

## MISSION: THE CHURCH AND THE ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS

Movements in the Church are called to reflect the Mystery of that love from which the Church was born and is continually generated, since in the bosom of the Church, the People of God, they express that manifold movement that is humanity's response to the Revelation and Gospel of Jesus. The Church itself, born of the eternal love of the Father, through the missions of the Son and the Spirit, is inscribed as a movement in the history of humanity and of human communities. To the freedom of contemporary humanity, the Church proposes the Jesus event: his mission is rooted in the awareness that "being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1). The movement of the love of God the Trinity towards us sets his creation in movement for salvation. Every one of the movements of and in the Church reflect and manifest this Trinitarian logic through charismatic spiritual gifts.

From the link between the Church and mission, St. John Paul II shed the first meaningful light on the nature of the movements. They are understandable only within the mission of the Church; indeed, they were born through the mission of the Church. In fact, their emergence can be largely connected with the Second Vatican Council, which energetically reaffirmed the missionary nature of the Church. The dynamism of the Church's growth – and, by analogy, the growth of the ecclesial movements – must be its identity as the bearer of a message of salvation and of an encounter to the ends of the world, avoiding any self-referentiality and exclusivity.

Charism – a gift of the Holy Spirit and the origin of any ecclesial movement – is recognized and affirmed as a path that leads to Jesus, as a historical and concrete actualization of that pedagogy with which God continually and in many ways revives and leads the body of Christ that is the Church. The Spirit, who instructs and directs the Church, rejuvenates and renews it with hierarchical and charismatic gifts rooted in the experience of the Passover of Jesus, leading it to perfect union with his Spouse (see *Lumen Gentium*, 4). Thus, fidelity to the founding charism, continually confirmed, will increase the missionary power of the movements, making them readier to serve the Church for the salvation of the world.

These two elements, the Church's mission and the charism of foundation, represent the constant invitation to live from the universality of the Church, at whose service the ecclesial movements are placed. This is the challenge of catholicity. In it, in fact, the movements are destined to grow or decrease according to the measure of God's will for the mission in the world. "Catholicity," in this context, means the ability to live the charism without separating it from the whole, keeping it in relation with all the implications of the Mystery of Christ that the Church offers. However, "catholicity" also indicates the energy with which to witness, through the change of one's own life, the centrality of Christ for every person. The world, in fact, as Pope Francis recently emphasized, "vitaly needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the Church, Christ continues his mission as the *Good Samaritan*, caring for the bleeding wounds of humanity, and as *Good Shepherd*, constantly seeking out those who wander along winding paths that lead nowhere. essentially needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the Church, he continues his mission as a Good Samaritan, taking care of the bleeding wounds of humanity, and of the Good Shepherd, constantly looking for those who have lost themselves on twisted paths and without a goal" (Message for World Mission Sunday 2017, June 4, 2017). This is why the Church, God's people journeying through history, always encountering new realities and different human

conditions, wishes to proclaim the Good News in a concrete, understandable, and convincing ways. To evangelize in a missionary way today does not mean only to heading out for distant continents, but to penetrate the settings of everyday life, which, with the transformations of society, take on characteristics and propose challenges that are ever new. It is in these places that we want to show that encountering Jesus makes person's life new and allows her to reach her fulfillment. The great novelty of the Council is to underline that this task belongs to all the baptized faithful and is made possible by the charismatic variety of ecclesial movements. In this sense, the only true protagonist of the mission is Christ, who wants to meet each person in the context of his or her own life and teach her in the faith of the Christian community. The ecclesial movements correspond to the superabundant creative richness of God in meeting each one in the context of various human situations, cultures, languages, and sensibilities.

