



CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

ON THE MISSION OF THE CONGREGATION
REMEMBERING THE JUBILEE
OF THE BULGARIAN MISSION

Rome 2013

*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
(Mt 28: 19)*

Dear Brothers!

As I write this letter, we have begun to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Bulgarian Mission, which was entrusted to the care of the Polish Province by the XXIX General Chapter in 1993. Today, reflecting on the fate of this small part of the Community, it seems to me (and I'm not alone in this) that – humanly speaking – it does not have much chance of rapid growth; yet, on the other hand, I believe that nothing is impossible for God (cf. Lk 1: 37), and we never know when springtime might come for the Church in Bulgaria.

Looking back, I did not realize that in our history, at the beginning everything was a mission, and the status of a “mission house” was quite an honor as well as a commitment to a given local community. And so we have spoken of the Paris mission, or the Canadian mission, or the American mission, or the mission house in Vienna. Today *de facto* we are pleased and take pride in our mission *ad gentes* in Tanzania, where four of our brothers are occupied and there seems to be hope of the Congregation's taking root in that particular local church.

With the motivation of the Bulgarian jubilee, I would like you to reflect on the formulation of our mission in the Constitutions, such as it was developed and approved by the XXVII General Chapter in 1987. Of course, in addition to the basic text, in the fourth section entitled “Apostolic Life” (thirty-three paragraphs, nos. 189-221) the Constitutions speak of the principles of our apostolic activities and of the educational, parochial and missionary apostolates. As an arrangement of our reflections I suggest a double viewpoint: in the first section *ad intra* and in the second *ad extra*.

PART I: A LOOK AT OUR MISSION *AD INTRA*

In accord with an ancient Roman rule, *Nemo dat quod non habet* (no one can give what he doesn't have), our mission is focused first and foremost on ourselves. This is indicated by our “Principles of Apostolic Life”: the Congregation strives to live, in every phase of the apostolate, the new life and hope contained in the paschal mystery, so as to achieve personal resurrection and the resurrection of society (cf. Const. 189). This means that, in order to be able to undertake any apostolate, a Resurrectionist-apostle must first possess in himself a new hope, new zeal and new life which he

desires to bring to others; he must first take up a path to personal resurrection, in order to make a real contribution to our work for the resurrection of society. This belief in the necessity of renewing one's own life becomes an interior imperative to offer missionary service for the good of others, which is the *ad extra*. Important elements of the internal apostolate of the Congregation are: the conviction that God loves us unconditionally; total dedication to the mission of Christ; the belief that our Community should carry the banner of the highest quality; collaboration and mutual assistance in the name of brotherhood in a single religious family.

1. The certainty that God loves each one of us

*We have come to know and believe the love God has for us.
God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.
(1Jn 4: 16)*

The first sentence of the Constitutions, which is also the heart of our spirituality, is: "God loves each of us with a personal, unconditional love." The same axiom is found in the statements of both our charism and our mission: "God's love for us is merciful and unfailing"; "convinced of God's unconditional love for us". The saturation of the first pages of the Constitutions with this theme can be seen by the naked eye. These considerations lead us to a fundamental truth of Christianity, that God is "infinite Goodness and Love itself". Thus also the prophet Isaiah solemnly assured us in the name of God: "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed" (54: 10).

Receiving this truth into our heart and our mind leads us to respond gratefully or to reciprocate, offering love for love –or, as St. John says, to know and to believe the love God has for us (cf. 1Jn 4: 16). Acknowledging, then, that love is one's principal rule of life, we choose a double focus for our attitudes: on God and on people, or in other words, on the love which God has lavished upon us and which we pass on to others – "This commandment we have from him, that whoever loves God should love his brother also" (1Jn 4:21).

In this context we want to ask ourselves these questions: What image of God do I have in my heart? When and how do I discover the presence of a loving and merciful God in my daily life? What type of God do I allow others to experience by preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments? Is the image of man that I carry inside me even further the image and likeness of God? Do I love in the manner of my vocation: that is, so that in every human relationship there is a clear sign of the love of God – desiring always, as the Creator does, the good of the other person?

