

Church and Cultures in the Catholic Missionary Renewal of the Early 20th Century: Critical Issues in the Thought of Costantini, Manna, and Vanzin.

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Abstract - The article investigates the relationship between the church and indigenous cultures in the field of missionary renewal in the early 20th century, focusing on three influential Catholic figures: Celso Costantini, Paolo Manna, and Vittorino Vanzin. In analyzing their thought and writings, the research highlights the transformation of the linguistic and conceptual tools in missiology regarding the topic in question. This transformation is articulated in three key processes: the shift from “missions” to “local churches,” the “indigenization,” and the “evangelization of cultures.”

Keywords: church, cultures, indigenization, transformation, mission.

1. Introduction¹

The relationship between the church and cultures has shaped the entire history of Christianity. In modern times, a key passage in the Catholic interpretation of this relationship took place in the missionary renewal of the early 20th century, a period in which the concepts of the *missio ad gentes* and an approach to cultures, which discontinued the missionary colonial mentality, began to be developed in both Catholic and Protestant circles.

This article explores the debates of the time, focusing on four central issues that emerged within: the systematization of the epistemological status of missiology; the salvation of non-Christians and the development of a new hermeneutic of the relationship between Christianity and other religions; the relationship between the universal church, young churches, and non-European cultures; the de-westernization of the “foreign missions” and their transformation into “indigenous local churches.” All of these elements are traceable in (1) the magisterium of the Catholic Church of those years;² (2) the theoretical features of the missiological schools of the University of Münster (J. Schmidlin; T. Ohm) and Louvain (P. Charles; J. Masson); (3) the analyses of several theologians focusing on missiology (e.g., A.M. Henry, N. Dunas, H. de Lubac, Ch. Journet, E. Loffeld, Y. Congar); (4) the debate on the *salus infidelium* and the nascent ecumenical movement; (5) the works

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Gaetano Sabetta (Urbaniana University of Rome), Umberto Bresciani (Fu Jen University of Taipei), and Julia Marinaccio (University of Bergen) who patiently read and helped editing the article. Their suggestions, as well as their critiques, contributed to making the text more understandable and mature.

² See *Maximum Illud* (1919), *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926), *Summi Pontificatus* (1939), and *Evangelii Praecones* (1951).

on the rediscovery of Christian sources in the Nouvelle Théologie that contributed to the interdisciplinary debate on the legitimacy of the comparison of Christian revelation with pre-Christian religions.³

It is a scholarly consensus that the *Maximum illud* was the *magna charta* of the missionary renewal of the 20th century and China its experimental laboratory par excellence.⁴ The apostolic letter of Pope Benedict XV catalyzed and inspired the work of numerous “ferryman” (*passeurs*) – theologians and missionaries – who directed the church to go beyond colonial mentality toward a new phase of the encounter between the gospel and peoples.⁵ This process was marked by the transition from the romantic ideal of the “conquest of non-Christians lands” to the perspective of “de-westernization,” “localization,” “indigenization,” “naturalization,” and “adaptation” of Christianity to the ethnological physiognomies to each evangelized people.

The article aims to highlight the new interest in non-European cultures in the wake of the missionary renewal in the Catholic sphere of the early 20th century. By way of some illustrative examples, it draws attention to the transformation of the missiological language in the thoughts and writings of Celso Costantini, Paolo Manna, and Vittorino Vanzin, who perceived the need to understand cultures no longer as obstacles to evangelization but as elements in some way functional to the preaching of the gospel and the planting of the church (*plantatio ecclesiae*).⁶

The choice to focus on these specific Catholic missionaries is justified by three reasons. (1) All three were practitioners rather than theologians. By examining their biographies and writings, it becomes obvious that their transformation from a colonial to a postcolonial mentality and their practical contribution to the missionary renewal as a bottom-up process. It resulted from their direct contact with the links between foreign missions, missionary congregations, and European colonial power, especially in East Asia.⁷ (2) As will be stressed later, their positions substantially influenced the transformation of some elements of the Catholic ecclesial structures toward cultural adaptation, such as the decentralization of the Propaganda Fide⁸ offices. (3) Furthermore, their writings influenced the papal magisterium and the conciliar and post-conciliar debates on the church’s

³ See Jean Bruls, “Dalle missioni alle giovani Chiese,” in Roger Aubert, ed., *Nuova storia della Chiesa: La Chiesa nel mondo moderno*, vol. 5, t. 2 (Torino: Marietti, 1979), 237-99; Josef Metzler, *Dalle missioni alle chiese locali (1846-1965)* (Cinisello Balsamo, MI: Ed. Paoline, 1990); David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 309-20, 357-522; Gianni Colzani, *Missiologia contemporanea: Il cammino evangelico delle Chiese (1945-2007)* (Cinisello Balsamo, MI: San Paolo, 2010), 19-61. See also Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference: Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2009).

⁴ See Pasquale D’Elia, *Catholic native episcopacy in China: Being an outline of the formation and growth of the Chinese Catholic clergy (1300-1926)* (Shanghai: T’usewei Printing Press, 1927), 75-76; Agostino Giovagnoli, ed., *Roma e Pechino: La svolta extraeuropea di Benedetto XV* (Rome: Studium, 1998); Pope Francis, *Letter for the Centenary of the promulgation of the Apostolic letter “Maximum illud” on the activity of missionaries in the world* (22 October 2017), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171022_lettera-filoni-mese-missionario.html.

⁵ Riccardi suggests that the French expression *passeur* “evokes figures that, in an original and almost always individual way, are placed between two worlds. It assumes in themselves the suffering generated by the distance that separates these universes.” A *passeur* is a person who “has understood the deep or possible connections between two opposing universes and, at the bottom, tries to express them” (Andrea Riccardi, “*Passeurs* tra Oriente e Occidente,” in Elisa Giunipero, ed., *Un cristiano alla corte dei Ming: Xu Guangqi e il dialogo interculturale tra Cina e Occidente* [Milano: Guerini&Associati, 2013], 32-33). See Louise Bénat-Tachot – Serge Gruzinski, eds., *Passeurs culturels: Mécanismes de métissage* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2001).

⁶ More on the plantation theory in the academic debates of the time, see e.g., Pierre Charles, *Les dossiers de l’action missionnaire: Manuel de missiologie* (Louvain: Éditions de l’Aucam, 1938²); Joseph Masson, *Vers l’Église indigène: Catholicisme ou nationalisme?* (Bruxelles: Ed. Universitaires, 1944); Edouard Löffeld, *Le problème cardinal de la missiologie et des missions catholiques* (Rhenen: Spiritus, 1956); Yves Congar, “Théologie de l’Église particulière,” in *Mission sans frontières: Rapport du colloque organisé par l’équipe de Parole et Mission, les 26, 27 et 28 février 1959* (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 15-61.

⁷ This distinguishes them to the pioneer scholars of Münster and Louvain, who contributed to missionary renewal through a systematic theoretical approach.

