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Major Axes for Missiological Models after Vatican II: Rereading Spiritan Mission from the Portuguese Perspective

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In the missionary journey of the Spiritans, as in the whole Church, models of action and self-understanding have varied according to political, social, and cultural circumstances and, at the same time, in permanent expression of the missionary thought of the Church, in inevitable revision and re-elaboration, inscribed in the occasionally troubled rhythms of history. The social, cultural, and ecclesial relations between Europe and the other continents also reflect these variations and developments. In each concrete case, we can find specific elements that nevertheless corroborate a common process of renewal of missionary thought and the evangelizing action of the Church. The following reflection will take a concrete case, the mission of the Spiritan province of Portugal, to present a series of aspects common to the evolution in missiology following Vatican II.

The emergence of a new European and world order in the second half of the twentieth century, brought about profound changes (from which Portugal will only benefit much later) that saw the birth of a new thinking about the Church, about the place of evangelization, and about the relationship between the Church and the world. These changes had immense consequences for the theology of mission and for a new ordering of the presence of missionary institutes in the world, and, specifically, for the Spiritans. From this new model (or new models), whose outlines have been developing, getting complex and maturing, a new way emerged for missionary institutes' to be present in the Church and in society.

The self-understanding of the Spiritans also follows this trajectory and the conversion to these new models and the updating of Spiritan life and mission was marked by a troubled and divisive reception of the Council, which continued years after the Council ended. Without pretending to reduce an immeasurable wealth of acquisitions and rediscoveries to a quick and lapidary analysis, it is perhaps possible to outline the great axes of this new missiological model.

1. FROM MISSIONS TO MISSION

Transition to a new theological focus.

One of the most important missiological insights, with immense pastoral consequences, is the transition to a new theological focus from an emphasis on the functional aspects of missionary activity, with an understanding centered on the places, "the missions" and the missionary activity in those places. In this new focus, mission emerges as the very source of the Church's being and action and is rooted in the inner dynamism of the Blessed Trinity, and in its divine missions. The Father sends the Son, in the Holy Spirit; the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit; in the Holy Spirit the Son sends the disciples, from His filial relationship with the Father: "As the Father sent me, so I send you: receive the Holy Spirit."[1] This eminently theological approach recalls the theology of *Missio Dei*, as it has become known, which completely transforms all understanding of mission and missionary activity.[2] Without expanding on the extraordinary complexity of this understanding it is suffice to note the emergence of an ecclesiology rooted in the discipleship of Christ, Redeemer of all, and in the gift of Baptism.

The theology of Missio Dei, *relativized the geographical dimension of mission.*

On the other hand, in its widest extent, the theology of *Missio Dei*, relativized the geographical dimension of mission, which is everywhere. It occasioned multiple articulations between religious, cultural, and human situations, and not only in the bipolar articulation between "Christian countries" (in a concept of "Christianity" that the secularity of the state and the separation of registers had long put in crisis) and "mission lands." God is everywhere and the theater for mission is in every human heart.

From this geographical relocation of the mission, comes a new crisis: that of the very concept of "mission *ad gentes*." Who are "the peoples," if all peoples are agents of mission and recipients of it? Other designations have been rehearsed, with that of "mission a*d extra*" (that mission is about going out...) or, from the new Asian theologies, that of "*inter gentes*" mission (which also presupposes a precise Asian context, in which the Christian community, a minority, feels sent to its people in the midst of its people - *inter gentes*).

Pope John Paul II, in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, located the dimension of first evangelization, within the missionary vitality of the Church as a whole.[3] This vitality caused the pope to call for a resurgence of missionary activity. "Today the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission *ad gentes* and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed."[4] Based on its theological

source, missionary activity is freed from an institutional or merely functional reductionism.

2. FROM INSTITUTIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TO COMMUNAL DYNAMISM

A vital dynamism from an experience of discipleship and sending in the Holy Spirit.

