

Mission – A matter of love

Fr David Glenday MCCJ

Presentation

In relation to the theme of *Mission – Going to the essentials*, the General Secretariat of Mission looked for contributions to enrich the personal and communitarian reflection. Since both the last two General Chapters and the last inter-chapters assembly insisted on the importance of nurturing a Comboni spirituality to requalify our missionary service, we chose to share the following reflection on mission by Fr David Glenday. It was not prepared specifically for this purpose, but we believe it offers some interesting insights that can enlighten the reflection on our personal experience of mission.

Abstract

This reflection by Fr. David Glenday presents mission as fundamentally “a matter of love,” grounding missionary identity and action in the love of God revealed in the Trinity. Drawing inspiration from the teachings of Popes Francis and Leo, the text argues that mission originates in God’s own nature as an outgoing, compassionate, and missionary love. God is not distant but actively present in the world, especially among the poor and marginalized, and invites the baptized to share in this divine movement. Mission, therefore, is not primarily a strategy or activity, but a response to being loved and transformed by God.

Through personal experience as a Comboni missionary in the Philippines, the author illustrates how missionaries encounter God already present in the lives of the poor. Mission becomes a place of learning love concretely—through solidarity, gratitude, endurance, and joy—revealing that God’s love precedes and shapes missionary action. Love also demands work and commitment: missionaries are called to discern how God is already loving the poor and to collaborate humbly as coworkers in this ongoing divine initiative.

Living mission as love leads to transformation, both of the missionary and of those served. Missionaries become signs of God’s loving presence, while the poor are affirmed in their dignity as beloved children of God. The reflection concludes by applying these insights to the Comboni charism, understood as a lived, dynamic story rooted in prayer, discernment, and ongoing discovery. True renewal, the author insists, begins not with human planning but with attentiveness to how the Trinity is at work today, drawing the Church ever deeper into a mission shaped and sustained by love.

Synthesis of the Main Ideas of the Article

Fr. David Glenday’s *Mission – A Matter of Love* proposes a profoundly theological and experiential understanding of Christian mission, rooted not in activity or effectiveness but in love. Mission, the author argues, originates in God’s own identity as a Trinity of love. Drawing on the teaching of Popes Francis and Leo, the article affirms that God is essentially missionary: dynamic, outgoing, and deeply involved in the life of the world. Mission is therefore not an optional task of the Church but a participation in God’s own loving movement toward humanity, especially toward the poor and marginalized.

Central to this vision is the conviction that missionaries do not bring God to others; rather, they encounter God already present in the places and people to whom they are sent. Through his experience among the urban poor in the Philippines, Fr. Glenday illustrates how mission becomes a privileged place of encounter, conversion, and learning. The poor reveal the face of a God who teaches love through solidarity, resilience, gratitude, joy, and hope. In this sense, mission is not only

about giving but also about receiving, as missionaries themselves are evangelized and transformed by those they serve.

Because mission is born of love, it necessarily expresses itself in concrete action. Love cannot remain theoretical; it takes shape in commitment, work, and shared responsibility. The article emphasizes that missionaries are called to collaborate with God, who is already at work in history. This collaboration requires careful discernment: before acting, missionaries must first recognize how God is loving the poor in a particular context. Such cooperation highlights both the dignity and the challenge of missionary vocation, as it calls for humility, attentiveness, and fidelity to God's initiative rather than personal plans or projects.

A key consequence of living mission as love is transformation. The missionary is gradually changed, learning that what matters most is not simply what one does, but who one becomes. In this process, the missionary grows into a visible sign of God's loving presence. At the same time, those who are served are led to a deeper awareness of their own dignity and worth as beloved sons and daughters of God. Mission thus becomes mutually life-giving, generating healing, reconciliation, and hope.

Finally, the article situates this vision within the Comboni charism. Charism is presented not as a fixed inheritance or ideology but as a living story shaped by prayer, discernment, and ongoing discovery. It is a dynamic participation in the mission of the Trinity, inspired by dialogue with the Founder and attentive to new forms through which love seeks expression today. True renewal, the author concludes, does not begin with strategies for change but with openness to how God is already at work. By cultivating attentiveness, prayer, mutual listening, and discernment, missionaries remain faithful to a charism that continues to make Christ visible in the world through love.

Mission – A matter of love

Fr David Glenday MCCJ

A good question

I was fortunate enough, during my life as a Comboni Missionary, to spend eleven years serving in the Philippines. I remember one day there that a committed young layman fired this question at me: "Father David, you Combonis often speak with enthusiasm about your vocation and your Founder, St Daniel Comboni. You share about his dreams, his drive, his journeys, his hopes and disappointments, his heritage and memory – and that is all very beautiful and inspiring. But now what I would like to know is this: what is the heart, the centre, the engine of St Daniel's mission, and of your mission today?"

A very good question indeed, and one which during my almost fifty years now as a missionary I have often tried to answer, searching for the right words, and even more for the right deeds. If my young friend were to ask me the same question today I would not hesitate to enlist the help of not one, but two Popes: Francis and Leo. In fact, it is really striking that Pope Francis' last major letter entitled *Dilexit Nos* was about love – "the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ", and Pope Leo's first letter to the whole Church *Dilexi Te* is about... love – "love for the poor". It is clear then: as Pope Francis says, "mission becomes a matter of love", and missionaries are people who are "in love and who, enthralled by Christ, feel bound to share this love that has changed their lives".