⁸ Sacra Congregatio pro Gentium Evangelizatione seu de Propaganda Fide (currently, Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples).

mission. These include the establishment of the indigenous hierarchy, the understanding of the missionary nature of the church and the missionary vocation of all the baptized, the introduction of the concept of “evangelization of cultures,” and the clarification of the role of the local churches in the reception of the faith (*receptio fidei*).⁹

2. Costantini: The transformation of “missions” into “local churches”

Bishop Celso Costantini (1876-1958),¹⁰ the first apostolic delegate to China (1922-1933), denounced the mixture between Catholic missions and colonial interests in East Asia. In China, he observed the presence of an entirely foreign ecclesiastical hierarchy that belonged to religious congregations and was often compliant with the European states’ imperialist policies. Being aware that after the 19th century’s Opium Wars, the Chinese increasingly associated Catholics with Europeans, Costantini aimed to indigenize Catholicism in China fundamentally.¹¹ He shared the ideas of the Belgian missionary Vincent Lebbe¹² about indigenization and decolonization and dedicated himself to implementing the key objectives of this missionary reform. These included the separation of the missions from the French protectorate, their transformation into local indigenous churches, and the enhancement of the local genius “by accepting all that is naturally good in the cultural and ethical heritage of the various peoples, and by Christianizing all that is susceptible of being Christianized.”¹³

Costantini questioned the colonial ecclesiological model (*contra gentes*) that significantly hindered the evangelical goal of church planting and the widespread tendency to ascribe the causes of missionary work’s failure to the locals. Instead, he believed this mentality had to be transformed to bring missionary work back into the perspective of “service to” the peoples who were the recipients of the proclamation of the gospel. That is why he worked to decentralize the missionary figure and function with the concept of “hospitality,” or moreover, to the social standing of a “guest” among the local people.¹⁴

With the concept of “service,” he also referred to the particularism of religious congregations, to which he responded by reiterating the subordination of the figure of the missionary to the universal

⁹ In addition to the above-outlined reasons, a fourth element can underscore the importance of these personalities. The issue of missionary transformation of the ecclesial structures, which the three authors advocated, has been resumed recently by the magisterium of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* 20-49.

¹⁰ See Jean-Paul Wiest, “Costantini Celso,” in G. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (New York: Macmillan, 1998), 153-54; Ruggero Simonato, *Celso Costantini tra rinnovamento cattolico in Italia e le nuove missioni in Cina* (Pordenone: Concordia Sette, 1985); Bruno F. Pighin, ed., *Chiesa e stato in Cina: Dalle imprese di Costantini alle svolte attuali* (Venezia: Marcianum Press, 2010); *Id.*, *Il ritratto segreto del Cardinale Celso Costantini in 10.000 lettere dal 1892 al 1958* (Venezia: Marcianum Press, 2012).

¹¹ In the beginning of the 20th century, the majority of missionaries in China were of French origin and depended on the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It exercised a direct protectorate and, therefore, managed the relationships with Chinese officials. Direct diplomatic relations between the Holy See and China were established in 1946. See Claude Prudhomme, *Missions chrétiennes et colonisation, XVIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 2004).

¹² Vincent Lebbe (1877-1940) was vicar apostolic in Tianjin from 1912 to 1920. His thought influenced the drafting of the *Maximum illud* and the ordinations of the first six Chinese bishops, which took place on 28 October 1926 in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. See Celso Costantini, *Con i missionari in Cina (1922-1933): Memorie di fatti e di idee*, vol. 1 (Rome: Unione Missionaria del Clero, 1946-1947), 169; Giuseppe Butturini, “Chiesa Cattolica e mondo cinese. Nel ‘grande secolo missionario’ (1842-1949)”, in *Ad Gentes* 15:1 (2011), 49-68; Jean-Paul Wiest, “Lebbe F. Vincent,” in Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary*, 388-89; *Id.*, “The Legacy of Vincent Lebbe,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23:1 (1999), 33-37.

¹³ Celso Costantini, *Le missioni cattoliche* (Milano: Bompiani, 1949), 48. See “Lettera di C. Costantini a A.B. Masella (Città del Vaticano, 12.10.1958)”, in Pighin, *Il ritratto segreto*, 638-640. The translations from Italian texts are by the author.

¹⁴ Costantini rhetorically asked: “If the Catholic religion appears to the Chinese as a foreign institution related to foreign political interests, can we blame the Chinese? . . . Missionaries should remember that they came to China, not to denounce the faults of the Chinese to the world but to love the Chinese, to serve, and convert them. . . . The foreign Missionary is a guest, he is not the master in the Mission countries. Also, the Church must be naturalized, it cannot be constituted in perpetuity by guests” (Costantini, *Con i missionari in Cina*, vol. 1, 47-48, 339).

church: “The missionary must, first and foremost, serve the Church, not his Congregation.”¹⁵ One of the most severe consequences of “congregationalism,” so Costantini, was the de-responsibilization of the native clergy and their passive subordination to Western hierarchies that came with a degradation of the priestly vocation and the spiritual character of the missions themselves.¹⁶

Costantini explained the purpose of the mission in a twofold way: the preaching of the gospel and the local church’s foundation that cannot ignore the permanent formation of the native clergy. He acted as a “sounding board” for what Benedict XV affirmed in *Maximum illud*. The church planting in a non-Christian territory is completed when it is under the supervision of the native clergy. In the document, the pope specified that the goal of the church’s mission and the role of missionaries in a mission land were limited to a fixed period. Missionary activity should not pursue the organization of missions “like perfect colonial administrations” that were only tolerated by local governors when political and economic relations thrived.¹⁷

Costantini was convinced that it was imperative to redesign the church’s presence in China by reactivating adaptation processes to traditional Chinese features and concurrently transforming the “foreign” church into a “Chinese and Catholic” church. His vision drew on the evangelization of the Hellenistic world as a model. He noted that in the history of the ancient church, the main difference between the apostolic mission and the colonial *modus operandi* was ecclesio-genesis: “The first Missionaries planted the Church in the West developing it with a local hierarchy; whereas now the missionaries in the East have been planting the foreign Missions as a thing in itself and almost an end in itself.”¹⁸ Patronage and protectorates contributed to the creation of missions conceived as religious colonies belonging to one or the other religious institute and a mental disposition in the missionaries that he boldly defined as “missionary feudalism.”¹⁹ To these distortions, Costantini attributes the failure of centuries of evangelization in Asia and the indigenous peoples’ disaffection for a Christianity that appears foreign and distant from the local socio-cultural and religious milieu.²⁰

It is easy to notice in Costantini, as in other contemporaries, a certain idealization of the apostolic period concerning the Hellenization of Christianity. Simultaneously, this reference to the ancient church expresses the need to reactivate those ecclesiological and intercultural processes of negotiation and the exercise of “power” in the church. Intercultural and ecclesiological negotiations are the basis of each polymorphic transformation of Christianity. They are visible, for example, in the first Christian community in Jerusalem when the recipients of the announcement (Jews and pagans) were clarified, and the Greek cultural perceptions were received (e.g., the question of circumcision).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 170. The disorganization of the missionary work was discussed in the First Plenary Council of China (Shanghai, 1924) under the leadership of Costantini. Synod Fathers unanimously saw the need for the use of unified missionary methodologies and strategies, as well as for an indigenous church duly constituted in China. See Alfredo Popoli, *Il primo concilio plenario della Cina* (Parma: ISME, 1924); Paul Wang Jiyou, *Le premier concile plénier chinois: Shanghai 1924* (Paris: Cerf, 2010).

¹⁶ In this regard, he refers to a concrete situation: “In Hong Kong, I was told that Chinese priests themselves do not ask to change: they are at the Mission’s service and enjoy the Mission’s privileges. They have subordinate offices, but they are treated well and ask for nothing else. The vision of Rome is a Catholic vision that goes beyond these particularistic views” (Costantini, *Con i missionari in Cina*, vol. 1, 48).

