

**XIX Plenary – CEP 2015**

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**Tema:** Ecclesial Awareness and *Missio ad gentes:* The Service of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoplesat 50 Years since the Conciliar Document *Ad Gentes.*

**II Ponenza**

**Missionary Activities *ad gentes* in the Young Churches**

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**Introduction**

The Plenary Meeting of the *Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples* offers us the occasion to reflect on the Service of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to the Young Churches, 50 Years after the Conciliar Document *Ad Gentes*(AG). The aim of this paper is to introduce the second part of the discussion on the *Missionary Activities ad gentes*. First, I will highlight the definition of the key components of our discussion - **Mission *ad gentes*** - in the Decree *Ad gentes* and other relevant documents of the Council. Second, I will present the evaluation of the Missionary activities of the Young Churches in the light of the responses to the questionnaire sent out to the Young Churches. Third, I will underline some contemporary challenges of the Young Churches in order to introduce the reflection on how the Congregation for the Evangelization of peoples can help to foster Evangelization in the Young Churches.

**1. Vatican II: Mission *ad gentes* and Young Churches**

One of the great achievements of Vatican II Council was the retrieval of the theological sense of mission as *missio Dei*. The *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church*, *Ad Gentes*, defined mission as flowing from the dynamic of God’s love for the world manifested in the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Hence *missio Dei* defines the nature of the Church: “*The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father*”(*AG* 2)

The missionary Church is called to be a living witness of the eternal novelty of God’s love. She is instituted to tell the world about God. The Council used the term **"Missions"**to designate *“those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ”(AG 6).*

The Council calls ***“Young Churches”,*** those Christian communities that are born through the missionary activity of *“evangelization and implanting the Church among…peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root”(*AG 6). They are also called “***particular autochthonous churches****”*, “*particular churches*”, “*local churches*”.

It is expected that the “Young Churches” will grow gradually *“as communities of faith, liturgy, and love”*(AG 19). The should also be *“equipped with…local priests, Religious, and lay men, and ..endowed with…institutions and ministries which are necessary for leading and expanding the life of the people of God under the guidance of their own bishop*” (AG 19)

They should also have a mature, Christian laity committed to the service of justice and love in the society, that will help to root the gospel in the life and work of the people (AG 19; AG 21). They should develop means of communication, testimony of life in families which “become seedbeds of the lay apostolate and of vocations to the priesthood and the Religious life” (AG 19, AG 20). They should also carry out adequate catechesis. As for further development of the Young Churches, I would like to draw the attention of this Plenary to some areas of particular interest. Allow me to mention them briefly.

**Inculturation:** Vatican II Council also opened the way for the integration of different cultures in the expression of Christian faith. The word used is “adaptation”, however, it takes as model the “the economy of the Incarnation” which later gave birth to the concept of inculturation. *Ad Gentes* invites “Young particular churches” to *“borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Saviour, or dispose Christian life the way it should be”* (AG 22, 4.8).

**Theological research**: For the purpose of adequate inculturation of the faith, *Ad Gentes* encouraged particular churches to development of theological research in each socio-cultural area (AG 22). Moreover, the Council called on theologians of the Young Churches to *“submit to a new scrutiny the words and deeds which God has revealed, and which have been set down in Sacred Scripture and explained by the Fathers and by the Magisterium”* (AG 22). Sound theological inquiry should help to develop sound **catechesis and inculturated liturgy** (AG 19).

**Communion with the Universal Church**: The Young, particular Churches are also expected to be in communion with the universal Church. *Ad gentes* insists on the obligations of the Universal Church towards the Young Churches. Emphasis is led on solidarity in providing material support: “*Therefore, they are badly in need of the continued missionary activity of the whole Church to furnish them with those subsidies which serve for the growth of the local Church, and above all for the maturity of Christian life*” (AG 19).

It is also expected that these churches will on a long term have sufficient vocations and be able in their turn to share with other churches: *“It is very fitting that the young churches should participate as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the Church, and send their own missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world, even though they themselves are suffering from a shortage of clergy. For their communion with the universal Church will be somehow brought to perfection when they themselves take an active part in missionary zeal toward other nations”*(AG 20).

**Hierarchy:** The role of each bishop in his diocese is expressed as well as the importance of episcopal conferences (AG 22; 31; 32).

**Relationship with the society:** The Council redefined the relationship of the Church with the world. The Council asked the Church to interpret the *signs of the times*. Salvation is no longer understood only in religious terms but also as *social* *liberation* and *humanisation*. *Missio Dei* is to take place in the world for the salvation of humankind, of which the Church is both *sign* and *instrument*. Thus, while stressing the importance of the missionary activities (*Missiones Ecclesiae),* Vatican II heightened an awareness of the positive value of the progress of the social order towards the promotion of the common good and the dignity proper to the human person. World history is positively interpreted as a history in which the Spirit of God guides the progress of the world (*Gaudium et Spes* 26, 7).

