 Reading time: 5 min.

Salesian missions abroad, one of the characteristics of the Congregation founded by St John Bosco, begun during his lifetime, continue even though the concepts of mission and missionaries have changed due to the needs of the times.

Today we find ourselves in a different context than the missionary projects that spread the Congregation to America (1875), Asia (1906) and Africa (1980). New perspectives and questions have brought new missiological reflections. A renewed vision of Salesian missions is urgently needed.

In many countries, including countries of ancient Christian tradition, there are urban centres, or neighbourhoods, where people live who do not know Jesus, others who, after having known him, have abandoned him, or still others who live their faith as mere cultural tradition. Therefore, today “the missions” cannot be understood only in geographical terms, of movement towards “mission lands” as in the past, but also in sociological, cultural and even digital terms. Today “missions” are found wherever there is a need to proclaim the Gospel. And missionaries come from and are sent to all continents.

Salesian missionaries collaborate with the Church in fulfilling its mission to evangelise (Mt 28:19-20). Proclaiming the Gospel, especially to the young, is the primary missionary task of every Salesian. Salesian initiatives for human advancement, motivated by deep faith, are a First Proclamation of Jesus Christ. As educators and pastors, every Salesian appreciates the “rays of Truth” in cultures and other religions. In contexts where the name of Jesus cannot even be mentioned, we proclaim Him with the witness of personal and community Salesian life. It is intentionality in promoting the First Proclamation that can help us overcome the danger of being seen as social service providers or social workers instead of witnesses to the primacy of God and proclaimers of the Gospel.

The young Salesian missionaries today bring a new paradigm of missions and a renewed model of missionaries: the Salesian missionary is not only the one who gives, who brings projects and perhaps collects money, but above all the one who lives with his people, who attaches great importance to interpersonal relationships; he not only teaches, but above all learns from the people he serves, who are not just passive recipients of his efforts. In fact, it is not the doing that counts, but the

being, which becomes an authoritative proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Are there still Salesian missionaries who offer their lives for the witness of Jesus? Yes, and they no longer come from Europe as they used to, but come from all over the world and go all over the world. We present some young missionaries who have responded to the divine call.

We speak of 28-year-old Malagasy François Tonga, who went as a missionary to Albania to bear witness to his Christian and Salesian religious identity. His task as a practical trainee in the Salesian house in the capital, Tirana, is to coordinate the school lessons of more than 800 children. It is no small challenge to learn the language and understand Albanian culture, to bear witness in a majority Muslim context, even if – thank God – one does not live in a situation of clash between religions, but of mutual respect. It is a testimony made up of presence and assistance among poor and marginalised children, and of prayer for the young people they meet every day. And the response is not long in coming: young people, parents and co-workers help out and offer a good welcome.

This is also the case of another 28 year old, Joël Komlan Attisso, a Togolese by origin, who accepted to be sent as a mission practical trainee to the Don Bosco Technical Secondary School in Kokopo, in the Eastern New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea. The mission, with God's grace, of being called and sent to serve everyone – and especially young people – already bears fruit: welcome, openness, help and love is exchanged, even if one belongs to different cultural realities. This brings to mind Don Bosco's dream about Oceania, when he saw a multitude of young people saying: 'Come to our aid! Why do you not do the work that your fathers began?" […] It seems to me that all this together indicated that divine Providence was offering a portion of the evangelical field to the Salesians, but at a future time. Their labours will bear fruit, because the hand of the Lord will be constantly with them, if they do not demerit of his favour."

We also speak of 30-year-old Vietnamese Joseph Thuan Thien Truc Tran, Salesian Brother, a computer science graduate sent to Juba in South Sudan, where there is no shortage of commitments: three primary schools, a secondary school, a technical school, a parish, a camp for displaced persons and a pre-novitiate, in all, a complex of about 5000 students. Attracted by the testimony of a Salesian who worked as a doctor in Sudan, Fr John Lee Tae Seok, he decided to say his "yes" of total willingness to be sent on the mission indicated by his superiors, relying exclusively

on faith and God’s grace, so necessary in one of the countries considered among the most dangerous in the world.

Another young Salesian practical trainee who has given his availability for the missions is Rolphe Paterne Mouanga, from the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville or former French Congo). Sent to the Don Bosco Central Salesian House in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, in a work that includes oratory, primary school, secondary school and parish, he is one of the first two missionaries from Africa in this country, together with his compatriot David Eyenga. His African origins help him to familiarise himself with the young people who are intrigued and interested in getting to know him, and this relationship is strengthened through sport, to which he is so much inclined. The cultural diversity of Bolivia is a real challenge, because it is not only a matter of integrating into the local culture but also of being flexible in adapting to every situation. However, the openness, acceptance, cooperation and sharing of young people and co-workers help him in this endeavour. He wants to show himself open and willing to integrate with what he now considers ‘his people’.

Rolphe’s other compatriot, David Eyenga, was also sent to Bolivia, but to the Salesian house in Kami, Cochabamba: a complex Salesian presence that includes an agricultural technical school, a parish, a work of assistance and social promotion, an internship and even a radio station. Cultural differences are also strongly felt in this area, in the way they relate to others, especially in terms of hospitality, meals, dances and other local traditions. This requires a lot of patience to be able to relate to the local mentality. It is hoped and prayed that the presence of the missionaries will also be a stimulus for local vocations.

Emmanuel Jeremia Mganda, a 30-year-old from Zanzibar, Tanzania is another young man who has accepted God’s call to mission. He was sent to Amazonia, Brazil, among the Yanomami, an indigenous tribe living in communities in Maturacá. His educational tasks in the oratory and religious activity enriched him pastorally and spiritually. The welcome he received, also shown in the name given, ‘YanomamiInshiInshi’ (Black Yanomami), made him feel like one of them, helped him a lot to integrate, understand and share the love for Creation and the protection of this good of God.

Is there hope that the missions started by Don Bosco, almost 150 years ago, will continue? That Don Bosco’s dream – or better said – that Don Bosco’s dreams will come to fruition? There is only one answer: the divine will cannot fail, it is enough

for the Salesians to give up their comforts and comforts and to be willing to listen to the divine call.