Mission, therefore, becomes less a strategic process of implanting the Church, through the gradual expansion of institutional structures, and more a vital dynamism from an experience of discipleship and sending in the Holy Spirit by which the gift of life in Christ is communicated through witness, proclamation, service, and dialogue. This experience – based on God's Mission and a common baptismal commissioning – is led by Christ, in the Spirit, through the Church as the Sacrament of Salvation. It is thus an experience of all Christians, each according to his or her own vocation, and it is truly fused with the very being of the Church, in which mission and ecclesial identity are, deep down, different designations for the same unique reality. Mission and communion thus refer to a common dynamism: Trinitarian communion is essentially dynamic, made up of the sending relationships within the bosom of the Trinity and, in the work of creation, as a kind of shining forth, out of love, of divine life. To accept the gift of the Spirit, given by Christ, from the Father, is to accept to graft oneself into this eternal movement of going out and meeting. To follow Jesus is to accompany Him in His mission. To commune in Him in the life of God is to become Church and this is, by definition, a dynamic shining forth; a participation in the one Mission, which is of Christ and is Christ.

Expanding the Church is understood as welcoming and radiating communion in a dynamic process that we call mission. Thus, missions, as places of presence and activity of the Church (expert missionaries sent "on mission") become relatively secondary, a practical consequence of Christ's Mission, by Christ and with Christ, which we celebrate in the Eucharist, proclaim in the Word, and serve in the community. From this comes a new emphasis given to all Christians: not only priests, men and women religious, but also the lay faithful, the multitude of disciples who, by their own and not subsidiary title, accept themselves as active members of an ecclesial body that is missionary.

Spiritan movements were invited to absorb this new way of situating themselves: in Portugal, the Liamists (*Liga Intensificadora da Ação Missionária*), and later the Youth Without Borders (*Jovens Sem Fronteiras*), like all the other members of the other move-

ments and groups, are not auxiliaries of the professed Spiritans, but co-agents of a common mission, living in full co-responsibility and co-participation. In missionary activity, in its various and typically Spiritan expressions of first evangelization, of service to the poor, or of welcoming difficult and challenging projects, all enter as active agents and the very concepts of "vanguard" (the religious missionaries) and "rearguard" (the laity) cease to make sense if understood in this way.

This communitarian model clearly opens the way to the emergence of an important expression of contemporary mission.

This communitarian model clearly opens the way to the emergence of an important expression of contemporary mission: that of missionary volunteerism. Solidarity volunteering, growing today in all social contexts, finds in the Church an important place and in its *ad gentes* commitments an ever greater weight, strongly reflected in the functional performance of the various valences of the ad gentes commitments.

3. FROM THE COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF RELIGIOUS TO THE CENTRALITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The theocentric, Christological and pneumatological dimensions of the mission returns it, as has been said, to the core of its ecclesial identity, removing it from a reductive and restrictive status of a functional and geographical nature, attributed to a specific sector of activity within the Church, reserved for institutions specialized in this functional area. Located at the very heart of the Church, the Church becomes its rightful holder and, therefore, the functioning of the mission becomes dependent, by definition and theological requirement, not on specialized institutions, but on the whole Church, according to its charismatic and hierarchical character. Therefore, bishops have the first responsibility for the missionary action of the Church, in their role of leadership service within the Church.

Renewed understanding of the place of the bishops in evangelization.

Religious institutes, taking their proper place, are inscribed in the ecclesial fabric, and are not, therefore, entities parallel to the particular Churches, but part of the constitution of their internal dynamism. In "mission lands," the superiors of missionary institutes, as agents of evangelization in a certain territory, have, in some instances, superseded local bishops. Such subjugation is foreign to the dogmatic structure of the Church. In this renewed understanding of the place of the bishops in evangelization, without excluding first evangelization, that tension loses all meaning.

To this renewal and theological deepening, of which the Council was the bearer, must be added the effective development

of the local churches founded by Spiritans. From the beginning, the Spiritans, in line with their own spirituality, assumed as a *sine qua non* to their commitment to the growth of the local church, the creation of structures at the service of the local churches and the formation of an indigenous clergy. This urgency, underlined long before the Council by the Roman Magisterium,[5] finds an interesting example (among so many others) in the Spiritan presence in Angola. The bishops of Angola, from the creation of the three dioceses in the early 1940s (Luanda, Nova Lisboa and Sá da Bandeira - today Huambo and Lubango), were at the beginning, all Spiritans and then local priests formed by Spiritans. With the successive developments of the dioceses, which reached the rich profusion of local churches in Angola, as we have today, this Spiritan mark has perhaps become more explicit. Until independence, by very conscious choice, they had committed themselves, with regard to priestly formation, only to the formation of the local secular clergy, so that the first house of Spiritan formation proper only opened in 1977, more than a hundred years after the arrival of the congregation in the country.

