

Some Reflections for the Convention of Formators

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Almost one year ago, when Fr. Eugenio Pulcini asked me to prepare this paper, no one could foresee the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis that has forced us to cancel our meeting or postpone it to a later date. At that time, I had planned to treat this topic viva voce, but now, as I must put it into written form, it has become impersonal and wordy.

Even so, I hand it in. In this paper, I point to some directions that for me are self-evident and, I believe, everybody knows, insomuch that they may become boring and make one feel sleepy. I discussed and presented them in various occasions. I must confess that it took me some effort to write them down: firstly, because they reflect my own personal suffering both in noticing that they never find realisation and in remembering concrete situations which I find very hard to accept; secondly, because I am tired of speaking about them.

However, probably the truest reason rests on the fact that I begin to believe that they are a “utopia”. It is well known that any utopia as such is a “no-place”; it is something that lives in the mind but does not exist in reality. And yet it is equally true that we need the utopian as a stimulus that sets in motion our personal energy to search for that very “no-place” which we feel ought to exist.

This is also the same hope that has led me to write down these pages. I hope they may not turn out to be so boring as to stifle such hope.

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1. The Specific Identity of Our Charism: Rediscovering the Reasons behind the Church's Recognition of Our Constitutions

Historia magistra vitae (History is life's teacher)

Knowing one's history and, in our case, that of our Institute is always useful and sometimes necessary. Regrettably, the witnesses of our past are disappearing without having written much about the history of the Xaverian Missionaries. We have a good and historically documented biography of the Founder¹ but not of the Institute.

The Xaverian Constitutions' Drafting Process

We all should know the history of our *Constitutions* and the hard work done by the Founder to have them approved by the authority of the Church, as well as the reasons for such hard work. The resistance he was met with was provoked by the nature of the Institute and the characteristics he wanted his Institute to exhibit as he had clearly expressed in the constitutional text submitted to Rome for examination.

- *An exclusively missionary institute.* It is known that in 1895 Mons. Conforti had initiated an "Emilian seminary", namely, a formation house (seminary was then called every house for the training of the clergy) for the prospective missionaries that he was gathering even if, one must admit, they did not manifest a necessary and unequivocal calling to mission. However, very early (1900), the intention to establish a "missionary seminary" became very clear because the Institute that Conforti envisioned would have been an exclusively missionary institute,² just as he had written in his letter to Cardinal Mieczyslaw Ledochowski, Prefect of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* (March 9th, 1894).

- *The Institute's religious nature.* For Conforti, the religious nature was the second unquestionable feature that should have characterised his Institute. Thus, its future members would have tied themselves to it through the profession of the three traditional religious vows.

- *Being under the Jurisdiction of Propaganda Fide.* Conforti considered important for the Institute he was about to found to be subordinate to the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, the Holy See's agency then supervising missionary activities and upon which missionary institutes depended. It was the task of Propaganda to issue guidelines on missionary activity and, when necessary, provide financial aid. This dependency would have ensured the exclusive missionary identity of the future institute (one has to remember that this was occurring at the end of the 19th century, a time when mission was still thought of as "the missions").

Among the above three characteristics of the Xaverian *Constitutions*, it was the second one to cause the problems that delayed their approval.

¹ Manfredi Angelo, *Guido Maria Conforti*, EMI Bologna 2010.

² Manfredi, op. cit., p. 137ss. See: the Founder's letter of December 23rd, 1900, to two of his missionaries in China.

The Long Waiting for Approval

When Mons. Conforti presented his project of constitutions to the Holy See for approval, both Propaganda Fide and the Holy See were against the foundation of new missionary institutes characterised by religious vows; instead, they wanted institutes of apostolic life. Conforti had already obtained from Propaganda the *decretum laudis* (decree of praise) that gave recognition to the Xaverian Institute as “of pontifical right” (1905).³ What remained to be done was the approval of its constitutions. For the approval of the constitutions of a *religious* institute one had to apply to the Congregation for Religious, whereas Propaganda could only approve the constitutions of institutes of apostolic life (for instance, those of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris or those of PIME) whose members were bound by a promise to dedicate themselves to mission.