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 169-170. Costantini reported that “Religion [Christianity] is tolerated under foreign treaties. And the missionary is also seen as a foreigner and suspected of connivance with foreign powers . . . Many missionaries say, ‘Don’t touch the Treaties.’ Is the Catholic Church established in a large country under the control and protection of a foreign nation conceivable? . . . We came to China not for organizing foreign missions but to found the Church” (*ibid.*, 49). He also stressed that “for three centuries, the Church remained represented by the foreign hierarchy . . . I think that the Church is not properly founded on the Religious [missionaries] but the secular Clergy. The Religious are precious help to the Church, but they are not the Church. With the appointment and consecration of the first Chinese Bishops in 1926, one period ends, and another begins with a completely different physiognomy” (*ibid.*, 339).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁰ “Missionary work that presented itself to pagans for several centuries with a foreign hierarchy, gave an excuse for a fatal prejudice: ‘your religion is beautiful, it is good, the pagans say, but it is foreign.’ Becoming a Christian means placing oneself at the service of the stranger, it means uprooting oneself from one’s own soil, alienating oneself from one’s religious, cultural, and political heritage” (*Id.*, *Le missioni cattoliche*, 49).

On this point, one of Costantini's characteristics was his emphasis on using sacred art and architecture in the missions, based on the Christian reinterpretation of religious buildings and Hellenistic symbolism in the patristic period. He argues that rather than copying ancient monuments, elements of Chinese arts should be revitalized and transformed to create a new form of Christian art that would be Chinese and Catholic at the same time.²¹

The following extract of a correspondence between Montini (future Pope Paul VI), then Vatican Secretary of State, and Costantini, Secretary of Propaganda Fide, in 1953, is an example of both the thought of our author and the Catholic Church's changing attitude toward the socio-cultural heritage of non-European peoples in the years around the Council. It concerns the question of how the visual language of evangelization should connect with the Indian context. Montini wrote:

The Indian government intends to have various scenes from India's history reproduced in the central hall of Parliament, including the announcement of Christianity by the Apostle St. Thomas. I would be warmly grateful . . . if you would like to show me some ancient or modern image of the Apostle, which comes as close as possible to a traditional iconography, or notify me if it is not convenient to think of a new figure with the most suitable characteristics to be understood by the Indian people.²²

In his response, Costantini recommended that an appreciation of the indigenous artistic genius be the most appropriate and respectful choice vis-à-vis local customs and traditions:

I think it is better to use an Indian painter who makes the artistic language of India speak. This gives the composition a lovely meaning, and it is also an act of due respect for the Indian arts. St. Thomas was also an Oriental, and I think it would be a mistake to westernize him.²³

In modern times, the reciprocal intercultural transfer of knowledge between Europe and Asia and the reception of the Christian faith in China have been discontinued, as is well known, primarily due to the diatribes between religious congregations related to the policies of patronage that resulted in the noted controversy on Chinese rites. Costantini experienced in his work the negative implications that the controversy had on the adaptation of Christianity to local customs. He considered the abandonment of the cultural and religious element "filial piety" to be detrimental to Chinese Christians, who found themselves estranged from their own socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. The rites' question, among others, generated an adverse judgment on Christianity, both in the population and in the civil authorities, seen as a foreign religion and damaging to the Chinese social, cultural, and religious organization's cardinal values.²⁴ It was in the wake of the missionary renewal that the prohibitions were lifted by the Propaganda Fide decrees of 1935 and 1939, allowing Catholics to participate in traditional cults in honour of their ancestors and Confucius in terms of passive assistance to a civil cult (*de culto mere civili*), excluding any reference to the religious dimension of such rituals.²⁵

Among the outcomes of Costantini's work at the top of Propaganda Fide, first in the office of secretary (1935-1953), then as a cardinal member, we must also remember the *Instruction* of Propaganda of 8 December 1939 and the decree of 5 May 1940 that abolished the oath against

²¹ See "Lettera di C. Costantini a B. Biagetti (Pechino, 4.07.1929)," in Pighin, *Il ritratto segreto*, 242; Celso Costantini, *L'arte cristiana nelle missioni* (Rome: Tipografia Poligrotta Vaticana, 1940).

²² "Lettera di G.B. Montini a C. Costantini (Città del Vaticano, 3.09.1953)," in Pighin, *Il ritratto segreto*, 522.

²³ "Lettera di C. Costantini a G.B. Montini (Murlis Zoppola, 12.09.1953)," in *ibid.*, 522-23.

²⁴ See Costantini, *Con i missionari in Cina*, vol. 1, 92; David E. Mungello, ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994); Nicolas Standaert, *Chinese voices in the rites controversy* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2012).

²⁵ See "Ad Excellentiam Suam Mons. Augustum Gaspais, Vicarium Apostolicum de Kirin (28.05.1935)," in Josef Metzler, ed., *Sacrae Congregationis De Propaganda Fide memoria rerum: 350 anni a servizio delle missioni (1622-1972)*, vol. 2, t. 2 (Rome-Freiburg-Wien: Herder, 1976), 786-88; "Instructio circa quasdam caeremonias et iuramentum super ritibus sinensibus (8.12.1939)," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 32 (1940), 24-26 (the *Instruction* was countersigned by Costantini, who had been appointed secretary of Propaganda Fide on 17 December 1935).

Malabar rites. Further, the Holy Office approved the translations of the *Roman Ritual* and the *Roman Missal* into modern Chinese and other indigenous languages between 1941 and 1949, the internationalization of the College of Cardinals with the creation of the first Chinese cardinal, Thomas Tian Gengxin (Bishop of Beijing) under Pope Pius XII (18 February 1946), and the establishment of an episcopal hierarchy in China with the papal bull *Quotidie nos* (11 April 1946).²⁶ Finally, Costantini's positions on de-westernization, the development of local churches, and the enhancement of indigenous cultural heritages influenced both the missiological thought of Manna and Vanzin. It also shaped, to some extent, the magisterium of John XXIII and Paul VI – with whom he had beneficial institutional and friendly relations – regarding the understanding of the relationship between church and cultures.²⁷

3. Manna: The missionary transformation of the ecclesial mentality

Paolo Manna (1872-1952),²⁸ a priest of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), is an example of a *passer* who expressed in himself a missiological “double conscience.”²⁹ In his writings, we find the alternation of a double linguistic and conceptual instrumentation typical of the 19th-century's romantic image of the mission captured in the terminologies “spiritual conquest,” “missionary crusade,” and “civilization.”³⁰ At the same time, we note a reforming inspiration of the missionary conception that drew on Costantini's thought, such as decolonization, de-westernization, adaptation, and indigenization.³¹

In missiological terms, Manna understood the fundamental aim of the church's mission to establish the Kingdom of God in the world by diffusing faith among the “infidels.” The reference model was Christocentric and presented “Christ the Saviour” as the critical feature of the announcement. Here we see the closeness of Manna's thought to the theoretical approach of the Münster School of Missiology, which put the preaching of the gospel as the central goal of the mission.³²

²⁶ This process started in 1926 with the consecration of the first six Chinese bishops. It is also recalled that in the first half of the 20th century all the missions in Japan had been transformed into local churches and administered by a Japanese hierarchy. The first bishop was Januarius K. Hayasaka of the diocese of Nagasaki, consecrated in 1927 by Pius XI. In 1939 there was instead the appointment of the first two African bishops, Joseph N. Kiwanuka for Uganda and Ignatius Ramarosandratana for Madagascar. See Costantini, *Le missioni cattoliche*, 49-52; *Id.*, *Con i missionari in Cina*, vol. 2, 339-43; Pighin, *Il ritratto segreto*, 19-23; *Id.*, *Chiesa e stato in Cina*, 21-83; Elisa Giunipero, “La Chiesa cattolica e la Cina dalla rivolta dei Boxer al Concilio Vaticano II,” in Agostino Giovagnoli, ed., *La Chiesa e le culture: Missioni cattoliche e scontro di civiltà* (Milano: Guerini&Associati, 2005), 109-38.