African reflection and militant activism were leading to an organized and well-founded discourse that demanded liberation.

This primacy of the local Church, promoted by the Council, but already present, therefore, has always gained not only ecclesiological support, but also political, cultural and social impetus from the awareness in African societies' of the fundamental right of a people to self-determination. As mentioned above, the missionary model adopted by Spiritans resulted from an intertwining of ecclesial and pastoral motivations with European nationalist and ethnocentric motivations, combining "evangelizing work" with "civilizing work" with a view to the cultural assimilation of the African peoples to the supposedly Christian western culture. This relationship was challenged at the same time as the African peoples were becoming ever more aware of their rights and the legitimacy of their claims, for which they began to organize and free themselves from the colonial yoke. From the 1940s and especially during the 1950s, African reflection and militant activism were leading to an organized and well-founded discourse that demanded liberation, which, in the absence of any other alternative, gave way to armed struggle. In the case of Portugal, the fascist ideology of the dictatorial regime that prevailed in Portugal until 1975 labelled this liberation struggle as "terrorism" and, initially, most missionaries of European origin adopted this language and attitude.

However, the evolution of history and the erosion of the regime gave way to a new attitude, which resulted in the independence of Portuguese-speaking African nations in 1975. In this context, the

missionaries (including some Spiritans, but not they alone) who were unable to transition to this new social and political order, found themselves caught up in a crisis of identity regarding the *raison d'être* of the foreign missionary presence itself: if it was no longer Portugal, why stay? On the other hand, this was also the time for the protagonists for a local Church to question the presence and action of religious institutes. These questions, which reflected a deep crisis of meaning and demanded a reconfiguration of motivation, had the benefit of provoking a purifying and clarifying process, giving a new impulse to authentic missionary motivation as illuminated by the Council and subsequent theological and pastoral thinking.

New impulse to authentic missionary motivation.

In those troubled times, many missionaries left their place of mission, not only because of their disenchantment with the situation at the time, but also because, although, wishing to stay, they were expelled. There were those who wanted to remain, but found it impossible to manage the unbearable conditions and extreme violence caused by Marxist-Leninist regimes (which succeeded with a new oppression in place of the colonial one) and by the war that ravaged Angola and also Mozambique, where the Spiritans would only arrive later, in a completely different context. The missionaries who managed to stay had the privilege of participating actively in building a local Church in this, its new and decisive stage, marked by persecution and trial of all kinds as it grew in maturity. The dioceses multiplied, the local clergy consolidated and, in several cases, became capable of solidarity by sharing human resources with the neediest churches. Thus, a situation arose by which these young Churches went from being "founded" to being "founders," manifesting an evolving missionary dynamism, both locally and with increasing engagement with other places (including the mother churches of Europe), and with other cultures.

Closeness between missionaries and the people to whom they are sent is essential.

4. FROM CIVILIZING WORK TO INCULTURATION

It has always been very clear, in any model of mission, that closeness between missionaries and the people to whom they are sent is essential. As was said before, the Spiritans have always guided their presence and action by a strong commitment to learning the local languages and cultures of the people, which, in the case of evangelization in Angola and Cape Verde, was particularly effective. This real effort of the missionaries over the centuries to integrate and adjust to the reality of each people (through language, access to cultural symbols, affective closeness) could be generically called acculturation, referring, therefore, to individuals and their way of adapting, more or less narrowly, to lo-

cal realities.

As for the content and form of the proclamation and content of evangelization, the priority given to language and translations, as well as the effort to make the Gospel message intelligible to each people, has always been present. These processes of approaching the message could be called adaptation: the proclamation is essentially extrinsic to the recipients, but it is presented to them in a format adapted to their linguistic and cultural codes, to become perceptible and acceptable. However, because of the way the Church understood herself, her message, her liturgical practice, and her expression of the faith, the way of being and practicing Catholicism among the peoples to whom the Spiritans went on mission remained unchanged. The liturgical forms, language, and catechetical models largely followed the European model. Attention to cultural paradigms, worldviews, and ethical codes did not go so far as to allow for a dialogue with the Christian proclamation, allowing it to reorient them while emptying them of what was incompatible.