In 1905, when Mons. Conforti presented in Rome the text of his project of constitutions, he met with *two obstacles* that delayed their approval: the first was Propaganda that enjoined him not to found a religious missionary institute; the second were the demands of the Congregation for Religious, which very reluctantly would grant him their approval and kept imposing on Conforti requests for changes to the text – changes that every time Conforti introduced out of obedience. Moreover, there were long periods of inexplicable silence. For all these reasons, the *Constitutions* remained in Rome from 1905 to 1920. But, as the proverb goes, “good things come to him who waits.” And so it was that, in a manner Manfredi deems to be “surprising”⁴, thanks to the reshuffle of some officials within the two Congregations and, allegedly, the direct intervention of Benedict XV who knew and held Conforti in high esteem, on December 3rd, 1920, notwithstanding whatever it had required till then, Propaganda Fide approved the *Constitutions*. Thus, although religious, the Xaverian institute was placed under the jurisdiction of Propaganda Fide.⁵

Conforti’s expectations were not met completely. His initial project included a *fourth vow*, the mission vow, which was something Conforti cared about very much, as well as a series of ascetic and spiritual indications and exhortations that were not allowed by contemporary guidelines on constitutions. Strange vicissitudes of history! Less than fifty years later, the Holy See made an explicit request to insert in the new constitutional text demanded by the Second Vatican Council those very principles of asceticism and religious and missionary mysticism which the Holy See had removed at the time of the first approval, including the famous fourth vow. As we will see, this vow was introduced in the new text of 1983 and became the first vow (*Constitutions* 19).

Traits that Qualify the Xaverian Identity in the Mind of the Founder

From the brief historical review of the approval of the Xaverian *Constitutions*, we may infer the three characteristics that Conforti wanted to be enshrined in the

³ Manfredi, op. cit., p. 230.

⁴ Ibid. p. 433.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 433-434.

project of his Institute.

a. Being under the Jurisdiction of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, which at that time guaranteed the exclusive missionary purpose of the Institute. Such jurisdiction ensured that his institute was destined to the missions and the Mission of the Church in its *ad gentes* dimension rather than to a generic mission of the Church.

b. The “*apostolic life combined with the profession of religious vows*” (*Testament Letter 2*) places the Xaverians in a constant position of dynamic resemblance to Jesus Christ, the first missionary, by virtue of the practice of poverty, chastity and obedience, as well as through an implicit community life, signs of the historical existence of Jesus Christ. Undeniably, Conforti never talked about “community life” in the terms used nowadays, but he instilled it through that “intense love” for the congregation which he speaks about in the Letter accompanying the 1921 *Constitutions* (*Testament Letter 9-11*).

In the light of Fr. Lino Ballarin’s studies on the history of the Xaverian *Constitutions*, the fourth vow, about which Conforti cared a lot, was eventually added during the new edition of the *Constitutions* (1983). It became then clear that in the Founder’s mind this was the first vow, as well as the hermeneutical key of the other vows and of the Xaverian identity.

Till then, the entire thought of the Founder had not been yet clarified because of a failure to appreciate the function of the vows in the project of Mons. Conforti, but now it was brought to light. Consecrated life cannot be considered anymore an extrinsic addition to the vow of mission, something one must drag along with the choice of missionary life. Mission vow informs the vows and transforms them into concrete *modalities* of doing mission and into a life-tested *content* of evangelisation that is non-verbal but existential. Thus, the vows become a way of living the Gospel that the Xaverian offers to the non-Christians through his own presence among them.