²⁷ On the correspondence between Costantini and Roncalli (future Pope John XXIII) see Pighin, *Il ritratto segreto*, 349-50, 387, 480, 499-501, 509, 534-35, 566-67. On the correspondence with Montini see *ibid.*, 192-93, 391, 413, 441, 445, 479, 481-83, 493, 508-09, 518-19, 522-23, 526, 532-33.

²⁸ See Willi Henkel, “Manna Paolo,” in Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary*, 429-30; Ferdinando Germani, *P. Paolo Manna*, 5 voll. (Trentola-Ducenta, CE: PIME, 1989-1994); Piero Gheddo, *Paolo Manna (1872-1952)* (Bologna: EMI, 2001).

²⁹ “Double consciousness” (or “hybrid consciousness”) is an expression coined by the sociologist W. Du Bois in 1903 taken up by contemporary authors, such as F. Fanon, P. Burke and P. Gilroy. It describes the state of a person who has developed his own vision of the world by living in the condition of belonging halfway between different cultures. Its use in missiology expresses the coexistence of distinct lexicons and divergent concepts of mission in the thought of authors who lived in a transition period between two discontinuous eras and paradigmatic ecclesiological transformations. See William Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903); Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (London-New York: Verso, 1993).

³⁰ See Paolo Manna, *La conversione del mondo infedele* (Milano: Istituto delle Missioni Estere, 1920), 13-120, 258-63.

³¹ See *ibid.*, 154-58; *Id.*, *Osservazioni sul metodo moderno di evangelizzazione*, ed. Giuseppe Buono (Bologna: EMI, 1979), 69-89, 101-21.

³² See *Id.*, *Osservazioni*, 37-39; *Id.*, *La conversione*, 13-25. Manna, together with his collaborator Tragella (PIME), was attentive to the progress of German catholic and protestant missiology. Tragella held the first chair of missiology in Italy at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome (1919-1921). He translated *Katholische Missionsgeschichte* (1924) by

At the basis of missionary work, Manna places the concept of “responsibility.” It entails that Christians are under the grace of faith invested with the duty to cooperate in God’s redemptive work for the salvation of souls of non-Christians (*salus animarum*). This concept finds its highest expression in “missionary propaganda,” which, in his thought, also assumes the meanings of “cooperation” and “animation.”³³ The conversion of the “infidel world” does thus not only concern the specialists – the missionaries *ad gentes, ad extra, ad vitam* – but requires a transformation of the ecclesial mentality of all the baptized ordered to the mission. He thus promotes the idea of “the whole Church for the whole world.”³⁴ According to Manna, missionary propaganda should start primarily from empowering and using the diocesan clergy in foreign missions and parish missionary animation to incentivize vocations for the mission *ad gentes*. In this, as Gheddo notes, Manna stands in contrast with the widespread mentality at the time, which saw the missionary theme, if not entirely outside the concerns of bishops, at least as “an escape from the most urgent pastoral problems” of the Italian Catholic Church.³⁵

In ecclesiological terms, Manna’s thought followed the Louvain school that emphasized the concept of *plantatio ecclesiae*. The objective of evangelization was to “prepare among them the Church of Jesus Christ formed by the community of the faithful with their own pastors.”³⁶ He hoped for the establishment of the “colonial clergy” – an expression for the indigenous clergy at that time – undoubtedly also because of the lack of foreign personnel to be sent to foreign missions. However, the collaboration between colonial clergy and European missionaries had to be temporary. The latter had indeed an obligation to proclaim the gospel to the peoples but only for a limited amount of time. The responsibility for the local communities relied, after all, upon the native clergy.³⁷ On the role of colonialism, Manna partially admitted its usefulness insofar as it was functional to converting the

Schmidlin into Italian. Schmidlin, who held the first missiology chair in Germany at the University of Münster (1914-1934), is considered to be the “father” of Catholic missiology. See Joseph Schmidlin, *Manuale di storia delle missioni cattoliche*, 3 voll., ed. Giovanni B. Tragella (Milano: PIME, 1927-1929); Gheddo, *Manna*, 70-71, 114-27.

³³ See Manna, *La conversione*, 35-36; 200-368. The themes of “missionary propaganda” and “cooperation between the churches” in Manna should also be read in relation to the division between Christians, which he considered a serious impediment to the spread of the gospel. See *Id.*, *I fratelli separati e noi: Considerazioni e testimonianze sulla riunione dei cristiani* (Milano: Unione Missionaria del Clero-PIME, 1942²). “Missionary cooperation” is a topic that in the years following Manna was taken up by Pius XII in the encyclical *Fidei Donum* (1957) and by the Vatican II in the decree *Ad Gentes* 31-41.

³⁴ Manna disseminated this conception of missionary propaganda and cooperation through private letters and publications in the Catholic missionary press, which he considered an indispensable tool for creating missionary consciences within the diocesan clergy and the younger generations. He directed the magazine *Le Missioni Cattoliche* in 1909 (currently, *Mondo e Missione*). In 1914, he founded the information sheet *Propaganda Missionaria*, in 1919 *Italia Missionaria* for the animation of young people, and in 1945 *Venga il tuo Regno*, a magazine for southern Italy. See Manna, *Osservazioni*, 35-36, 60; *Id.*, *La conversione*, 200-368. See also *Id.*, *Il problema missionario e i sacerdoti* (Rome: Unione Missionaria del Clero Segretariato Nazionale, 1938); *Id.*, *Le nostre “Chiese” e la propagazione del Vangelo per la soluzione del problema missionario* (Trentola-Ducenta, CE: Seminario Meridionale delle Missioni Estere, 1950); *Id.*, *Operarii autem pauci!* (Milano: PIME, 1960⁶); *Id.*, *Virtù apostoliche* (Bologna: EMI, 1997⁴).

³⁵ Manna attributed the stagnation of Catholicism in Italy to the loss of the missionary vision: the *missio ad gentes* was interpreted by him precisely as the keystone to “re-evangelizing” all of Italy. This is the reason why he devoted most of his energies to conferring a missionary soul on the Italian church. That included the creation in Ducenta of the Southern Seminary for Missions Abroad (1921) on the model of the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions in Milan (1850) and the Pontifical Seminary of Sts. Peter and Paul for Foreign Missions in Rome (1871) – from whose merger PIME was established (1926). And also the founding of the Missionary Union of the Clergy (1916) for which he worked together with another relevant figure of Italian missionary renewal, Guido M. Conforti, bishop of Parma and founder of the Seminary for the Foreign Missions in Parma in 1895 (currently, Xaverian Missionaries). See Gheddo, *Manna*, 22-30, 57-60, 79-111, 129-52.

³⁶ Manna, *Osservazioni*, 48.

³⁷ See *Id.*, *La conversione*, 147-48, 167-80. “The indigenous priests are the most precious auxiliaries of the missionaries and will one day have to take their place. . . . Therefore, where there is a sufficient number of well-educated indigenous clergy worthy of their excellent vocation, the Church can be said to be founded and the work of the missionary accomplished” (*ibid.*, 167-69).