The process of integrating the Gospel into the heart of cultures.

In 1962, in the *Nouvelle Revue Theologique*, Joseph Masson SJ published an interesting article[6] identified as one of the founding texts for what came to be known as inculturation. In the following decades, with abundant theological and pastoral writing in this area, the theme of inculturation developed strongly, not only at the theological level, but especially in the pastoral field. Inculturation is not understood as the superficial form of communication of the Gospel, but rather as the process of integrating the Gospel into the heart of cultures, transforming them from within and thus producing the personal and social metamorphoses that make possible the formation of an authentic Christian community, generated in a people and from a culture. Inculturation is not only a question of producing an expression of faith with the elements proper to culture, but the articulation of "an inspiring, normative and unifying principle that transforms and recreates this culture, giving rise to a new creation."[7]

Inculturation therefore refers much more to the Gospel and the Church as such than to the agents of mission alone. It is not exactly the foreign missionary who becomes "inculturated," but the Gospel which, by penetrating cultures, generates a new reality which, rather than being syncretic or hybrid, is the expression of an authentically Catholic and authentically local Church. Consequently, inculturation refers not only to the initial process of evangelization (as in first evangelization), but to all its stages, in all contexts: it implies a permanent dialogue between faith and cultures, since faith always uses

cultural support as its vehicle for expression. A "pure state" of faith, in which this cultural support is dispensed with, simply does not exist, since faith is lived by humans who invariably only know themselves in their cultural context. All this supposes a very dynamic, progressive way of understanding mission in all its aspects, including the transmission of faith.

The decisive basis for the emergence of an authentically local and authentically Catholic Church.

Although it may seem mainly theoretical, this approach to mission, as a process of evangelization, is practical and has immense consequences for the way missionaries situate themselves in relation to the society in which they are inserted, in relation to the Church to which they belong, in relation to the people with whom they establish countless interactions. The mark that this passage has left on the Spiritans is indelible and deserves at least some brief comment.

Spiritans have contributed significantly in their places of mission to the formation of a local clergy, as well as the formation of a mature laity, which is already, in itself, a first and indispensable condition for the development of the process of inculturation. It is through the formation of members from each culture that the integration and maturing of the Christian faith in that culture becomes possible. The growth of a local clergy and lay agents of evangelization in the African Churches (and beyond) is thus the decisive basis for the emergence of an authentically local and authentically Catholic Church. In the case of Portuguese Spiritans regarding the mission *ad gentes* in the pre-conciliar period, this investment focused mainly on Angola and Cape Verde.

The missionary commitments assumed by the Spiritans after the Council already had, on their horizon of priorities and central missionary values, the need to bring about the maturing of the local Church according to this fundamental principle of inculturation. The case of Guinea Bissau, as an international project, with an international team of Spiritans, is of particular interest. The Spiritans who went to Guinea Bissau committed themselves to an evangelization that would bring about the gradual emergence of a local Christian community, based on the local culture. The Gospel, in its originality, received from the local culture its own original configuration, creating within that culture a new and essential reformulation. This effort, present since the beginning of the Spiritan presence in Guinea-Bissau, produced the undeniable fruits of an evangelization of the regions where they were located, initially only among the Manjak (Manjaco) people. In this case, as in others of earlier missionary efforts, the radical change of approach is very evident: integral service to the hu-

man being, in which growth is sought in all aspects of individual and collective reality that does not involve the transmission of European cultural categories, as if Western civilization were part of the evangelizing proposal. Helping the human being to be himself, each people to be themselves, is a condition for the proclamation of Jesus Christ to become relevant in this process of "integral development." Being a Christian does not mean, therefore, to change one's culture, but rather to change oneself within one's own culture.

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With this understanding, the *ad gentes* work of missionaries allowed for the inclusion of elements extrinsic to culture and it is accepted that the people, with their culture, are the holder and protagonist of their own process of growth in the Christian faith. The recognition that culture is a dynamic reality in continuous interaction with otherness creates the favorable conditions necessary for an encounter with the difference that enables the Gospel to take root in different environments in different ways according to different cultures. The subject of this process is certainly the local Church and the people of God, rather than the foreign missionary who does what he can to the extent that he really integrates himself into the new Church and society that welcomes him.