c. *Spirituality* – namely, the collection of recommendations on spiritual life that Mons. Conforti would have included within the texture of the *Constitutions* but which were refused by the Holy See at that time – was not lost. In fact, those recommendations are disseminated in the articles of the 1921 *Constitutions*. In 1983, when work on the new text was under way, in order to preserve and offer those spiritual recommendations to the meditation of the Xaverians, they were collected in the *Fundamental Rule* which, along with the *Letter* accompanying the text of 1921, rightly called *Testament Letter* by the early Xaverians and up until now, constitutes the inspirational text for the new *Constitutions* and vouch for their fidelity to the intention (*mens*) of the Founding Father. Furthermore, the *Testament Letter* is the best portrait of Mons. Conforti and, therefore, also of the Xaverian that is faithful to his teachings. One might object that the spirituality proposed by Conforti to his sons is not a missionary spirituality. This is true. Since Conforti did not have a personal experience of missionary life, he did not venture into giving indications about missionary life, but set himself the goal of founding the spirituality of his missionaries on a fully lived Christian life: a life

based on faith, obedience, fraternal charity and zeal for the evangelisation of the non-Christians (just as he presents it in *Testament Letter* 10).

Revisiting the Specific Xaverian Identity Today

Forty years after the approval of the *Constitutions*, through the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), history has led the Church to reconsider her own identity and mission. The Council's documents – in particular, *Lumen gentium*, *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et spes*, *Ad gentes*, *Nostra aetate*, and *Dignitatis humanae* – have set in motion a real revolution inside the Church, leading to a progressive transformation of mission. However, this revolution has slowed down – and, according to some, even stopped – by fears, uncertainties and contrasting views in the period after the council (1966-1985), and by the Magisterium's interventions. Today, thanks to Pope Francis, the renewal started with the Council is back on track. Francis has asked the Church “a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are” (*Evangelii gaudium* 25). After the end of Christendom, in the light of phenomena such as secularism and globalisation that have given rise to a multi-faceted pluralism, the Church is searching for her original identity as messianic people, as universal sacrament of salvation, as a “church that goes forth” (*ib.* 20), in dialogue with the world so as to transform it according to the project of God's kingdom.

We Xaverians have responded to the Council's call. Following the instructions of the Council and subsequent Magisterium,⁶ we have tried to highlight our identity by reviewing our *Constitutions* and bringing them in line with the Council's renewal and with history. The face of Mons. Conforti's Congregation re-emerges from the renewed *Constitutions*: it is a family of missionaries, called to consecrate their life to the evangelisation of non-Christians (*Constitutions* 1). This community was generated by the Founder's charism and by his own spiritual experience, something he has transmitted to us so that we too live it out in our times.

Fifty years after the Council, great transformations have taken place in much of our missionary life thanks to the Church's teachings and the historical development of our Institute. Over this time span, the institute has spread to many countries and different cultures, in a journey through history replete with events and challenges that, to a certain extent, have changed it: the end of the colonial age to which foreign missions were tied; profound historical and cultural changes in the world; technological developments; the new consideration for culture; the religious and cultural pluralism in which the Church and mission find themselves today; and, most recently and quite importantly, the election of Francis as bishop of Rome, the first pope to come from the South of the earth, who has injected new energies and objectives in the life of the Church.

Mission is no longer, as it used to be, a venture for “daring captains” that bring their own faith and culture to other peoples. Rather, it is participation in the

⁶ Paul VI's Apostolic Letter *Motu proprio* (August 6th, 1966), *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, which promulgates norms for the application of some Decrees of the Second Vatican Council.

mission that is born out of the Father's original love and, therefore, from the very heart of the Most Holy Trinity. The *mission Dei* is the first conciliar novelty to change every approach to mission, to archive "the missions" and to transform mission into a participation in the Mission of the Son and of the Spirit (see John 20, 21-22). Mission is God's initiative, he has transmitted it to the Church, and now is entrusted to every local church. Mission, a gift of God to the Church, consists in sharing the free God-given gift of love with all those who do not know they have already received it. This is the *joyful news* missionaries bring to the world: there is a Father who loves all to the point of giving his only begotten Son so that all, by virtue of the Spirit of the Risen Lord, may live that fullness of human life that has appeared in the Son obedient to the Father (see *Titus* 2,12).

Hence, mission is no longer an enterprise organised by the Holy See, let alone by missionary institutes, as it was the case up until the Council. Rather, it is the work of individual churches in tune with the Holy Spirit. The first task of Christian missionary communities is to maintain a conscious communion with God in Jesus Christ: "Remain in me (...) in my love" (John 15: 4.9). The communion to which God calls everyone is love, and the disciples must spread it in the world: "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit (...) I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit" (John 15: 8.16). In the Fourth Gospel, *to bear fruit* is a verb typical of the mission – a mission that above all is not action but fertility that arises from being in communion with God. The verb *to go* is the classical verb of mission, the verb that expresses the movement of a "church going forth" and that "has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy" (*Evangelii gaudium* 24).