2. Total dedication to the mission of Christ

*I have come to cast fire upon the earth;
and would that it were already kindled!
(Lk 12: 49)*

The mission of the Church is a continuation of the mission of Christ, which is graphically summarized above in the citation from the Word of God, which speaks of its hastening and completion by the gift of the Holy Spirit: first poured out on the day of Pentecost and even to this day coming to us in charisms and sacraments. Our Constitutional text refers this latter truth to our mission in the summary, programmatic paragraph of our Mission Statement: “We share Christ’s desire to enkindle the fire of divine love in the heart of every person on this earth.” Reflecting on our participation in the mission of Christ, we come to the conclusion that we should take great care to cultivate a sensitivity to the working of the Holy Spirit, reflected in the great manifestations of God’s goodness and love for us: starting with our vocation, and through the vowed life and our ministry in the Congregation. In order for our participation to be more fruitful, we must be ever open to His inspiration. And the Spirit of God “blows where He wills” with surprising force, freshness and originality; he helps in reading the will of God, bestows his charismatic gifts, comes to the aid of our weakness, remedies our powerlessness, gives us courage and impels us to be involved.

If exegetes see in the sign of fire above all a symbol of the Third Divine Person, it is appropriate during self-examination that we ask ourselves these questions: Am I open to the Holy Spirit, that he might purify me of all ungodliness, pride and stubbornness and might heal my woundedness? That his gift of wisdom –that is, to look at reality through the eyes of God and see everything in the perspective of eternity—might radiate in me? That his gift of counsel, which is the proper orientation in the complexity of life, might enlighten me? That his gift of piety, which is experiencing my relationship with God in a filial manner, might warm me?

3. The belief that the Community should be of the highest quality

Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
(Ef, 4: 3)

The internal mission of the Congregation is addressed not only to the individual consecrated persons, whom the Church sees as true teachers of communion as well as witnesses and creators of a vision of communion (cf. *Vita consecrata* 46), but also to all religious communities, which “must be a model of Christian community”, animated by unity in spirit and heart. A religious community, as we know, is no ordinary gathering of Christians seeking personal perfection, but constitutes a part of the Church-mystery, the Church-communion and the Church-mission. In this constellation the fraternal life in community is essential for spiritual growth and the attainment of holiness, and also has great importance for apostolic activity. And only such a community can be effective in the missionary sense, capable of attracting others to itself and open to the gift of new vocations.

From experience we know that here on earth the perfect community does not exist. All of our communities are always on the road, committed to seeking the ideal model of the Holy Trinity. But being on the road means gradually slowing down, a

dull variety, fatigue, tension, misunderstanding, confusion, misguided choices, erroneous evaluations and false judgments. Despite these and many other difficulties and obstacles, none of us can dispense himself from participating in the building of community, but must strive for unity and give of himself to the maximum.

Bearing in mind that I am called to live a fraternal life in community, and to build a model form of this community as far as possible, I ask: how much of my time, talents and ideas do I invest in the local community? Do I remember that caring for each other, especially for the sick and elderly brothers, is one of the evangelical signs of the quality of a community? Am I patient and understanding towards those who because of personal limitations and difficulties follow more slowly? Are the members who live on the margins of the community not excluded by chance from the mission of the Congregation? Does my local community live the charism of the Congregation and make the gift of our brotherhood ever present for all to see?

4. Cooperation and mutual assistance as a challenge of internationality

*Your abundance at the present time should supply their want,
so that their abundance may supply your want,
that there may be equality.*
(2Cor 8: 14)

The fact of internationality, which for many of the old religious orders was a matter of course, we have dealt with only in recent decades. Our legacy in “mission”, therefore, is most gratifying and builds our sense of internationality: “As an international community we assist each other in various parts of the world by sharing our ministries, experiences and resources.” There are also international structures (International Formation Commission, International Resurrection Studies Commission, International Seminary in Rome), not to mention the General Curia and the Extended General Council. These bodies, according to the Constitutions, are supposed to promote international cooperation through the sharing of information and experiences. Our legislation applies the same goal to the building of community together with the laity (cf. Const. 116, 190).