5. FROM MONOLITHIC DISCOURSE TO INTERCULTURAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The development of the Church's view of culture and cultures is important in the transformation of its attitude towards other religions. The perception of the intrinsic value of each people and its culture (within the realm of spiritual, aesthetic, artistic, technical, and literary values, etc.) leads to the recognition of the essential presence of the Good in each culture, including the spiritual and religious element. At the Second Vatican Council, the theology and spirituality of the "seeds of the Word" of which St. Justin spoke (in the second century) was recovered, referring to expressions of truth and God's presence in all religious traditions, thus functioning as a preparation for encounter with the Gospel. In the *Ad Gentes* decree, the Council invites Christians (and, therefore, all missionaries), with regard to the different human groupings, to become "familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows."[8] The encounter with religions then becomes, not a strategy for proclaiming the Gospel, but a valid place for evangelization. This is a recurring theme in the document. "Just as interreligious dialogue is one element in the mission

of the Church, the proclamation of God's saving work in Our Lord Jesus Christ is another... There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other."[9]

The Church recognized the "seeds of the Word" in other religions.

The document *Dialogue and Proclamation*[10] of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue identifies five major pillars of the Church's mission: witness, service to social development, liturgy, dialogue and proclamation. The importance of proclamation in the transmission of the faith is of such importance that it can even eclipse the other four elements, which are also important. However, the successive reaffirmation by the magisterium of the importance of dialogue by providing elements for its definition and understanding leaves no room for doubt about the importance of this theme.

The recognition by the Council and the Magisterium of the spiritual and religious validity of many aspects of other religions has certainly generated a difficult, even turbulent, crisis that required a deepening of some Christological and ecclesiological principles related to faith in Christ, the only Savior, and to the ecclesiological principle that outside the Church there is no salvation. Without undermining the role of Jesus as only Son of God, and as the only savior, and maintaining the centrality of the Church as "sacrament of salvation," the Church recognized the "seeds of the Word" in other religions. This recognition not only legitimizes, but also demands, a missionary approach full of humility. It is the way of pilgrimage in contemplation of the truth with which God has imprinted all peoples and cultures; and full of closeness and hospitality, welcoming the difference of the other as a place where God speaks and makes possible "a dialogue of salvation" necessary for the encounter with Christ and the integration into the community of his disciples. It was from this experience that Paul VI spoke in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*. "The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make."[11]

This path of theological reflection and magisterial teaching, considered here in brief summary, has generated the principles that give Spiritan mission an assuredly personal and dialogical face. The value of simplicity, always present in Spiritan spirituality and practice, is expressed by the options and pastoral actions by which the missionary sees himself as being inserted in the midst of the people, sharing their hopes, joys and sorrows, participating in their struggles and being always at their side in an empathetic way and in spiritual and social solidarity. This closeness and spirit of insertion transcends all places and inspires all forms of spiritual presence. When many

Portuguese Spiritans in the 70s were forced to leave Angola and chose to go to Brazil, their way of mission was always about being close to and among the poorest people, taking up with the local Church the cause of the integral liberation of the people. We can say the same for the smaller Spiritan presence in Paraguay and other Latin American countries, and in Mozambique, which came later.

A position of humility, self-reliance and inclusiveness.

6. FROM SPECIALIZED AND EXCLUSIVE MISSION TO SHARED MISSION

All that has been said above regarding the new theology of mission, which integrates the importance of inculturation and interreligious and inter-spiritual dialogue, enhances the path, begun well before the Council, of inclusion of the laity in Spiritan mission, taking this inclusion to much deeper levels. Indeed, the overcoming of a monolithic attitude towards truth and towards mission not only opened the way to another attitude towards peoples and their different religions, but also fostered a position of humility, self-reliance and inclusiveness that made possible and natural a much greater proximity also towards other vocations and identities within the Church and within the Spiritan family. Thus, the path of inclusion and shared mission, long begun, gains here a new possibility of appreciation. The "Youth Without Borders" (*Jovens Sem Fronteiras*) movement (JSF), founded in the Patriarchate of Lisbon in 1983, is an eloquent example of this: missionary insertion in the midst of young people, starting from young people, valuing their forms of cultural and spiritual expression, and empowering their witness in their own process of Christian maturity. Here too, Libermann's maxim becomes concrete: "Make yourself blacks with the blacks," as a principle of identification and empathy with the actual people with whom one is called to walk.