“immense non-Christian masses.”³⁸ At the same time, he argued that the work of civilization of the colonial powers “is incomplete, almost always harmful, if they ignore or hinder the action of the missionary, who is the only true civilizer of peoples.”³⁹

From an anthropological perspective, Manna was influenced by an ethnocentric interpretation of the relationship between church and cultures typical of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Then, the notions of “evangelization” and “conversion” were synonymous with the “civilization” of non-European societies. Catholic missions were regarded as a preferential tool for spreading “Western civilization” in the “pagan world.” They exported European pedagogical models, health concepts, technical progress, and Christian moral and doctrinal values in antithesis to indigenous religious beliefs. The conversion of “souls who still lie in the darkness of death” had to be carried out according to a process of “transformation of thought and ideals,” primarily through the establishment of Catholic schools in the missions.⁴⁰

Against the backdrop of the pervasive disregard of local religions that were usually reduced to their syncretic and superstitious aspects, one of the most innovative elements in Manna’s thought was the relevance of interdisciplinarity for the study plans of missionaries. According to Manna, both languages and indigenous religions were to be studied to qualify missionaries to engage in a dialogue with these religions’ referents and adapt Catholicism to the context. He matured this sensitivity for ethnographic studies during his time in Myanmar (1895-1907). Partly due to poor health conditions, he devoted some of his time to drawing up detailed reports on the customs and traditions of the Karen tribes.⁴¹

Alongside the romantic conception of the mission, Manna developed a missionary vision with postcolonial features. It was shaped by his work for the Missionary Union of the Clergy of which he was international secretary (1937-1941), the commitments in his institute of which he was also Superior General (1924-1934), as well as the analysis of the state of foreign missions in Asia.⁴² Manna took a critical position toward the vicious circle that linked missionary colonialism to the foreign protectorate, pointing out that the congregations’ interests were subject to the protection and funding by the neo-colonial powers. This *modus operandi* had become so routinized but clashed with the original evangelical nature of the missions and their objective of the *plantatio ecclesiae*. It had made them more similar to “spiritual colonies of Western Christians, and too often fiefs of religious orders,” rather than churches as “living organisms, capable of supporting themselves, maintaining themselves and developing on their virtue.”⁴³ To the colonial administration model of the missions,

³⁸ *Id.*, *Operarii*, 19.

³⁹ *Id.*, *La conversione*, 164.

⁴⁰ An extract from the bulletin of the Central Council for Italy of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith is indicative of those Eurocentric residues in the lexicon of Manna: “Missionaries are true masters of civilization. They go to faraway places to raise, on the ruins of slavery, the banner of the freedom of the children of God. They replace inhuman and barbaric customs with the truth, meekness and charity of Jesus Christ. They give to peoples, whom passions made similar to beasts, the appearance of men endowed with intellect and reason. The missionary . . . as a preacher of the true and purest liberalism, he teaches among men that there are no castes but the whole earth is the common homeland of men equal in the eyes of God” (*Id.*, “La civiltà dei missionari,” *La propagazione della fede* 5 [1924], 3). See *Id.*, *Operarii*, 18; *Id.*, *La conversione*, 58-80, 144, 170.

⁴¹ See *Id.*, *I Ghekhù: Una tribù cariana della Birmania orientale* (Milano: Tipografia Pontificia S. Giuseppe, 1902). See also the letter dated 20 July 1920 that Manna sent to Willem M. van Rossum, prefect of Propaganda Fide, in Germani, *Manna*, vol. 2, 139-46; *Id.*, *Manna*, vol. 1, 290-322, 343-69.

⁴² Between 1927 and 1929, Manna visited the PIME missions in India, Bengal, Burma, China, Japan, and Korea. During his trip, he was guest at various congregations (including Xaverians, Verbites, and Jesuits) where he was confronted with an overview of the problems that the Catholic missions faced in Asia. It was during this period that he met Costantini, then apostolic delegate to China. See Gheddo, *Manna*, 79-100, 153-230, 277-301; Germani, *Manna*, vol. 3, 147-282. On the correspondence between Manna and Costantini see Pighin, *Il ritratto segreto*, 201, 274-75, 310, 319, 326-30, 347-48, 529-30. See also “Lettera memoriale” (1940), which Manna sent to Costantini, then secretary of Propaganda Fide, on the use of Chinese in the liturgy, in Giuseppe Butturini, *Le missioni cattoliche in Cina tra le due guerre mondiali* (Bologna: EMI, 1998), 291-311.

⁴³ Manna, *Osservazioni*, 46. “We founded the so-called Foreign Missions. The name reveals the mistake: they are, in fact, in the midst of faithless countries real foreign bodies led by foreign personnel, backed by foreign money, and too often

Manna contrasted the itinerant model of the apostles. They only had a provisional character in installing indigenous churches, each with its distinct features and resources.⁴⁴

The internal discontinuity between the ideal of religious conquest and the awareness of the need for adaptation in Manna's thought is best illustrated in the criticism he made to westernized Catholicism and the export of the particular Latin tradition to non-European countries.⁴⁵ According to Manna, the extraneousness of Catholicism in a foreign socio-cultural context should be overcome by stripping off its unnecessary Western forms (e.g., using Latin in theological studies and liturgy; artistic styles) and, instead, assuming indigenous forms. He hoped for the reactivation of a process of cultural adaptation and translation that characterized the first centuries of Christianity when faith had been reinterpreted with the Hellenistic philosophical heritage, showing itself favourable to enhancing other peoples' ancient thought and transferring intercultural knowledge within the church. "Confucius and Buddha can give much and more to Christian philosophy than Plato and Aristotle gave. As for art, one is as good as another, and it is good that every people has what their natural and spontaneous expression of their genius is."⁴⁶

Regarding the transmission of Catholic doctrine, Manna pleaded the Tridentine Catechism's essential truths to be inserted into the study plans for indigenous seminarians but sensitive to different socio-cultural environments. The Christian truths were to be adapted and integrated with knowledge functional to local church planting and naturalization, leaving aside what was secondary in Catholicism. In fact, he disagreed with inculcating the indigenous clergy with a Western mindset, as it was not very agreeable to the evangelization of their societies.⁴⁷

The metaphor of the "church-tree" trans-shipped from one place to another and used by our author epitomizes the sterility of that colonial *modus operandi* that was coming to an end: "We take care that the roots, the trunk, and the branches remain intact. We do not care about the leaves, the flowers; sure that the tree, naturalized in the new soil, will draw the humors to revive and give new blossoms and new

supported to protect foreign governments. . . . We have entrusted these missions to congregations and religious institutes to spread the faith and establish the Holy Catholic Church in the unfaithful world. On examining the matter well and dispassionately, we see that faith has been little propagated. Instead of setting up the Church, the Congregations mentioned above, Missionary Institutes have ended up establishing themselves" (*ibid.*, 40-41).

⁴⁴ "The Apostles . . . passed through the world and left Christian communities everywhere, developing freely by their virtue and by their means. We modern apostles, wherever we have gone, or we have stayed, we have made ourselves indispensable only because we know how to handle the mechanisms. Thus, if we leave, the whole building will collapse" (*ibid.*, 41).

⁴⁵ "In the conversion of today's infidels, we present ourselves equipped with all the armaments that our two thousand years of Christianity have given us. Is it natural? Is it a good tactic? Is it any wonder that if dressed in this way, Catholicism does not penetrate the masses, it is challenging to have a sufficient number of indigenous clergy, it is thus difficult to establish native churches?" (*ibid.*, 45).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 71. Manna also refers to the successful adaptation of Buddhism and Islam in their spread in East Asia: "In China, there are several million Muslims and what a wonderful adaptation! Who distinguishes them from other Chinese? It would be interesting to study how the Koran could make so many adherents. Buddhism was born in India. Let us see how it penetrated and completely made itself at home in Indochina, in China, in Japan" (*Ibid.*, 72). Like Costantini and others, Manna considered the controversy of Chinese rites a lost opportunity to the spread of the faith in China. "Why can't their meaning be corrected by giving them a purely relative or civil value? Haven't we done this too? It is known that the genuflection, the offering, and the incensation are acts vis-à-vis divinity. But one also genuflects to the Pope, the Bishop, the priest, and the parents. Do we not incense priests, the faithful, the corpses, the simple mound? . . . What do the candles, the flowers in front of the sepulchres mean? . . . Why can't a Christian in China kneel to say a *De profundis* above a tomb? The matter should have been treated in another, more gentle way. . . . They were both wrong; those who claimed the rites were only civil and the others who considered them insanely superstitious . . . Let's not go among the infidels to break down idols with hammer blows . . . even a pagan temple can become a Christian church" (*ibid.*, 74-76).