**Relationship with other religions:**

The Council, while maintaining the validity of the maxim “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” (cf *LG* 14), has deepened its meaning with a hope-arousing statement. Those, who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation.

Although in ways known only to himself, God can lead to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (cf Heb 11:6), those who through no fault of their own are ignorant of the Gospel, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize everyone without exception. (cf *LG* 16, CCC 846-848).

In this vein, the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions so as to recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them, is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel (*praeparatio evangelica* *LG* 16). Indeed, she regards with sincere reverence those ways of life and conduct and those precepts and teachings which, although differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth (Jesus Christ) which enlightens all people. Indeed, she proclaims and ever must proclaim Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom all people may find the fullness of religious life and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. (*NA* 2)

**2. Evaluation of the missionary activities *ad gentes* in the Young Churches: Data from Questionnaires**

The openness of the Church through the Vatican Council produced and still continues to produce a lot of fruits. It opened the way for the renewal of missionary activities of the Church in different continents. A clear evidence is the numerical growth of the Young Churches**.** Thanks to the activities of the Young particular churches, supported by the Universal Church, through *Propaganda Fide* and the solicitude of missionary congregations from more developed Churches, the number of Catholics has grown in Africa, Asia and Oceania. The present statistics show that in the last 5 years only, in 230 churches, the number has increased with 72% while it remains stable in 5%. It is noted however, that there is a decrease in number in 23 %, the reasons for the decrease will be seen later among the factors that weaken or threaten faith in Young Churches.

It is also shown that Local Churches are organised/structured as Apostolic Prefectures, Apostolic Vicariates, Dioceses, Archdioceses, all headed by bishops. Majority of the Churches are in Africa with 507 Ecclesiastical Circumscriptions, while Asia has 478, America has 80 and Oceania 46 ( Cf. Doc. *Elementi per la preparazione delle ponenze*, p. 3 and p. 30-33). It would be good to follow the responses to the questionnaires and see that elements that factors that favour mission *ad gentes*, weaken or threaten it.

**QII-1. Factors that Favour Evangelization in the Young Churches**

**QII-1.1: Elements that favor mission *ad gentes***

The responses to the questionnaire show that many Young Churches try to develop missionary structures that favor evangelization, such as **Commissions** (73% The number of the frequency of the term divided by the number of the responding dioceses): for mission, evangelization, catechesis, liturgy, ecumenism, biblical, education, etc.; **Diocesan offices** (52%): for missions, pastoral, caritas, laity, publications, etc. 87% underline the importance and presence of **Councils**: episcopal councils, presbyteral councils, parish councils, students’ councils, college of consultors: 13% note the role played by **Movements** like Lay associations, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Association of Catechists, Movement of pastoral agents, etc. Finally, 6% note the importance of the institution of the **World Missionary Day**, as well as activities for missionary animation.

**QII-1.2 Activities that spark interest and attachment to Jesus Christ.**

The responses indicate that the activity of the Church that attracts people mostly to Christ in the Young churches is **Charity work** (57%). This includes all services that promote human values and dignity: hospitals, clinics, service to migrants, assistance to victims of disaster, etc. This is followed by **Catechesis** (41%) and **Liturgy** (37%) with emphasis on Eucharistic celebrations, celebration of the sacraments, adoration of the blessed sacrament, group prayers, pilgrimages, processions, spiritual retreats, Marian devotions, liturgy of the hours (it is important to underline that many religious communities open their liturgy of the hours to lay people). Other activities include **Education pastoral** (32%) in Catholic and public schools, universities, formation of the laity, pastoral of the youth and children; **Dialogue/Encounters** (32%), like inter-religious dialogue, dialogue of cultures, social collaboration etc.

QII-1.3 Activities for guiding catechumens in view of baptism

Here, **Catechesis** comes first (53%), followed by **Social works** (38%); **Liturgy** (36%); **Witnessing** on the part of bishops, priests, religious men and women, laity (35%) and the **Pastoral visits** of bishops to the different pastoral zones and out stations (22%).

**QII-1.4 Places where Evangelization activities take place**

The most common place underlined is the **Parish** (88%). This is followed by **Schools**, at different levels, universities, pastoral of students, pastoral of the youth, formation centers (73%); **Social centers**, including health structures, old peoples’ homes, orphanages, center for refugees, caritas, prison ministry, etc (54%); the Media (27%) and Spiritual centers (18%).

**QII-1.5 The Media at the service of Evangelization**

The responses indicate the medium which is most available to the Young Churches is the **Press**, that is journals, bulletins, pastoral letters, etc. (81%). This is followed by the **Radio** (53%), which includes religious programs diffused in public radio stations or Diocesan radio, in connection with Radio Maria and Vatican Radio; **Internet** (41%): majority of the dioceses have websites; many have access to Twitter, Facebook, etc.; **Libraries** (18%).

