

The mission from a decolonial perspective

Looking at the recent history of the West's conquest of the world, it may certainly seem bold—or naive—to envision a Christian mission from a decolonial perspective.

However, if we think back to the early Christian movement, to the biblical and patristic sources of the first centuries, some inspiration must come to us, even if we must reckon with what Christianity has become over the centuries, while also recognising what the churches are called to return to in the present and future.

First, we must consider that the modern Christian mission, the one we know and which is part of our imagination, is in fact *structurally* colonial. What do we mean by "colonial"? To answer, we could use four nouns: European overseas *expansion* (expansión), which marks the transition from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and the beginning of Western globalization; economic *exploitation* (explotación) of mineral, agricultural, and human resources for the benefit of metropolises, merchant companies, and colonizing nations; political *expropriation* (expropiación) of indigenous peoples, their territories, their social organization, and their culture; *extermination* (exterminación) as a systematic strategy of physical, symbolic, and spiritual elimination of the other, denial of their being, affirmation of their animality and subordination, naturalization of racial classification.

Unlike colonialism, understood as a historical event/process, coloniality presents itself as the underlying *structure* of Western modernity, or as its "dark side," characterised not only by explicit aggression but also by the aggression of knowledge, being, and worldview. These acts of violence shape political, economic, and sociocultural relations between peoples to this day, under the auspices of various projects of domination.

If colonialism is primarily determined by expansion, decolonialism will be characterised as an attempt at an authentic encounter with the other. Expansion in terms of conquest was not at all an opening to the world: rather, it was the affirmation of one's own identity over otherness. Moving from domination to encounter means respect, recognition, dialogue, hospitality, friendship: it means moving from the anxiety of "salvationism" to the quiet of conviviality and sharing; from heroic militancy to the kenosis of irrelevance; from the glory of triumphalism to silently disappearing into the universe of others.

Second, colonial exploitation has always been an extractive process, not just material, but also and above all symbolic, cultural, and spiritual. For the West, the other is an *object* to be studied. A mission with a decolonial perspective will instead strive to see the other as a *subject* with whom to forge new relationships and from whom to learn to unlearn the Western mania for plundering, vivisection, and appropriating everything before us, and then relearn a new approach to the reality of which we are part, along with the otherness that confronts us.

A third aspect recalls colonial expropriation, in which the foreign missionary claims to be inculturated and to inculturate "his" message, when instead the process of inculturation should concern only the interlocutor. Pope Francis reminds us in *Querida Amazonia* that "we are called to participate as guests and to seek with the utmost respect ways of encounter that will enrich the Amazon. If we wish to dialogue, we must do so first of all with the least (...) They are our principal interlocutors, from whom we must first learn, whom we must listen to out of a duty of justice, and from whom we must ask permission to present our proposals" (QAm 26). Finally, in the face of the extermination that continues to flaunt its massacres, the Christian mission must more than ever promote a profound and radical culture of life through a decolonial pedagogy, committing itself to unmasking every ideology and theology of domination, developing tools that help

identify hegemonic positions, including its own, patiently proposing paths to decolonising subjectivities and relationships, and placing itself at the service of the liberation causes of subaltern peoples as a reliable ally.

We should never forget that the fundamental content of every Christian mission is the offering of life in its fullness for all (DAp 361), since there is nothing more decolonial than "realising the value of a human being, the value of a person, always and in every circumstance" (FT 106).