Internationalization of the community means also the universality of our mission, which means that it is present “in various parts of the world” and serves the whole Church. Awareness of internationalism on the one hand opens us to different cultures, and on the other hand allows for an appreciation of one’s own roots while preparing us for this openness, in order to be a citizen of the “global village” which is the Congregation and to feel at home there. Our international character enriches the entire Congregation; thanks to this we become a sign of “a new and better world”.

If today entire societies are becoming increasingly dependent upon each other and are growing in their awareness of this reality –that we have to unite, because the bigger is stronger and able to do more—our internationalism in this perspective is a great gift as well as a challenge to solidarity, cooperation and mutual assistance in

various dimensions. Just as St. Paul called the Corinthians to recognize that their abundance and prosperity came with the help of other communities, so our Constitutions call for the sharing of ministries and experiences, as well as our spiritual, material and human resources.

So this raises the question: are we, who have an international status, yet sensing a certain resistance or prejudice in our hearts, generous enough to leave the old country and live in a new one, learning from each other and helping each other? Theoretically, among us “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for (we) are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3: 28).

PART II: LOOKING AT OUR MISSION *AD EXTRA*

If the mission *ad intra* defines who we are, the mission *ad extra* defines what we do; wherein the strength of what we do is who we are, or how deeply we remain united to Christ and his mission, as well as how united we are with our brothers in community (cf. Const. 5). After all, the Gospel principle is unequivocal: only the one who abides in Christ bears much fruit (cf. Jn 15: 5). Blessed John Paul II said that “missionary activity *ad intra* is a credible sign and a stimulus for missionary activity *ad extra*, and vice versa” (Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, 34): that is, between one and the other direction there is a strong interdependence; the internal missionary dynamic always leads us to the world outside.

The mission *ad extra* is composed of all apostolic endeavors of the Congregation which we direct to those who are close to the Church, but also to those for whom the Church is far away or for various reasons has become a stranger. This missionary activity has five channels: preaching the Word of God, bearing witness to Christ, building communities, pastoral-educational ministry and collaboration with the laity.

1. Proclaiming the Good News

I delivered to you what I also received.
(1Cor 15: 3)

Proclaiming the Good News, or evangelization, is not just teaching and passing on knowledge, but is above all telling the story of one’s personal experience of the encounter with Jesus Christ. This is precisely what the Apostle of the Gentiles did, explaining to the Corinthians that he was transmitting to them what he himself had received in his encounter with the Risen Lord. This was aptly expressed in the *Lineamenta* for a recent Synod of Bishops: “People are able to evangelize only when they have been evangelized and allow themselves to be evangelized, that is, renewed spiritually through a personal encounter and lived communion with Jesus Christ” (22).

We, as Resurrectionists, place a special emphasis in our preaching on the paschal mystery, “manifesting the presence of the Risen Christ to the world” (Const. 5). Our

Constitutions indicate that, for an effective and credible preaching of the Word of God, three things are necessary: preaching the word of God, and not one's own; diligent preparation for this task; and conforming one's own life to the truths proclaimed (cf. Const. 216).

The Church encourages us at every opportunity (and especially in the celebration of the Year of Faith) to seek out continuously new ways to evangelize effectively, while also being aware that telling the story of Jesus Christ appears more difficult today than in the past. Pope Francis urged at the beginning of his pontificate: "Let us never succumb to pessimism and bitterness which the devil offers us every day, let us not fall into pessimism and discouragement. We have a strong confidence that the Holy Spirit provides his powerful breath to the Church, the courage to persevere and also to explore new methods of evangelizing, in order to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth" (Words to the Cardinals on March 15, 2013). We cannot let ourselves be so discouraged, we must not give up, we must not cease to proclaim the Gospel; we must not surrender the ground to the enemies of the Church, but rather stand up to the task with renewed vigor and enthusiasm, with redoubled courage, with unwavering faith, radiant hope and sincere love.

Do I believe deeply that it is Christ who is guiding his Church by his Spirit? Is my preaching of the Word of God, who is Love, a genuine preaching, practicing charity in my actions each day? Do I convey to others with joy and enthusiasm my acceptance of the deposit of faith as well as our Resurrectionist charism and traditions?