**QII-1.6 The concrete witnesses that Christian communities offer to the society in favor of evangelization**.

The responses underline first the importance of the **Witness of life** (63%), especially, that of the first missionaries, priests, religious, lay peoples and catechists who bore and bear witness to fraternal love in Christ. **The Sacrifice of Martyrs** is also underlined (40%), especially, that of missionaries priests, catechists and lay people killed for the sake of their faith. **Holiness of life** is also underlined (32%) as well as the importance of **Social works** (17%).

**QII-2 Factors that weaken evangelization in the Young Churches**

**QII-2.1 Internal factors that prevent evangelization**

The first among the factors underlined is the prevalence of **Traditional beliefs** (46%), which were there before the advent of Christianity and continue to appeal to people especially in moments of difficulty. This is followed by developing **Ideologies (**31%), like Gender, materialism, colonialism and relativism. Others are, **Socio-political situations** (35%) like instability, immigration, discrimination, poverty, tribalism and illiteracy; the presence of sects, especial the neo**-Pentecostal churches** (31%), which proclaim the prosperity gospel; **Religious Fundamentalism**, especially from religions like Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.

**QII-2.2 Factors that weaken interest in Evangelization**

**Ideology** stands out as the first factor that weakens evangelization (50%). It is followed by **Poor formation** (44%) which includes clericalism, lack of ongoing formation, illiteracy, decrease of moral values etc.; **Poverty,** lack of economic means (38%); **Division**, tribal and ethnic, sectarianism, etc. (20%) and Violence, especially, persecution, oppression and discrimination against Christians (15%).

**QII-2.3 Other weakening factors**

Note that **Discrimination** comes up again with a greater percentage (66%) and englobes, interdiction of religious formation, absence of religious freedom and extremism. Other factors underlined in 2.3 are **Religious indifference** (55%); **Vocation crisis** (5%) and **Marriage problems** (1%).

**QII-3 External Factors that favor Evangelization**

**QII-3.1 Factors that derive from the state**

It is noted that the positive **Political** situation of a state favors evangelization, that is, where there is a favorable legislation, peace, tolerance, and good Church-State relationship (90%). Other factors are, **Natural religious disposition** of the people (37%) **Culture**: hospitality, dialogue, collaboration (30%); **Agreements (Conventioni)**, social assistance, works, institutions etc (8%) and **Education** (9%).

**QII-3.2 Factors that derive from the society**

Generally, the first factor in this domain is the importance of International Organizations (44%) in collaboration with local NGOs. This is followed by **Partnership** and cooperation between dioceses (25%); **Humanitarian works** (30%), which includes the Churches advocacy and initiatives in the area of Justice and Peace and Integrity of creation, as well Protection of life; Christian Education (7%) and Ecumenism (4%).

**QII-3.3 Factors that derive from Culture**

The factor underlined here are: Hospitality (53%), especially towards people of different cultures; Tolerance (38%); Cultural diversity (32%); Popular religiosity (27%) and Respect of Authority (9%).

Other external factors (28 out of 262 answered) that favor evangelization are, the positive impact of the **Charism of Pope Francis** (46% 13 out 28), as well as Christian involvement in the search for peace in the society (4% 11 out of 28).

**QII-4 Factors that Threaten Evangelization**

**QII-4.1 Factors that derive from the State**

The first factor that stands out in this domain is **State Legislation** (57%): It is clear that unjust legislation against religious freedom, like the Sharia which prohibits conversion to another religion threaten the work of evangelization. Other factors include the type of **Political regime** (46%), **Insecurity** (16%), **Corruption** (11%) and **Religious fundamentalism** (12%).

**QII-4.2 Factors that derive from the Society**

The factors underlined here are Traditional religious beliefs (25%); **Ethnicity**: nationalism, tribalism, regionalism, clientelism, etc.(14%); **Occultism**: masonic cults, Rosicrucianism, Jihadists, Boko Haram, Isis (12%); **Crisis**: socio-political, economic (7%) and Moral laxity(7%).

**Q 4.3: Factors that derive from Culture**

The predominance of **Customs and traditions** is highly underlined (57%) : special reference is made to syncretism and “pagan practices”, polygamy and social inequality especially the place of women in the society. Equal to this first factor is the issue of **Mentality of the people** (57%) which includes in certain areas, neo-liberalism, secularism and globalization. Then comes the issue of **lack of adequate formation (**21%).