Mission as love: yes, this is the stupendous and splendid reality that forms a bridge holding the Popes' two letters together. And above all, we wish to reflect in such a reality to grow as missionaries, each of us in his or her own special circumstances. So what deep discoveries about mission can we hope to make on this journey, with Pope Leo's letter as our roadmap?

First, our God is a missionary God

Mission is a matter of love, and in the end this is because mission is born of God, the Trinity of love. Everything Jesus says and does in the Gospels, by the power of the Spirit, makes this plain: our God is

not distant, aloof, indifferent, uninvolved. No, our God is on the move, outgoing, committed, interested, close, passionate.

And we are baptized in the name of this missionary God. By our baptism the Three take up residence in our deepest hearts and set about forming us into missionaries – like them!

This theme, this reality of the missionary Trinity, was very powerfully present in the teaching and witness of Pope Francis (think, for example, of his first letter *Evangelii Gaudium*) and has been taken up with energy by Pope Leo. Both of them urge the Church to be where the Three already are: at the edges, on the peripheries, with those who are deemed far away. In *Dilexit Nos* Pope Francis insists that our hearts are to be transformed into the Heart of Jesus, a heart that goes out to the wounded and weak, and Pope Leo deepens and consolidates this missionary call.

So mission is a matter of love, because God is love, and God's love is a missionary, outgoing love.

Second, encountering God in mission

So the Trinity of Love impels us to mission – but also awaits us there. During my years in the Philippines – I ministered in a tiny corner of the mega-city of Manila – I had the grace of learning the national language, Tagalog, and of thus being able to accompany especially one small community in the city's slums.

With them I made the moving discovery which is the treasure of so many missionaries' lives: that the God who is love precedes us in our missionary journey, and that we come to know this God afresh in the lives and especially the hearts of the poor to whom we are sent. In the example of their lives mission becomes a matter of learning love, where love has the face of solidarity, of gratitude, of courage, of joy, of endurance, of good sense, of tolerance.

In mission with and to the poor, we missionaries learn to love.

Third, working with God in mission

Because mission is a matter of love it is also a matter of deeds, of work, of action. As Jesus says in John 5, 17, "my Father is always at work until today, and I too am working", and he fills this out in John 15, offering us the rich portrait of the Father as the vinedresser. The Father is delighted by our abundant fruits, Jesus tells us, and St John underlines the same vision when he encourages us to love in practice and not in theory.

Because of love, we are God's coworkers, as St Paul insists, and this is both a joy and a challenge. It is a great joy to know that the Lord wants us to join him in loving the poor, that he desires our company and solidarity: it is a new way to appreciate our great dignity and potential in the grace of baptism. And it is also a challenge, because it means that we need first to discern how God is loving the poor here and now, so that we can respond to this divine initiative. God loves the poor first.

Finally, transformed by love

When we understand and live mission as love in these different ways, something wonderful and powerful happens: we are changed, transformed. We come to realize little by little that what really matters in our service of the poor is above all who we are, and we discover that we are becoming a sign, a sacrament of God's loving presence.

Yes, we are transformed but also by God's grace so are those to whom we are sent, as they are led to a new awareness of their infinite value and dignity, and of their potential as human beings, sons and daughters of the Father who loves them in a very special way.

Pope Leo's concluding words inspire us to connect the vocation to love to the specific way of doing so as Comboni Missionaries:

Christian love breaks down every barrier, brings close those who were distant, unites strangers, and reconciles enemies. It spans chasms that are humanly impossible to bridge, and it penetrates to the most hidden crevices of society. By its very nature, Christian love is

prophetic: it works miracles and knows no limits. It makes what was apparently impossible happen. Love is above all a way of looking at life and a way of living it. A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love, is the Church that the world needs today.

Implications for our missionary journey

Looking back on our personal experience, we are invited to discern how we have encountered such love of God in harmony with the charism of Daniel Comboni. A charism is, first and foremost, a story to be told: something that happens to us, a lived narrative—the Trinity at work. A charism leads us towards an end first willed by the Trinity: to make present, in the Church and in the world, here and now, one or other of the countless facets of Jesus' life and mission, through the lives of those "touched" by this grace. In this way, a charism makes Christ visible.

When charism is understood and lived in this way a number of very significant things will tend to happen:

1. Participating in the charism will be lived as an experience more than simply the state of being convinced about an idea, no matter how valuable. The movement will be from static to dynamic, from theoretical to practical, from head to heart.
2. The connection with the Founder will be recast so that the priority will be dialogue with him more than simply knowing about him and espousing his ideas, important as they are found to be. Charism is more a conversation with the Founder than a lecture about him.
3. A discerning and prayerful spirituality will move to the centre of the missionary's world, because it was of such prayer that the charism was born and still lives. The charism draws one into the burning heart of the Triune God so as to become a sharer in their mission.
4. While memory plays an important part in the experience of the charism, so will also discovery: what new forms and expressions is this grace giving birth to today?

Conclusion

When charism is understood and lived in these ways, the challenge of ongoing renewal becomes quickly impelling. Yet it is of great importance to begin such renewal with the right question, which is not "how should we renew ourselves?" but rather, "how is God the Trinity at work now drawing us into renewal?" or, as Lonergan would urge, "be attentive". The importance given to discernment, study, prayer, and mutual listening thus becomes a significant indicator of a charism that is alive and well.

Fr David Glenday, MCCJ