2. Bearing witness to Christ

And we are witnesses to all that he did.
(Acts 10: 39)

The event at Caesarea described in the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter "opened his mouth" and related to Cornelius and his household his best case for Jesus, highlights three necessary steps in the mission of evangelizing *ad extra*: first knowledge, then preaching, and finally testimony, which manifests the confession of Jesus unambiguously, courageously, with all of its consequences. Pope Paul VI said that also our good conduct –or our style, form and specific principles that we proclaim by our way of judging and acting—are a witness (cf. General Audience Dec. 14, 1966). So it may be that we can preach without words, by advocating simplicity and authenticity of life.

In this option, testimony is none other than our deeds of faith themselves, because believing must be made manifest also on the outside, as an exemplary and communicative faith. Such a witness makes the most effective apostle. Hence the Church "needs above all people who, through an enlightened and lived faith make God more credible in this world. It needs people whose minds are enlightened by God's light, and whose hearts God opens, so that their intellects might appeal to the intellects of others, and their hearts might open the hearts of others. Only through people who have been touched by God, can God once again come to the people"

(Joseph Card. Ratzinger, *Europe in the crisis of culture*, April 1, 2005). Being a witness, however, is no easy matter: it requires at all times great faith, firm hope and profound love. This is the road on which, after a two-thousand-year history, Christians continue to set out.

And so for our reflection the following questions emerge: Does our “official” witness bear features of a petty-minded profession of external signs, formal gestures and routine words, to which consistent actions do not follow? Do we get tired of the daily apostolate of giving good example? Are we deeply convinced that God’s grace works and transforms, to the point of a true conversion of heart?

3. Ministry in our traditional apostolates

*I have become all things to all people,
that I might by all means save some.*
(1 Cor 9: 22b)

Even though in the early history of the Congregation our scarce human resources did not allow for too much apostolic expansion, the first generation took up various activities within the Church, including: pastoral care of immigrants in Paris and Rome, writing and preaching, sacramental ministry and spiritual guidance, education and vocational training, formation for the priesthood, involvement in the diplomacy of the Holy See, works of charity, ministry at shrines, and finally organizing parishes and the building of churches. Our Constitutions maintain the multiplicity of forms of service, but mention as our primary apostolates parish ministry, educational work and missions *ad gentes* (190). Our Mission Statement also states that we “reach out” to everyone, but in a special way to young people and families, as well as to all those victimized by unjust structures of any political or economic systems.

Because of all the aforesaid, at the beginning of the jubilee I would like to highlight the courage and determination of our first missionaries 150 years ago. After welcoming the Eastern Rite majority, “the march” of their apostolic activities swung toward the Turkish people of Thrace. They not only erected churches and organized parishes, but also built boarding houses and schools, created training programs from the ground up, prepared manuals, translated and published books in their own printing shop, and founded and ran the seminary for the formation of Uniate clergy. This activity not only received wide coverage in Bulgaria and Greater Poland, but even received recognition by the Apostolic Visitor, future Pope John XXIII. Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, only a year after his arrival in Bulgaria, in a letter to our General Chapter XVIII of 1926, praised the merit and competence of our missionaries in the field of education and in dramatic terms asked for the Chapter’s good will toward the Bulgarian mission: “I ask and beg of you, Reverend Father, and your honorable General Chapter, to study carefully this circumstance of tremendous good that Providence is offering to your Congregation, and to undertake a determined and strong program of apostolic action, especially in the field of education. You should have the will to believe that Bulgaria is “not the least” among the regions

where the apostolic field is ripe for harvesting. And it is here that the Resurrectionist tradition is already so beautiful and glorious that it would truly be a shame to interrupt it or let it start to weaken.”

Alongside these considerations I would like to pose three questions: In our traditional apostolates, are we in solidarity with those who live on the margins of the Church community and of society? In the name of solidarity are we ready to bear the burdens of others, or to carry them together as a community? Is concern for our mission among our personal interests?