⁴⁷ "Is our traditional method of training priests for our old Western and civilized countries the most suitable for training priests who must plant and maintain the faith among the peoples of India, China, Africa, and Oceania? The current method of training indigenous priests, that of taking Indian, Chinese, etc. children, and making them go through the long and tedious training of our seminarians, to fill them with our knowledge, as if they were from our countries, is this the most rational method for forming Apostles for those people? . . . And do we expect to reach the masses of China, India, etc. with indigenous priests trained with a European education?" (*ibid.*, 42-43).

fruits.”⁴⁸ Manna did not consider the planting as an automatism but as a work of dedication: “It should be our study to make Catholicism indigenous in every country, and as we have made it Latin in the West, so we make it Chinese in China, Japanese in Japan, and African in Africa.”⁴⁹ Finally, Manna indicated two passages for the reform of ecclesial structures indispensable for improving the coordination of bishops, native clergy, and congregations and thus functional to transforming foreign missions into local churches: The decentralization of the organs of Propaganda Fide in non-Christian countries⁵⁰ and the development of regional synods.⁵¹

4. Vanzin: Evangelization as a process of transformation “of” and “in” cultures

Vittorino Vanzin (1900-1976) is one of the *passeurs* of missionary renewal in the Catholic field who internalized the reference missionary model’s transformation. It encompasses the passage from colonial device to adaptation and, finally, inculturation. Unlike Costantini and Manna, Vanzin’s missiological thought appears more systematic and developed according to three fundamental thematic nuclei. They offer a reading of the mission first as “conquest of the distant field” (1914-1946), then in terms of “evangelization of cultures” (1946-1969), and finally as an “explosive breakthrough” (1969-1976).⁵²

The first nucleus coincides with the seminar formation in Parma (1914-1922), the missionary experience in China (1924-1929), and animators’ work in Italy. Vanzin was shaped, at least initially, by the ethnocentric vision of a romantic mission captured in the ideal of the conquest and civilization of the “infidel world” in competition with local religions.⁵³ While employing linguistic instruments with ethnocentric tones typical of the time, Vanzin distanced himself from the *contra gentes* method. He embraced Maritain’s conception of spiritual primacy, the cosmic vision of Teilhard de Chardin, Lebbe and Costantini’s criticisms of westernization, colonialism, and congregationalism, as well as the guidelines of the Founder of his Institute, Bishop Conforti.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁰ “Could we accept that distant China and the Chinese regulate religion in one of our European countries? . . . This is what we pretend to do today with regard to other peoples, as long as Propaganda Fide will stay only in Rome and will be directed by all our personnel. . . . It could be objected that by decentralizing Propaganda, the Holy See would lose that close and direct contact and control that it now holds over the entire missionary movement. And then this decentralization could not over time favor schisms and heresies? The objection is serious, but I reply by repeating . . . that only one thing is necessary: the spread of the Kingdom of Our Lord and all souls’ salvation; the rest is just a means. . . . There were plenty of schisms and heresies in the early centuries of the Church. In a certain sense, they were a sign of vitality; on the other hand, we inevitably go toward sterility by risking nothing” (*ibid.*, 65-67).

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, 60-61.

⁵² The missiological literature widely neglects the figure of the Xaverian missionary Vanzin, even though he was the first to use the expression “evangelization of cultures” (see Vittorino Vanzin, *L’evangelizzazione delle culture* [Parma: ISME, 1958]) – later adopted by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 20-24 – and significantly contributed to the pre-conciliar and post-conciliar debates on the relationship between the church and cultures, which specified the role of the local churches in the reception of the faith. The only available systematic study on his thought is the doctoral work of Mario Menin, *Il Vangelo incontro alle culture: Uno studio sul rapporto tra evangelizzazione e culture negli scritti di V.C. Vanzin dei missionari saveriani (1900-1976)* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2008). The monograph facilitates access to some bibliographic data that would be difficult to use otherwise, as they are unpublished or can only be found in the archives of Xaverian Missionaries.

⁵³ See Vittorino Vanzin, “Perché il missionario è civilizzatore (Conferenza missionaria, 7.03.1920),” *Vita Nostra* 3 (1920), 16-17, cit. in Menin, *Vanzin*, 71; *Id.*, “Lo studio delle religioni (Conferenza missionaria, 18.02.1920),” *Vita Nostra* 2 (1920), 11-12, cit. in *ibid.*, 75; *Id.*, “L’opera missionaria e le pseudo religioni (Conferenza missionaria, 25.12.1920),” *Vita Nostra* 8-9-10 (1920), 10, cit. in *ibid.* (*Vita Nostra* was a private bulletin of the Xaverian Missionaries published in Parma from 1918 to 1946); *Id.*, *Le vie della conquista* (Rome: Unione Missionaria del Clero, 1942), 50-51.

⁵⁴ See *Id.*, *Il campo lontano* (Parma: ISME, 1936), 55, 358-59; *Id.*, *Le vie della conquista*, 61; *Id.*, “La salvezza dell’umanità in una prospettiva cosmica,” *Fede e Civiltà* 1 (1964), 1-49 (*Fede e Civiltà* was a monthly of the Xaverian Missionaries published in Parma from 1903 to 1978. Currently, *Missione Oggi*); *Id.*, *Padre di missionari: Il servo di Dio Guido Maria Conforti* (Parma: ISME, 1941).

Vanzin also emphasized that the church needed to assume, in addition to an indigenous administrative structure, “a deeply local colour and flavour” in its existence as a church.⁵⁵ This is a profound adaptation, which – with reference to his experience in the Chinese context – he considered indispensable for the fermentation of the “social and political cyclone” that hit China in the early 1900s. In this regard, Vanzin, like Manna and Costantini, focused his attention on one critical issue of missionary renewal, namely that of the liberation of Christianity from the local people’s suspicion that it was merely an appendage of the imperialist powers and foreign religion.⁵⁶ This perspective led Vanzin to point out that the cultural adaptation of Christian faith is neither a clean sweep of local traditions, nor a passive reception, nor a uniform assumption of a western religion that remains detached from context.⁵⁷ He explained the church planting with an original trait, compared to that of the Louvain school, and refers to interpreting socio-cultural spaces rather than geographical space in itself. Without such anthropological hermeneutics, the *plantatio ecclesiae* would remain uniform in every place and foreign to the surrounding environment. Therefore, it is a transition of the “space” in which the *missio ad gentes* is shifted from geographical territoriality to socio-cultural context.⁵⁸

From an anthropological point of view, Vanzin seems to express the relationship between church and cultures with the model of the adaptation of Christianity according to which culture, in an “objective” sense, is a set of selectable and replaceable elements available to missionaries.⁵⁹ He also cautioned that the adaptation should be careful not to twist the individual physiognomies of the peoples. Therefore, it is a process that requires expertise and, ultimately,

a profound study of the thought, sentiment, and customs of the non-Christian peoples to separate the elements that can be accepted and purified from those that must be abandoned. In a way, however, that does not remove, to a possible extent, the paintings of the local tradition. The “Christian revolution” must appear as a renewal.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ *Id.*, *Il campo lontano*, 317. “The missionary does not work to convert pagan peoples, but to establish the Church everywhere. To achieve the formation of the local clergy he must necessarily create a nucleus of converts in order to recruit candidates for the priesthood; but they are the local priests who, hierarchically organized, must deal with the conversion of the mass” (*Id.*, *Nasce un missionario* [Parma: CEM-ISME, 1943], 35).