More recently, the emergence of lay associates is another strong expression of shared Spiritan mission.

Another eloquent case is the *Liga Intensificadora da Ação Missionária* (LIAM), founded in Fatima in 1937 and which would come to be the defining mark that Spiritans imprinted on the Portuguese Church in the second half of the twentieth century. The parish and diocesan base of LIAM, later also followed by the JSF, fully assumes its foundations, giving the local Church the agency that it in fact has: Spiritan mission is not a parallel project, it is always an integral part of the great project of the Church, concretized in each concrete community, in each particular Church.

More recently, the emergence of lay associates is another strong expression of shared Spiritan mission, based on a common spirituality lived according to different vocations. So too are Spiritan fraternities

There are no foreigners in the Congregation and there is more than one experience of mission.

and missionary volunteerism. The latter, in particular, reflects a true sign of the times: the growth of lay missionaries, in number and importance, in the area of mission *ad gentes* or mission *ad intra*, attests to these new winds that open new horizons for Spiritan mission. Looking at the reality of the Congregation in Portugal today, it is increasingly evident the place to which the lay Spiritans are called to live and carry out mission, both at the level of missionary works and commitments, and at the level of energizing fraternity, is within the province and the extended Spiritan family.

7. FROM NATIONAL MISSION TO INTERNATIONALITY IN MISSION

The broadening of horizons on the conceptual and theological level, has led to a progressive overcoming of the understanding of mission defined by national parameters. Just as in the Church there are no foreigners, there are no foreigners in the Congregation and there is more than one experience of mission. All are equally entitled; all are equal partners in a common vocation. The former bipolar character of mission (between "Christianity" and the "mission lands", identified with "overseas"), has morphed into a much more complete unitive vision in which exchange and dialogue, openness, and unity in diversity, constitute the preponderant paradigm.

These structural evolutions thus lead to the realization that, regardless of the reduction of the active number of European Spiritans (and this reduction, accompanied by marked aging, is very real), the increasing presence of members from other cultures in Europe is both a spiritual and ethical requirement. The witness of dialogue, universal brotherhood, and evangelical witness absolutely needs this variety of Spiritan personnel and the experience, lived *ad intra*, of the joys and sorrows of cultural diversity. It is for this reason that the dimension of "internationality" or "interculturality" is an integral part of the current model of mission increasingly practiced in the congregation. The others are not auxiliaries, but together we are holders of a common mission. The "we" is made of "others." Communion presupposes diversity and the one cannot exist without the other.

8. FROM PATERNALISM TO PARITY: NEW APPROACHES IN JUSTICE AND PEACE

The dimension of justice and peace in the mission of the Church is omnipresent and transversal. The option for the poor, essential to the Spiritan charism, has always been a pillar of everything that

Spiritans have done, since the foundation of the congregation and, in the Portuguese case, since our arrival in this country. Throughout the decades, Spiritan efforts to evangelize, in their dimension of service and witness, has always prioritized projects related, in a broad sense, to justice and peace, and to development. Schools, hospitals, agricultural and craft projects, works of economic development, defense of the vulnerable, empowerment of women, etc., have always been strong components of Spiritan mission. It is interesting to see how the people keep not so much the memory of competence, eloquence or fruitfulness in action, but above all, they keep the memory of the missionaries who defended their rights, who walked alongside them. Names of Spiritans, such as Fr. Cretaz or Fr. Campos, in Cape Verde, are associated with countless stories, sometimes almost legendary, related to caring for the poorest and most in need.

Prioritized projects related, in a broad sense, to justice and peace, and to development.