Mission is to evangelise; it is the joyful proclamation of the love of God, who welcomes all, forgives and celebrates, takes care of the poor and excluded, and welcomes all with the same hospitality the disciples have received from Jesus. Hence, mission is offering a welcome and a dialogue to all. But, if mission may express a preference, this is in favour of the poor, the last ones and the excluded, as Jesus did (see *ib.* 193-198). It goes without saying that carrying out mission in a similar fashion requires a *deep reform* of the Church and of her ministers, and that, in her turn, a Church reformed according to the Gospel will set in motion a mission that is evangelically renewed. This reform must be the journey of permanent conversion of our Institute.

To summarise: the specific features of mission *today* and, therefore, of the renewed identity of the Xaverian missionaries can be listed as follows:

a) **The first element** of Xaverian identity is Jesus' choice of mission to the non-Christians as the only objective of our life that excludes any other purpose (RF 3 and C 2). This reflects the choice of the Son who has given up himself only for this purpose (John 4:34). This is where our Christocentrism takes root. In Jesus, first missionary of the Father, we find the prototype of mission; by looking at him, we can break free of the taint that colonialism has left upon mission. Before *bringing*, *giving* and *doing*, the missionary must *be* mission, conscious of being sent by God, and aware that this relation he lives in constitutes his own being.

His mission will be peaceful and unarmed, devoid of every imposition or violence – even those he is not aware of – and in line with the Beatitudes of poverty and meekness (Mathew 5: 3.5). Thus, the missionary will be a man that brings with himself and offers merely his faith and the Gospel, without “power and glory,” with the sole desire of establishing relationships with his interlocutors and offering them his witness of faith.

It will be a mission whose purpose is looking for the “seeds of the Word”, for those traces and grains of goodness that the Spirit has left scattered along history. The missionary must discover them “gladly and reverently” (*laete et reverenter* as *Ad Gentes* 11 goes) in order to cultivate them and bring them to maturity on the day when he will be eventually able to announce the Pascal mystery of Jesus.

It will be a mission unfettered by the “benefactor complex” [i.e., patronizing attitude – *t.n.*], self-promotion, and the search for success and prestige which obscure the action of God and his Spirit for, like Jesus, God’s action is characterised by *kenosis*, by an absolute generosity that ignores any other end.

The uniqueness and exclusivity of the missionary purpose will determine also the geographical and anthropological *where* of our mission. For us Xaverians, not any place can be the place of mission. We go towards the non-Christians as the *specific* field of our presence and activity. This is the significance of the two criteria, *ad gentes* and *ad extra*, that are meant to determine the *where* of mission, even if today they are undergoing deep study and re-definition with the aim of ridding the *ad gentes* of every colonialist reminiscence. Furthermore, in recent years, the subject of mission *inter gentes* is being raised with growing conviction. It is not put forward in opposition or as an alternative to the *ad gentes*, rather as an interpretation of the *ad gentes* that takes into account those milieus where evangelisation takes the form of dialogue with non-Christian religions, and where those who have come to know the message of Jesus cannot yet conclude their journey by receiving baptism and joining the Christian community (see *Redemptoris missio*, n. 10). Then, important and decisive is also the criterion *ad vitam*. It is a reminder of the commitment to be completely available in terms of time, capacities, talents and activities, in the context of a missionary community and to the benefit of those who do not know the Gospel of God’s Kingdom that Jesus preached, or of those who, having come to know it, have forgotten or are unable to live it out because of historical circumstances (e.g., some sections of Christians in Latin America or in the West).

