sums up the whole mission of Jesus:  
 "That is what I was sent to do." (Lk 4:43b)  
 These words take on their full significance if one links them with the previous verses, in which Christ has just applied to Himself the words of the prophet Isaiah:"*

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
 because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.  
 He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
 and recovering of sight to the blind,  
 to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."  
 (Lk 4:18-19)*

→ true for the **11 disciples**

### **The Great Commissioning**

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."  
 (Mt 28:18-20)*

The bond with the Christ, established, reinforced and maintained is what triggers St. Guido to affirm that "**the vocation to which we have been called could not be more noble or greater**; it draws us close to Christ, and to the apostle!"

Vocation and mission entail an ongoing sustaining **participation to the Divine Life** since God is asking us to cooperate with his project of salvation: Mission.

### **MISSION AS DISCIPLESHIP**

There is an important point to make here.

This refers to the **kind of** relationship with God which we entertain. We are not dealing with a God in the clouds, that many worship like many others are doing. Discipleship is about

following an incarnate God that in Jesus, born of Mary has put his tent among us, speaks our words:

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (Jn 1:14)*

*In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe. (Heb 1:1,2)*

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete. (1Jn 1:1-4)*

We realize that vocation and consequently the mission which it carries is not just a moment in time. Also **our "Yes" uttered once within a celebration must be reiterated in the daily life.** In the continuity of our life journey striving for fidelity, one becomes a missionary.

**A true missionary must be a disciple!** Only **disciples** can be sent

#### **THE JOURNEY IN MISSION IS ONE OF DISCIPLESHIP**

*When **Jesus had called the Twelve together**, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. (Lk 9:1-3)*

*After this **the Lord appointed seventy-two others** and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. (Lk 10:1-3)*

The Lord is not outside of us If we look for him He can be found. Isaiah reminds the people to:  
*"Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near".(Is 55:6)*

Not only the Lord can be found, He also made a promise to remain with us. The Gospel according to St. John sets forth a way of knowing Jesus that brings us the possibility of a **deep communion with the Divine Trinity:**

*"If a man loves me, **he will keep my word**, and my Father will love him, and **we will come to him and make our home with him**. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.(Jn 14:23-24)*

Still in the context of the Lord's Supper in his Farewell Discourse Jesus exhorts his disciples:

*"**Abide in me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are*

*the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:4-5)*

**Sequela Christi.** This Latin expression means '(walking) in Christ's footsteps'.

***Imitating Christ's Humility***

*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, (Ph 2:2-5)*

In discipleship we choose to journey with the Lord. Among many things we are learning by our Master that in the life of a missionary there is no room for:

apathy, neutrality, complicity in the face of oppression and injustice,  
 moving forward by inertia or inserting automatic pilot  
 superficiality, lack of depth, oversimplification being happy-go-lucky  
 taking things lightheartedly  
 indifference  
 ...

In the Book of Revelation we find very strong words against lukewarmness.

*"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.  
 " know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! 16  
 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth". (Rev 3:14,15)*

St. Paul reminds the Corinthians of their **great dignity** as Christians:

*Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.  
 So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.  
 (2Cor 5:17,20)*

**MISSION AND DISCIPLESHIP must go hand in hand.**

*Matthew records (28:18ff) Jesus last words as a command with authority (not a suggestion). To go, and as you are going, "**make disciples**" of all nations baptizing them..." He didn't say go make "Christians" a later term that eventually stuck, nor "make the church" which was more directly his doing, but it was to make disciples.*

*But Jesus told them, you are not to go out as rabbis, but always and only, forever **as disciples of mine**, duplicating more disciples, and the process should unfold all over this world.*

*But something went very wrong, somewhere along the way we stopped making disciples and concerned ourselves more with "making churches."*

*" One author made a strong, but I believe, important statement as well as observation: set out to make (build) the church and you will rarely get disciples, but set out to make disciples and you will always get the church. We have put the cart before the horse, if you will, or even worse, we have lost the horse all together! We don't know how to make disciples today.*

*(<http://sanctushieronymus.blogspot.com/2012/02/word-disciple-in-bible.html?showComment=1564609303330#c3211415681548805936>)*

## **MISSION AS A CALL TO HOLINESS**

**St. Guido** wanted his missionaries to be **consecrated people**.

He knew and believed that **through the profession of religious vows the totality of one's life could be offered to God**.

**Discipleship can be seen as a journey of holiness to re-establish the beauty of humanity which has been disfigured by sin**

**EN 69.** *Religious, for their part, find in their consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelization. At the deepest level of their being they are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life, which is thirsty for the divine Absolute and **called to holiness**. It is to this holiness that they bear witness. They embody the Church in her desire to give herself completely to the radical demands of the beatitudes. By their lives they are a sign of total availability to God, the Church and the brethren.*

A missionary, apart from being sent as an ambassador of Christ, is also **a witness; martyrdom** of which religious consecration is an expression, signify in fact 'becoming witness'.