**3. How to Help the Young Churches foster Evangelization**

Having in mind the framework of the responses to the questionnaire, especially various internal and external factors, like strength, weakness, opportunities and threats, I would like **to mention some areas in which the evangelizing capacity may well be enhanced, if some due assistance is given.**

***Formation of the laity***

Vatican II talks of the training of the laity “to become conscious of the responsibility which they as members of Christ have for all men” (AG 21). A good number of the laity played and continue to play considerable roles in the missionary activities of the Church in the mission territories. While continuing this mission, the Church needs to help the intelligentsia in these societies to develop the courage to take up social and political responsibilities in the society in a way that is informed by the social doctrine of the Church. How can the young churches be helped to develop unions of the intelligentsia in their territories, especially in Africa ?

The Church should also support the laity in the effort to fight against ideologies that destroy the family. Attention should also be focused on the contribution of women in these churches. Women are victims of all forms of discrimination and exploitation, especially in cultures dominated by men. On the other hand, they are also victims of feminist movements and gender theories that propose a uniformed model of the woman, as well as the banalization of sexuality. How can women be helped to take their responsibility in these churches and in the society?

***A true and balanced inculturation***

Young Churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania are witnessing cultural revivalism. Unfortunately, this cultural revivalism is coated with a certain form of ethnocentrism, tribalism and regionalism. This makes people forget that every human being is created in God’s image and likeness. It makes people slow to open up to people from other areas and share the good news of our fraternity in Jesus Christ. This attitude affects the life of the Church in a very troubling way. In some areas priests and lay people go to the extent of rejecting a bishop appointed by the Holy Father, for the simple reason that he is not from their region or their clan. Some even justify this attitude by referring to the need for inculturation of the Church in the local churches. Seminaries and formation communities also face the problem of inter-cultural living. Some dioceses and congregations are slow in accepting people from certain cultural backgrounds because they are afraid of intercultural encounter. Unfortunately, some of these dioceses or congregations toe the line of some myths surrounding the history of relationship among different cultures in a given country. Some cultures could be tagged as domineering; others are tagged as immoral, or laissez-faire, etc.

The Young Churches should be helped to understand that inculturation is not just a celebration and preservation of local cultures but a true conversion to *the living person of Christ*"(*Ecclesia in Africa*, 57). Emphasis should be laid on a *new phase of evangelization that*  would “aim at *building up the Church as Family,* avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favoring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources ( *Ecclesia in Africa* 63).

***The challenge of Pentecostalism***

These Young Churches are witnessing an assault of Pentecostalism, Neo-Pentecostals propose a Gospel of material prosperity, display of the pastor’s wealth, obligation to pay tithes, investment in the media as means of evangelization, hyper-emphasis on healing rituals. This Gospel of material prosperity appeals to entrepreneurs and young people alike, who see wealth and health, prestige and prosperity as obvious signs of divine favor. Many Catholics are brought to think that the Church should imitate the Pentecostal churches in order to be credible. How can the Young churches be helped to discern which evangelization activities correspond to the Gospel values?. As Vatican II Council stated, “*The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light....Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us”*(*Gaudium et Spes* 22). Here lies a great challenge for mission *ad gentes* in these churches.

***Sharing with the universal mission of the Church***

The Young Churches respond more and more to the call of *Ad Gentes* to *“participate…in the universal missionary work of the Church, and send their own missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world* (AG 20*)*. African, Asian and Oceanian churches send out diocesan priests and religious men and women to churches that are in need of priests and missionary in their regions as well as in Europe and America. This poses the question of how they are prepared for mission *ad extra*. Some of the local churches already have formation programs for outgoing missionaries, but they are not sufficient. How can these Young churches be helped to adequately prepare their priests and religious for mission ad-extra? On the other hand, more reflection needs to be done with the welcoming churches on how these missionaries from the Young Churches are perceived and welcome. How can the welcoming churches help the incoming missionaries to adapt to the different cultural, social and ecclesial contexts of their appointment?

***Migrant Church?***

The phenomenon of migration that has recently taken a new planetary dimension reveals the growing instability in the developing countries. This instability caused by conflicts, persecution poverty, economic and natural disasters also affects the Missionary Activities of the Young Churches. Some of the dioceses, parishes, schools are destabilized. How can the Congregation for the Evangelization of peoples help to stabilize the situation of these societies so as to slow the migratory flux? On the other hand, how can the presence of these refugees in Europe bring the universal Church to rediscover her prophetic voice and question her fidelity to her identity as Church of Christ, Family of God ?

**Conclusion**

I have tried to give more flesh to highlight the challenges facing the Young Churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania in the light of their responses to the questionnaires on their *Missionary activities ad gentes*. It comes out clearly that the impressive numeric growth and the positive development and structuring of the missionary activities in these churches is accompanied with the development of instability in major parts of these territories. This brings to mind the expression of Saint Pope John Paul II: “*The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service*” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1). The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has always accompanied the Young Churches in their mission of Evangelization. I hope that the questions raised here-in will help us to find how best to foster Evangelization in these Churches.