The long journey, in its various aspects, described above, and the successive initiatives that Spiritan mission has been making have given way to a new approach with regard to the defense of the poorest.[12] "Being the advocates and defenders of the poorest" Spiritans came to perceive the poor, as the totality of the people with whom they worked, as subjects of their own process of growth and liberation from poverty and not as objects of charity from others, or as recipients of social action from specialists. Solidarity is understood less and less as acting out of charity, and more and more as a duty of justice, which places the option of love, always present, in its most appropriate register. Commitment alongside the victims of injustice or the weak is not an optional extra, but an evangelical and missionary imperative. Thus, projects of development and social solidarity have become fewer and fewer actions of the rich to help the poor and more and more about human projects with people cooperating with each other to build a more just society aligned with evangelical values. This implies more demanding undertakings conceived with ever-greater professionalism and rigor, and carried out with total and non-negotiable transparency and accountability.

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The NGO *Sol sem Fronteiras* ("Sun Without Borders"), born of the Spiritans and the Spiritan family in Portugal, embodies this approach of solidarity in service to development in everyday life. CEPAC,[13] in Lisbon, had its first embryonic expression in the work of Frs. José Vaz, Figueira, Afonso Cunha and others who, at the time of Cape Verde's independence and beyond, committed themselves to protecting and welcoming Cape Verdeans who arrived in Portugal without the minimum requirements to succeed here with dignity. With

simple beginnings, it grew to become a social support organization with a considerable number of employees and dozens of volunteers. These two Spiritan institutions in Portugal, although geared to different objectives, are consolidating the missionary action of the Spiritan family and generating great synergies between Spiritan missionaries *ad intra* and *ad extra*, the Spiritan family movements, and many people of good will who identify with Spiritan causes.

CONCLUSION

Over the last century, spiritual, theological, and pastoral acquisitions have been added to the long road travelled by Spiritans in Portugal, converging on what is today the dominant model of the Spiritan presence in this country. In this model, and concluding from what has been described above, we could summarize some central axes:

- a mission of closeness, by the appreciation coming from being in the midst of people, sharing their situation, challenges and missionary calls;
- a mission of dialogue and hospitality, by the appreciation of cultures, differences, and the way God speaks to us today through others;
- a mission of proclamation and confessional clarity, pursuing a following of Christ that has to be unequivocal and radical, witnessing and announcing the Salvation that only He can offer. This proclamation and witness take place within that process of closeness and dialogue, deeply respectful of differences and deeply consistent with one's own identity.

In all this, what is at stake is always more than strategies or theological systems. It is the life and the practice of a Christocentric spirituality that transcends everything and integrates everything in the light of the Gospel.

It is a Christian *praxis* coming from a concrete experience of God in the midst of His people.

It is this spiritual vitality and this existential experience of God that makes the journey possible, traveled in the last century, and taken up in the present century, in constant fidelity to a call that has always been present, and renewed in today's challenges.

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ENDNOTES

1. John 20: 21.
2. Cf. Second Vatican Council Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, Ad Gentes, 1-5. In this decree, as in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* or even in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, we find the foundations of this approach that marks a change of position for missionary institutes, as for the whole Church, in face of the missionary challenge and the concrete commitments to mission.
3. Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), 30.
4. *Ibidem*.
5. The successive missionary encyclicals from 1919, with emphasis on the first, *Maximum Illud*, of Benedict XV, without excluding the others, like *Fidei Donum*, of Pius XII, had already given strong emphasis to the urgency of the formation and consolidation of a local clergy, as well as the missionary commitment of all the Churches as a whole, headed by their bishops. This commitment requires translation into concrete solidarity, through the sharing of clergy with the churches in need, especially in the southern hemisphere. The secular priests sent by their bishops to the "missions" were called "*Fidei Donum* Fathers," precisely because of the relationship this form of missionary commitment had with the encyclical that encouraged it.
6. J. Masson, "L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde" in *Nouvelle Revue Théologigue*. 84 (1962).
7. Pedro Arrupe, Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation (1978). *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses—III, ed. Jerome Aixala. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1981, "On Inculturation," pg. 171–181.* Accessed on 13 April 2021.
8. *Ad Gentes*, 11.
9. John Paul II, in Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) 6.
10. Op. Cit.
11. Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 65.
12. Francisco Libermann, Regulations (1849), in *Notes et Documents*, vol. X, 517, cit. in *Regra de Vida Espiritana*, 14.
13. Padre Alves Correia Center founded in 1992 by the Spiritans to support immigrants in precarious situations or with irregular documentation.