⁵⁶ *Id.*, *Il campo lontano*, 328. See *Id.*, *Turchino pallido* (Rome: AVE, 1943); *Id.*, *La via mandarinale* (Parma: ISME, 1958). On the concept of “evangelical fermentation” of society see also *Id.*, *Il fermento del Regno* (Rome: Unione Missionaria del Clero, 1946); *Id.*, *La chiesa e i nuovi popoli dell’Asia e dell’Africa* (Milano: Ancora, 1963).

⁵⁷ The Catholic Church, Vanzin observes, “can neither think nor does it think of abandoning and degrading the particular characteristics which each people with jealous piety and understandable pride cherishes and considers as a precious inheritance. Its purpose is supernatural unity in universal love, felt and practiced, not the uniformity, exclusively external, superficial, and, therefore, itself debilitating” (*Id.*, *Conquista* [Parma: ISME, 1940], 15). The perspective of mutual enrichment between church and cultures found ample space in the conciliar and contemporary magisterium. See *Gaudium et Spes* 44-45, 53; *Ad Gentes* 22; *Redemptoris Missio* 52; *Ecclesia in Oceania* 16; *Ecclesia in Africa* 61; *Evangelii Gaudium* 116.

⁵⁸ The theologians of the so-called “French school,” including Congar, Henry and Dunas, insisted on this “spatial transition.” Colzani writes, “abandoning the distinction between Christian lands and mission territories, these authors use socio-anthropological problems in relation to the ‘milieu’ or ‘pays,’ in short, to the social environment. Mission is everywhere where the existential situation of people it is such that their life conditions cannot be approached with ordinary pastoral care. . . . Here the fence between mission *ad intra* and *ad extra* falls definitively” (Colzani, *Missiologia*, 49).

⁵⁹ Menin observes that Vanzin “uses the terms culture and civilization indiscriminately, with a certain preference for civilization. . . . He also uses the expression ‘Christian civilization’ . . . in opposition to ‘unchristian civilizations’, not yet reached by the gospel. . . . The civilization of ‘uncultivated’ peoples is, in any case, understood by our author in terms that are still markedly ethnocentric . . . ‘True civilization’ depends on evangelization and not on civilization. Nevertheless, it grants civilization a generic and preparatory role in the evangelization, especially in the case of charitable works (hospitals, schools, etc.)” (Menin, *Vanzin*, 80-81).

⁶⁰ Vanzin, *La chiesa e i nuovi popoli*, 245. While reflecting on cultural differences, Vanzin sketches a negative definition of culture: “What makes countries, peoples, and races themselves incommunicable is above all culture – that is, mental categories, moral customs, the worldview, the interpretation of reality. The barriers of culture are insurmountable due to the fact that they refer to the very way of setting up life, judging humanity, conceiving the truth, and expressing ideas”

At the same time, he understands the gospel's encounter with cultures in their "subjective" dimension. A human being is not an abstract or neutral entity. It is determined and inserted in a socio-cultural milieu that shapes it. Some people educate him or her. As such, the human being represents the recipient of God's movement toward humanity realized in Jesus Christ and the gospel's proclamation. From an ecclesiological perspective, this is translated in terms of the gospel's universal destination and the church's catholicity. Regarding this point, Vanzin holds the church responsible for involving all people toward God in building the *civitas christiana*, not in the sense of a medieval Christianity, but based on the individual's social character and the redemption which involves the individual in the public sphere. In other words, converting the individual means directly or indirectly affecting the individual's relationships within the ethnic group to which it belongs and the society in which it lives.⁶¹

On the missiological level, the conversion of individuals is the first stage on the map of evangelization. It appears in the early writings of Vanzin and then unfolds in the church planting as a specific and final goal of the evangelization of society. At this point, it is essential to highlight a detail that he specifies and that concerns the visible burgeoning of local churches as a result of official recognition from civil authorities.⁶² Regarding the method of preaching, Vanzin was inspired by the Jesuit strategy of accommodation and indicated three guiding principles in the encounter of the gospel with cultures: immersion, valorization, and sublimation rather than destruction.⁶³ Therefore, the announcement must be rethought and developed to become more familiar "to the people's mentality and sensitivity, in such a way as to be acceptable, interesting, and attractive." This is why Vanzin specifies that the announcement "must be inserted in the religious context of the recipients, to make it welcome as a sublimation of their spiritual heritage."⁶⁴ The purpose of the announcement is then expressed as the opportunity for peoples to bring together and rethink their cultural physiognomies on the broader horizon opened up by Christian revelation.

Vanzin also provides criteria that measure the modalities of the encounter of the gospel with cultures: First, the distinction between the original core of Christianity and its cultural coverings assumed in the course of history; second, Catholic "intransigence" in new cultural syntheses;⁶⁵ third, non-competition with other religions – "matrices of civilizations themselves."⁶⁶ According to Vanzin, the guiding principle of inter-religious dialogue is the mutual disarmament of violent attitudes. The expression "disarmament" does not mean then "the surrender of one of the parties but the search for the grounds and terms for a peaceful conversation" in a place where "mutual concessions must not concern the doctrinal field but the social coexistence, so that in charity the truth can shine forth."⁶⁷

(*Id.*, "I valori delle grandi civiltà asiatiche," in *L'incontro cristiano con le culture: Atti della sesta settimana di studi missionari*, Milano, 6-10.07.1965 [Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1966], 137).

⁶¹ See *Id.*, *Problemi della conquista missionaria* (Rome: AVE, 1946), 91-93; *Id.*, *Le vie della conquista*, 11; *Id.*, *Conquista*, 15-20. The relationship between evangelization and the personal dimension of culture was also endorsed by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 20. See also *Gaudium et spes* 53.

⁶² "Until the ruling class does not grant at least the right of citizenship to Christianity – in short, until the individual Religion has not become social also from the civil point of view – the life of the Church will always be precarious and more or less atrophied" (*Id.*, *Problemi della conquista*, 93).

⁶³ "Descend to the level of the people . . . to know his mind, his heart, his aspirations, his needs. Go up with it, follow the natural ways most suited to his spirit. . . . Appreciate, loyally and sincerely, all the good and holy elements that every people possesses. Do not crush his mistakes with contempt and sarcasm. . . . Finally, try to sublimate his aspirations, to raise his gaze to higher goals. Do not destroy, barbarously, for the sake of sowing in a harmless, but likewise sterile desert" (*Id.*, *Conquista*, 156).

⁶⁴ *Id.*, *La chiesa e i nuovi popoli*, 244.

⁶⁵ Vanzin uses the term "intransigence" as a synonym for "fidelity" to the church's apostolicity, unity, and catholicity. It refers to, so he writes, "the doctrinal content of a religious position, to the impossibility, that is, to accept impairments of one's belief to access the different and contrasting position of others. . . . This attitude has no character of hostility toward other religious denominations" (*Id.*, "Intolleranza," *Crocevia* 5 [1951], 1, cit. in Menin, *Vanzin*, 219-21. *Crocevia* was the monthly of the Movimento Missionario delle Classi Colte published in 1951 in Rome).