4. Inviting others to a closer union with the Risen Lord

*May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,
as you are being rooted and grounded in love.
(Eph 3: 17)*

The author of the Letter to the Ephesians, endeavoring to create strong and courageous Christians, explains to his addressees that human strength is a close, intimate relationship with Christ. Toward this purpose he expresses, in simple words, the wish that Christ entirely fill their heart, which is the center of thought, volition and action in man. This is because it is in the human heart that the struggle between good and evil takes place. If Christ lives by faith in the depths of a person, then our hearts are strengthened by his presence, are “rooted” and immersed in God's love. God's love has been poured into our hearts, equipping us and creating a space to build a special bond with each other. Our Rule of 1857 discovered this truth, stressing that the Congregation is to have as an aim “that God’s truth would enlighten all minds, that God’s goodness and his holy law would set all hearts on fire; and thus the multitude of believers would become one soul and one heart; and throughout the world there would be one flock and one Shepherd” (15).

In recent times the community dimension of the Church has been emphasized; we ourselves feel a stronger need for a community spirit: and this takes place not only in anonymous large liturgical assemblies, but especially in smaller communities of faith and the exchange of ideas, worship and prayer, and brotherly love, friendship and mutual assistance as well. Hence we find our Constitutions defining the parish as “a community made up of smaller communities through which the faithful will be able to realize their responsibility for the Church”; immediately after this expression we also have the statement that “the Congregation supports and encourages communities of the faithful” (214).

It is clear that these communities – on account of our charism – are inherently marked by the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ, not to mention the communities which have a spiritual “kinship” with us and which also draw from the treasury of our Resurrectionist tradition and history. The fact that we call “especially young people and families” to form these communities is due to the awareness that it is precisely these groups that are the future of the Church; and with them small communities can be formed in a natural way. The Constitutions want our communities to radiate faith,

hope and love, as well as developing personal growth and promoting friendship and cooperative effort in the apostolate (cf. Mission, Const. 214).

Bearing in mind that we should be building communities to be “signs of union with Christ and his mother Mary, in the Church” (Mission), let us consider to what extent they serve the unity and renewal of the Church. Since we have been asked to build communities and to teach this art to others, do we have sufficient desire and knowledge in this specialization? Does our building of communities restore to the lost and confused in society the taste of being together?

5. Working together with the laity in ecclesial communion

Until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.
(Eph 4: 13)

The New Testament letters repeatedly speak of a variety of Christ’s gifts and of the diversity of offices and functions performed in the Church, yet always emphasizing coming together to Christ in the unity of faith; only in this way do we come to full knowledge and excellence. We go together, but for us as religious involved in the pastoral mission of the Church, there is a designated place on the frontline. The Rule of 1857 already outlined some principles in this respect: “In the guidance of souls, neither sinning nor inopportune severity or excessive gentleness; diligently guarding against imposing our own opinion and our own will, and above all tracing out the path of God and guiding souls to follow in it. The result of this striving will be that each person, according to his own vocation and his own road, arrives at true perfection –for not only progress in devotion and the practice of the Sacraments, but most of all the acquisition and exercise of the virtues, make up the content of the Christian life” (208).

As the pastoral activity of the Church is now unthinkable without the collaboration of the laity, the Constitutions oblige us to assist them in fulfilling their specific vocation in the world. In view of the constitutional provisions regarding the relationship between us and the laity, we have the following obligations: assisting the laity to discover the value of the sacraments and the power of the Word of God; integrating them into the mission of the Church and the Congregation; listening to the voice of the laity with a truly fraternal interest, taking into account their desires and points of view, experience and competence; creating spaces for their actions and initiatives; concern for their formation and religious development; and mutual assistance and cooperation.

We must now ask ourselves: are we aware of the above-mentioned obligations and do we treat them seriously? As persons born from the laity, do we recognize the dignity, necessity and complementarity of the different vocations in the Church? Do we know how to enable and take advantage of the various gifts, talents and skills in the edifice built by God?

I would like to end my meditations on the mission of the Congregation with the wish that their content and the questions formulated in each of the nine points might stimulate us to continue our personal and communal reflection, which would add all the more to what is written in this circular. At the same time it will enter the current of the new evangelization and the new challenges arising for the mission of the Church and the Congregation. In this effort I commend all of us to the intercession of Our Lady of Mentorella, Mother of Graces.

In eo Christo Redivivo



Fr. Bernard Hylla CR

Superior General

19th successor to Elder Brother Bogdan Jański

Burgas, Bulgaria, July 2, 2013

On the cover:

stained-glass window from Our Lady of Mercy Church in Rio Claro (RJ), Brazil, where the Congregation labored for ten years.