b) **The second element** which characterises our Xaverian profile and mission itself – something that should emerge in an ever more effectively manner from our identity – is the power of attraction of the Gospel testimony. The witness of a life of faith, hope and charity, the consecration of our personal and community life through poverty, chastity and obedience, as well as our common life in multicultural communities – not as a structure or a commitment taken once for ever, but as a daily journey of renewal – this all is the strength of the evangelising mission. We can announce only that which we are and live. If we are not sincerely at the service of others and we do not welcome and love them as

they are, then our actions do not proclaim Jesus Christ and his Gospel. [The thought that evangelisation is doing rather than being] is an illusion of the past – I say this without meaning any disrespect (*distingue tempora et concordabis jura* – every course of action must be viewed in its unique historical context: this is a principle to be remembered always!). Today, the pope reminds evangelizers of this truth: “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction” (*Evangelii gaudium* 14). What evangelizes is the evangelical quality of the life of both the missionary and the community. The Founder’s vision finds confirmation in the teaching of Pope Francis but, at the same time, puts us to a merciless test.

In *Testament Letter* n. 2, Mons. Conforti quotes Paul’s sentence, “*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*” (Colossians 3: 3). With this text, which was very dear to him, the Founder meant to say that Christ lives in each one of us and unites us with the Father. In this way, Christ speaks, acts, meets and works through us: He is always the first and most important missionary. *This is the significance of our Christocentrism*, which we so often talk about but rarely are able to explain. It is the apostolic mysticism of San Paul who, in another text, affirms: “*Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me*” (Galatians 2: 20). Union with Jesus Christ is the central commitment of our Xaverian identity: it’s about proclaiming to those we meet the love of Christ that we have received and for which we are indebted, or as another quote from St. Paul, a sentence that was much dear to our Founder who used it as the motto for our Institute, puts it: “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (2Corinthians 5: 14). The love of Christ drives, possesses, “enfolds, engages and overpowers”⁷ the missionary. Before any sort of works or initiatives that we may deploy, our first duty is bearing witness to the love of Christ and the Pascal Mystery that gives us life and reveals the strengths of Christ’s love. This is “the beauty which will save the world”, as Dostoevskij wrote. This is the decisive factor of our mission, for in it two components (*coefficienti*) of our identity – “a spirit of living faith which enables us to see God, seek God, love God in all” and “a spirit of prompt and ready obedience in everything”, – which the Founder expects to see in his Missionaries (*Testament Letter* 10), find realization.

c) **The third element** of our Xaverian identity is a “spirit of intense love for our religious family, that we must look upon as a mother” (*Testament Letter* 10). Common life is a new and modern term that, in his times, the Founder could not use. Nevertheless, it is a value that he strongly and persistently instilled into his sons (see *Fundamental Rule* 45-48). In addition to being the “new commandment” and the distinctive trait of the disciples, brotherly love is the soul of mission. It constitutes us as a family, as children of a mother who loves us and whom we love in our brothers. The maternal image of the Institute must not allow us to fall into forms of mama’s boys (*maternalismo o paternalismo comunitari*), rather must

⁷ “Avvolge, coinvolge e travolge”: This is how Franco Manzi translates the verb *synechei*. In Bruno Maggioni and Franco Manzi (eds.), *Lettere di Paolo* (Paul’s Letters). Assisi 2005, p. 517. The Italian translation of 1973 renders the same verb as “ci spinge” (i.e., impels us), that of 2008 as “ci possiede” (i.e., possesses us), whereas St. Jerome translates with “*urget nos*” (or “urges us”).

remind us of that sense of reciprocal belonging whereby I consider the other as part of me: I cannot neglect him but must take care of him, especially when he is not doing well, when he finds it hard to keep going, when I see him in danger; and I must be glad to spend my free time with him. Common life should not be *mea maxima poenitentia* (my greatest penance), but my joy, or “gladness and crown” as Paul used to say about his faithfuls from Thessalonica (1Thessalonian 2:19).