The way that ecclesial movements have been called to live this mission takes the form of an invitation to build a civilization of truth and love. This requires a method of education of mature personalities, missionary disciples capable of penetrating with faith every possible condition of humanity. Scripture, faith, sacraments, communion, and obedience (see *Lumen Gentium*, 14) are fundamental elements for evaluating the ecclesial authenticity of movements and their missionary efficacy. In particular, once the foundation phase has concluded and the recognition by the ecclesiastical authority is completed, the movements can reach a maturity in which the Church's mission becomes essential so that the charisms continue to be living and fruitful. Missionary commitment, in the encounter with the other, is nourished through education and growth within the movements themselves, opportunities to deepen the received charismatic gift.

Although the hierarchy does not hold a monopoly on charisms, it possesses the charism of discernment and of ordering all the charisms for the common good of the Church. Filial deference to the Pope and the

bishops by the movements must not diminish their charismatic service of opening and widening the ecclesial horizons towards all those experiences and human conditions that, in different ways, have need of the mission of the Church.

With regard to the pastoral problem of integrating the activities of movements into the ordinary activity of the Church, we can not expect to solve it through ecclesiastical strategies or simple canonical and pastoral planning. Rather, it is necessary to look to the Spirit, to see what the Spirit brings about in the life of the Church, to see where the best missionary relationship between the Church and the world is manifested concretely and begins to bear fruit. The answer to this tension is not, then, a human plan, but an initiative of the Spirit within the dynamism of the Church's mission. Personal vocation, the family based on marriage, culture, work and economy, the integral care of human life, social justice, peace, and respect for the environment – all of these are places of true pastoral engagement and discernment in which one can find both missionary conversion and useless tensions and oppositions. It is in the mission and in the effort to serve it that all ecclesial, sacramental, and charismatic organizations, local Churches, parishes, and movements, are invited to express their genuine willingness to serve the universal call to holiness, common to all men and women eager for salvation.

Saint John Paul II called the young movements to create more authentic forms of relationship with the ordinary life of the Church. The often problematic relationship between diocesan Churches and parishes, on the one hand, and ecclesial movements and free lay associations, on the other, is part of the wider context of the relationship between particular Churches and the universal Church. The particular Church stands as a way in which the universal Church can encounter people directly, reaching them in the context of their own lives. In fact, the parish, as an institution that lives in the midst of the places of everyday life, is originally configured as the expression of this local Church. In this way the nearness of

God to humanity is manifested concretely, within the social contexts in which people live. The one and whole Church of Christ is localized. Seen in these terms, the universal Church and the particular Church are not two different entities, but two dimensions of the one Church of Christ.

In the same way, ecclesial movements relate to the Church as such, in its universal and particular dimensions. Now the changed and ever-changing situations of life impose a rethinking of Christian presence and witness. In the context of people living their lives in their homes and neighborhoods, the parish still maintains the precious value of community in which faith is transmitted, lived, and sustained through the centrality of the Eucharistic celebration. On the other hand, however, greater personal dynamism and greater creativity in evangelization are required; it is the person who lives in the various and fragmented settings to whom faith must be witnessed. For the parish, then, the task of transmitting the faith and accompanying people requires a growing and challenging openness and communion with all the ecclesial realities that make it possible in the places of study, work, and public and social duties. Parishes and movements, in the communion of particular Churches within the universal Church, are called to collaborate, according to their own roles, in the one mission of the Church. On one hand, movements can reach men and women in the settings of their lives according to each person's spiritual sensibilities. On the other hand, the parish offers the presence of God in the midst of our homes and safeguards the universality of the proclamation of salvation that is addressed to all without discrimination, based simply on the area in which we live. The frenetic movement of contemporary life, the digital speed of connections, together with the massive migrations and movements of peoples, requires the Church to be present everywhere, always flexible and on journey.

The apostolic flexibility and the new forms of community life generated by the charisms of ecclesial movements seem to correspond to these new traits of postmodern and digital cultures at the center of which there is a

strong concern for the emotions and feelings of human subjects. The freedom of the Spirit in the creativity of ecclesial movements, lay associations, and new communities of Christian life responds to the new challenges of Christian proclamation and witness.