We are used to the refrain that "the real missionary is the saint" and "The world does not need teachers or preachers, **the world needs witnesses**"; though we agree with the statement we oftentimes forget that the journey of discipleship is marked by **the dynamic of the Paschal Mystery** which call us to die to one-selves. Oftentimes **we see ourselves in the shoes of teacher** rather than witness.

*Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

*For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

*For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? (Mt 16:24-26)*

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (Jn 12:24)*

HOLINESS REFERS TO THE QUALITY OF OUR DISCIPLESHIP, THE INTENSITY AND RADICALITY OF OUR ANSWER TO GOD'S CALL

**Maximum Illud**, Apostolic Exhortation of pope Benedict XV speaks of the '**Necessity Of Sanctity**':

26. But for the man who enters upon the apostolic life there is one attribute that is indispensable. It is of the most critical importance, as We have mentioned before, that he have sanctity of life. For **the man who preaches God must himself be a man of God**. The man who urges others to despise sin must despise it himself. **Preaching by example is a far more effective procedure than vocal preaching**, especially among unbelievers, who tend to be more impressed by what they see for themselves than by any arguments that can be presented to them. Give the missionary, if you will, every imaginable talent of mind and intellect, endow him with the most extensive learning and the most brilliant culture. **Unless these qualities are accompanied by moral integrity they will be of little or no value in the apostolate**. On the contrary, they can be the cause of disaster, both to himself and to others.

27. Let us have him, then, be an example to those he deals with. Let him be humble and obedient and chaste. And especially let him be **a devout man**, dedicated to prayer and constant union with God, a man who goes before the Divine Majesty and fervently pleads the cause of souls. For as he binds himself more and more closely to God, he will receive the grace and assistance of God to a greater and greater degree. Particularly applicable here are the words of Saint Paul: "Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and well beloved, **clothe yourselves with sentiments of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience**" (Col 3:12). With these virtues the missionary will open for the Faith he preaches a smooth and unobstructed entrance into people's hearts. All obstacles will melt from his path, for no man's will is obdurate enough to oppose their attraction with equanimity.

30 November 1919, Benedict XV

Holiness can be expressed also with the expression "**to be friends of God and of neighbor**"

The new encyclical of pope Francis, 'Fratelli Tutti' implies a path of holiness that is actualized in an outreach towards others in the pursuit of good. Perhaps the novelty here lies in the fact that this path is proposed to all people of good will, not necessarily Christians. The element of faith is not so evident, yet, in agreement with the teaching from the parable of the Good Samaritan, the goal of holiness is truly achieved in the care and solicitude for the needy which transcends boundaries.

*Each day offers us a new opportunity, a new possibility. We need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen. let us foster what is good and place ourselves at its service.*

*We can start from below and, case by case, act at the most concrete and local levels, care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man's injuries. Let us seek out others and embrace the world as it is, without fear of pain or a sense of inadequacy, hearts.*

*Difficulties that seem overwhelming are opportunities for growth.*

(Fratelli Tutti: No. 77-78)

**We cannot insisted enough that ongoing discipleship should mark our life.**

If it were not so, instead of having the mind of Christ, **our ego** would take total possession of our life.



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## A CHALLENGE IN OUR TIME

Pope Paul VI declared clearly in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that the Church "exists in order to evangelize." (14) Some inspiration from that document includes:

### NEED FOR AN EXPLICIT ANNOUNCEMENT

22. Nevertheless this always remains insufficient, because even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified - what Peter called always having "your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have"[52] - and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus.

The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.

The history of the Church, from the discourse of Peter on the morning of Pentecost onwards, has been intermingled and identified with the history of this proclamation. At every new phase of human history, the Church, constantly gripped by the desire to evangelize, has but one preoccupation: **whom to send to proclaim the mystery of Jesus?** In what way is this mystery to be proclaimed? How can one ensure that it will resound and reach all those who should hear it? This proclamation - kerygma, preaching or catechesis - occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it; and yet it is only one aspect of evangelization. **(EN No. 22)**

Fr. Emanuele Borelli, sx

### QUESTIONS

Were the language and symbols of this recollection understandable and relevant to your personal and communal journey of vocation?

Are you intimately persuaded of the greatness of our vocation?

Can you share your feelings about being a Xaverian in our own time?

How would you encourage a young man to consider missionary life?

Do you feel encouraged or affirmed in your vocational journey as missionary?

Thank you