Nowadays, common life has become more demanding as our local communities are made up of confreres from different nationalities, languages, cultures and educational backgrounds. Feeling one family is not quite spontaneous. Only the action of the Spirit, that is at the origin of our common vocation, can build up communion and keep us together in the name of mission. Community life cannot be reduced to the mere living together under the same roof, but must lead to mutual integration. Only then the world that surrounds us and suffers because of conflicts and divisions will ask who and what is able to make us live together as brothers. This is evangelization by attraction (see *Vita Consecrata*, 51).

d) **Mission vow** asks us to evangelise by following the path (*met-hodos*) of dialogue: not only the intercultural dialogue but also the interreligious one. Since the time of the Council, this necessity has become increasingly pressing. Perhaps, someone will still find it new, but today it is without doubts an essential and constitutive trait of the evangelisation of the non-Christians.⁸ Dialogue means encounter, listening to the other before presenting the *kerygma*. Dialogue is more than an exchange of views, let alone a discussion on contrasting opinions. Dialogue is, first of all, a common search for truth, which goes beyond the different positions in the pursuit of a shared truth. Dialogue removes from evangelisation all possible impositions. “The truth will set you free,” Jesus said (John 8: 32). In order to dialogue with him who professes a non-Christian religion, one must, first of all, know it and have an *a priori* esteem for it, as well as a benevolent attitude and a great interior openness, just as the Council, recent documents of the Church and Pope Francis’ praxis teach us. The missionary approaches the other, not with self-conceit (the “I know and do everything” attitude), but with that respect for otherness that allows him to see in others a gift and a chance for interior growth in the Holy Spirit, the actual protagonist of mission. However, all considered, we cannot affirm that dialogue is the complete and final objective of the missionary; he will never give up the proclamation of Jesus and the Gospel whenever it is possible for him to do so, that is, as soon as those questions that we are waiting for arise in our interlocutor. “Speak only when you are questioned, but live in such a way as to make people ask you questions”: This is the advice given by two missionary sisters that live among the Muslim. Some missionary considers this a novelty that does not belong to our tradition. I would like to remind that Mons. Conforti used to ask his missionaries to approach their interlocutors by taking into account – and therefore by trying

⁸ See Roberto Repole, *La Chiesa e il suo dono, La missione fra teologia e ecclesiologia*, Brescia 2019, p. 374 that quotes *Redemptoris missio* 55.

always to know more deeply – “the customs, places, history”, in other words, the culture of their interlocutors (see *Fundamental Rule* 17). This had to be done, not out of ethnographic, albeit understandable, curiosity, but in order to find those openings through which the message of the Gospel can be offered and clarified in a way that is as “understandable and persuasive as possible” (*Evangelii nuntiandi* 3). At the time of Mons. Conforti, this instruction was a novelty which, by a spiritual intuition, he considered useful and, possibly, also necessary for an authentic evangelisation.

In the same line of dialogue with the world, today, the mission faces two new and very demanding fields in the reality of our times: the poor, with all possible meanings this word indicates (from beggars to migrants, to the marginalised and prisoners, etc.); and the commitment to the care of our “common home”, that is of the creation. Both fields are now part of the Church’s mission and, therefore, of the Xaverian Missionaries.

* First of all: the option for the poor, that is, the special attention every missionary of Jesus Christ pays to the poorest. Such preference for the poor comes from the revelation which, already in Exodus, shows us a God who sees, hears and intervenes to defend a people impoverished and enslaved in Egypt (Exodus 3: 7-12), until the action of Jesus that in his earthly ministry is concerned almost exclusively with the poor. The option for the poor, above all when qualified as *preferential*, caused in the Church’s hierarchy alarm over ideological drifts (the theology of liberation) and was banned until the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei sociali* of 1987. Missionaries had adopted and given it an evangelical interpretation, but they were not always understood. It was then adopted with cautions by John Paul II and employed in *Vita Consecrata*. Nevertheless, it is with Francis that this expression has been openly legitimised and re-introduced in the pastoral ministry of the Church and her mission of evangelisation.

As for the Church, so for the Xaverians too “the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one” (*Evangelii gaudium* 198). This category is part of the mission and implies helping the poor, listening to the cry of the excluded and rejected ones, advocating their cause, and defending and promoting the poor within the present socio-political juncture which spares no effort to ignore them (*ib.* 186-192; *Constitutions* 9.27).

For those who, like we Xaverians, are called to make their own the mind of Jesus, it is not possible to ignore the poor. We may say that such attention to the poor has been a constant feature of mission and, all along, one important component or missionary identity. It is rooted in the vow of poverty (*Constitutions* 27) and in that of chastity, which opens one’s heart to “welcome all people in a spirit of genuine fellowship and pastoral paternity” (*ibid.* 21). Today, we too have to commit ourselves to the realization of Pope Francis’ desire to help the Church become “a Church which is poor and for the poor” (*Evangelii gaudium* 198). It is about an option that “is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor

for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty” (*ib.* quote from Benedict XVI). Avoiding whatever makes us live a bourgeois lifestyle is then part of the Xaverian style, as we strive to help the poor, make space for them, champion their cause, defend and promote them. Let us avoid being rich even if it were for the purpose of being capable to give to the poor. Poverty is the revelation of the Lord and predisposes us to the gift of ourselves, to prophetic liberty, to the free welcome of others, without going after those positions of power that always move in tandem with money.

* Another element of the new mission is the “care of our common home”, as the integral ecology is called by Francis in the encyclical *Laudato si'* he published in 2015. Since the 1997 Conference of European Churches in Graz, this topic has become part of the Church’s understanding of mission and has been embraced by religious institutes and missionaries. It is about a commitment to safeguard and cultivate the goods of creation that God has entrusted to humanity and which, instead, are squandered in thousand ways, particularly in the lands of the poor. They are very rich lands, that are systematically pillaged and robbed by anonymous societies, international corporations and local governments, causing severe damage to the populations and leading to their impoverishment. Undoubtedly, part of Christian charity, the commitment to safeguard the creation falls also under our responsibility as missionary, for two reasons: firstly, it requires us not to deplete the goods which are not renewable and, therefore, to change our lifestyle and needs; secondly, it requires us to promote everywhere that *integral ecology* [i.e., environmentalism – *t.n.*] (*Laudato si'* 138-142) that at the same time and with the same determination takes care of both human beings and nature, with the purpose of transmitting nature to future generations since its goods are destined both to us and to those who will come after us. The urgency of a worldwide cultural awareness of the global ecology, rather than simply being an environmentalist strategy, in light of environmental disasters and climatic changes of which we are spectators (as well as responsible agents), appears to be a growing necessity. Such awareness demands to be translated, also by our family, into a lifestyle characterised by moderation in the use of goods and by respect for creation. This is all part of personal and community witness of evangelical poverty, which delimits the use of goods and one’s own freedom.

2. Today’s Challenges to Formation: Which Kind of Xaverian Does the Church Need Today?

It is not my intention to repeat here what the *Ratio Formationis Xaveriana* already proposes in a complete and detailed manner. Instead, I want to emphasize four aspects of Xaverian formation that seem important to me and which I think are wanting or not easily recognised by today’s generations.

1. There is one aspect in the life of the missionary that is not always taken care of or receives insufficient care. Nonetheless, it is a fundamental one if we believe

in the principle that “*gratia supponit naturam et perficit eam*” (Grace builds on and improves nature). This is the *Xaverian’s humanity*. In the past we used to talk of the “*human dimension of the Xaverian*” (il volto umano del Saveriano). Both expressions are employed to indicate the human virtues of the person and, concretely, of the Xaverian Missionary.

What is involved here is human formation: the formation of one’s temperament and of human virtues such as honesty, sincerity, capacity to trust others, deliberation, justice, politeness in different environments, listening and attention to the little and poor, care for weaker brothers, care for one’s personal look and demeanour, the capacity to recognise one’s mistake, to forgive those who offend us and, in general, to be with others, ... and many others too.

These are aspects that need to find a balanced application in the personality of the missionary but, first of all, must be *taught* and *verified* to avoid enlisting among our ranks people that tomorrow will not be able to love others, to live in community, to believe and trust the other, to be open to dialogue with others and especially with non-Christians. Intellectual or manual skills are not enough to make of one a good missionary. Mons. Conforti has indicated and summarised this point of Xaverian formation with Paul’s words to the Philippians: “whatever is noble...” (*Fundamental Rule* 60) and thus showed us that what he wishes to find and develop in the Xaverian is a rich humanity, a persona that is open and willing to grow and improve.

Among us there are excellent “rough men”; they are holy people, but find it hard to live with others or others have a hard time living with them. They are people that do not irradiate the beauty of the Gospel. How, then, can they attract the non-Christians?

2. The second element I think must be taken care of during formation is the development of a *deep spirituality* that pervades the spiritual and apostolic life and brings out the values of the Gospel. To consecrate oneself to God with generosity is not enough. This good start must continue with attention to one’s personal growth and the consolidation of one’s consecrated life by reconciling it with the commitments of apostolic life. This is the sphere of *on-going formation* and *spiritual accompaniment*. Experience teaches that he who does not take care of this aspect and does not keep it alive and vital soon will lose his ability to transmit and share with others his own faith; he will make up for this with frenetic activities that wear the person down and lead to burnout and an interior dissatisfaction, which is never declared and, for this reason, more dangerous.

Especially those coming from Western cultures must watch out for the temptation of overworking and superficiality. They need to be wary of the seductive power of the means of communication and particularly guard against the *tyranny of the smartphone* that ends up preventing a true testimony of faith and humanity. When a confrere is never off his mobile phone, and keeps opening it at all moments to check whether there are calls or interesting news, then he does not pay attention to the persons and does not live in community any more. The desire to be always “connected” ends up producing a chronic superficiality

and indolence, and waste of precious time that should be invested in one's training to the apostolate. These are matters everybody sees and knows, and many formators know and denounce, but then... This is an actual and daily field of life, and therefore of the missionary's *spiritual* training; it is a field that has not been included in the normal teaching of religious pedagogy, and yet we all feel it may entail a real danger for the spiritual and missionary life of the Xaverian. Nobody means to demonise mobile phones which are an excellent means of ministry, but one has to be aware of the risks that experts have long since denounced. It is not possible to go into details about this area of the life of young – but not only young – Xaverians today. I would just like to point to the fact that this problem of the use and abuse of similar tools, which in the consecrated ones may bring about a real and dangerous psychological addiction, have already become object of numerous articles and studies that can be useful to know. This problem requires attention and discernment from confreres and their formators.

3. The prospect of living in a multicultural context requires attention and training of a Xaverian's cultural sensitivity. He must be trained in the capacity to recognise the importance of the culture of others – besides his own one – in the process of evangelisation. Such capacity must be verified against the ability to listen, appreciate and accept, and being patient in relationships; it must take the form of esteem for one's own culture and, at the same time, the capacity to relativize one's own cultural habits. To reach an authentic intercultural and interreligious dialogue, we must develop, as a habit, the ability to listen to others' positions and critiques, as well the capacity to propose one's viewpoint with humble courage, "with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience" (as 1Peter 3:16 teaches). This requires the training of humbleness and patience so as to be able to accept the culture of others and develop the courage to promote or correct with brotherly spirit the confreres that live with us. Being able to live in a small local community and, consequently, the possibility to give a witness to communion depend on the human and spiritual training received and verified during the period of formation; however, we must not forget that this constitutes also a crucial area of on-going formation – an objective which we always talk about but rarely are able to concretise and carry on with persistence.

4. It is certainly important in evaluating candidates to Xaverian life to take into account and pay attention to their intellectual formation. Ensuring a good preparation (*Fundamental Rule* 16-17) is a tradition of the Institute and goes against the idea that even a good... ignoramus can be a missionary. A fine programme of humanistic and theological studies, satisfying results and above all the habit of on-going formation are important elements for the assessment of a future Xaverian's eligibility. Even so, I would not overemphasise academic titles and the various *Master Degrees* that, today, often entice a good number of young Xaverians. These can be offered or permitted to those who are "proficient" in the previous three points, whereas those who already show a tendency to withdraw into themselves or find community life hard ought to be courageously dissuaded. In fact, additional courses after the conclusion of the initial formation programme

may be – but not always – an excuse for escaping from an unsatisfying work or from a community where it is hard to remain and work.

Gabriele Ferrari s.x.

Tavernerio, May 2020