⁶⁶ *Id.*, "I valori delle grandi civiltà asiatiche," 126.

⁶⁷ *Id.*, "Disarmo," *Crocevia* 3 (1951), 1, cit. in *ibid.*, 218. See *Id.*, "Colloquio," *Crocevia* 2 (1951), 1, cit. in *ibid.*

Ultimately, the purpose of dialogue is to clear the field of the idea of tolerance because tolerance presupposes that “all religions are necessarily at war with each other.”⁶⁸

The “evangelization of cultures” that appeared in a nutshell in the first phase was the matter that characterized the second phase of Vanzin’s thought (1946-1969). These were the years after World War II and decolonization in African and Asian countries. Vanzin interpreted these epochal events from a missiological vantage point and argued for the need for a new phase of evangelization. The concept of conquest should be abandoned, and mission instead understood as a twofold process: the evangelization of cultures and Christian humanism (or plenary humanism).⁶⁹

The first element insists on the one hand on fidelity to the church’s missionary vocation and on the concern to make cultures meet with the gospel message without Western entanglements. On the other hand, it highlights Christianity’s phenomenological need as a religion “to incarnate itself in a culture” because it is only through this path that it can “enter the history of humanity.”⁷⁰ Therefore, the evangelization of cultures is presented as an action carried out by the church “to build a Christian community in a specific cultural context, replacing the religious element with Christianity.”⁷¹

The insertion begins with an ontological hooking operation that replaces the metaphysical element but leaves the traditional intellectual and moral factors unchanged. This process’s theological foundation is the Christological analogy of the “hypostatic union that must occur between the Word of God and the ‘flesh’ of all peoples.”⁷² It is an acculturative approach with multiple implications, which generates a Christian pluralism in cultures, but can also cause deculturalizing effects or the decline of a civilization.⁷³ The second element, closely linked to the first, is plenary humanism, highlighting the gospel’s public dimension and Christianity. Christian humanism finds its foundation in the history of salvation that incorporates all peoples’ histories and ultimately opens them to the final eschatological resolution.⁷⁴

The third phase of Vanzin’s missiological evolution coincides with troubled missionary experiences in Zaire (1970-1974) during the years of the civil war. The African context, wounded by political and ethnic conflicts, is a space in which it is difficult to propose an encounter between the gospel and cultures on the model of replacing the religious factor. The thematic core developed by Vanzin interprets Christianity as an “explosive breakthrough” that, immersing itself in a context, intervenes as a factor of rupture and transformation. It offers the possibility of new syntheses between the gospel message and the cultures experiencing a crisis period. Here Vanzin appeared to go beyond acculturation. He holds local churches responsible for the specific task of inculturating (or incarnation) the gospel in the specific socio-cultural fabric.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ *Id.*, “Intolleranza,” 1.

⁶⁹ See *Id.*, *L’evangelizzazione delle culture*, 5; *Id.*, “Colonialismo e Missione,” *Fede e Civiltà* 4 (1957), 105-28.

⁷⁰ *Id.*, *L’evangelizzazione delle culture*, 10.

⁷¹ *Id.*, “L’evangelizzazione delle culture,” *Fede e Civiltà* 6 (1964), 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷³ “To replace an essential element of a civilization means to modify life, not only the individual but also the social life, and sometimes even the structure of a society. When religion is replaced, it is a new orientation given to the needs of a people, a new cosmic vision that operates on souls and requires a psychological adaptation, the assimilation of a doctrine that has direct repercussions in intellectual and moral life. In summary, it is an authentic peaceful revolution that must, however, leave the ethnographic physiognomy of a people intact” (*ibid.*, 5-6).

⁷⁴ See *Id.*, *L’evangelizzazione delle culture*, 9. It is in dissonance with this universal dimension of salvation that Vanzin, in agreement with Manna, considers confessional divisions a severe obstacle to the unity and integrity of the faith, as well as to its diffusion and credibility. See *Id.*, *Le vie della conquista*, 66; *Id.*, “Ecumenismo e missione,” *Fede e Civiltà* 1 (1959), 12-16. On this topic, see also what the Vatican II stressed in *Unitatis redintegratio* 1.

⁷⁵ See *Id.*, “Le missioni nel nostro tempo,” *Fede e Civiltà* 5-6 (1973), 7-17; *Id.*, *Giovani nello Zaire* (Parma: EMI-ISME, 1972). “After the Annunciation, the pre-eminent task of the missionary of our time is that of inserting the Christian message into local cultures. It is now common ground that this problem can be solved in two stages with different operators. The first phase is that of acculturation, that is the comparison between the contents of the Gospel and traditional cultures, revealing the values, the differences and the connecting elements. In this phase, the missionary is qualified, both for the correct and complete exposition of Christian doctrine and morals, and for clarifying the norms of the Church’s practice. The local clergy will then operate in the second phase, that of inculturation, that is, the concrete translation of

Hence, by virtue of the gospel, local churches can unsettle all cultures not to deculturalize them with the introduction of extraneous elements but to transform them into theological places more suited to the manifestation of God's saving will. From a missiological perspective, Vanzin's "acculturation" and "inculturation" are two distinct phases in the *receptio fidei*, addressing two actors: Firstly, the foreign missions and missionaries (acculturation process) and secondly, the local churches (inculturation process). Menin highlights that the moment of acculturation "still fails to offer a new Christian humanism mostly because of missionaries' cultural extraneousness." Inculturation, on the other hand, "describes the evangelization of cultures in a more advanced phase, that is the transformation of a new culture thanks to the local churches."⁷⁶ Here the originality of Vanzin in relation to Costantini and Manna must already be read in the context of post-conciliar debates in which discussions shifted from the plan of adaptation to inculturation as a process of evangelization *of* and *in* cultures.

5. Conclusion

The article highlighted the importance of missionary renewal of the early 20th century, focusing on the contributions of three charismatic Catholic missionaries: Costantini, Manna, and Vanzin. The themes they developed are in line with the theology of mission of the schools of Münster and Louvain and the pontifical magisterium of the time. These included the ideas of de-westernization, adaptation, and indigenization of Christianity. The originality of their contribution was more on a practical level than a systematic theorization, and their purpose was the transformation of missionary practice from a colonial to a postcolonial vision.

Two elements stand out to be most relevant in their way of understanding the relationship between church, mission, and cultures: responsibility and service. They contributed to transferring the work of missionaries to the evangelical spirituality of the "service to the peoples," intending to free the church's mission from the colonial-Eurocentric logic of "domination over peoples." On the other hand, they attributed the responsibility of governing the adaptation properly to the local indigenous churches.

In summary, Costantini insisted on the structural transformation of Catholic foreign missions into local churches – especially in East Asia – by establishing a fully-fledged indigenous hierarchy, using local languages in the liturgy, and enhancing the local artistic genius. Manna worked mainly for the missionary transformation of both the Catholic ecclesial mentality and the structures that governed mission work (e.g., Propaganda Fide; Missionary Union of the Clergy). He also took care of changing training methods of the indigenous clergy (e.g., the use of non-Western knowledge in theological studies). Central to Manna's thought was the idea of missionary cooperation between churches based on the duty of all the baptized to be missionaries. Finally, Vanzin introduced the concept of "evangelization of cultures" in Catholic circles and clarified the local churches' active role in the reception of the faith.

The concept of transformation used by Costantini, Manna, and Vanzin became a keyword in interpreting the relationship between the church and cultures in the post-conciliar period. From the vantage point of systematic ecclesiological analysis, it becomes evident that excluding the transformation process from the *receptio fidei* results in the imposition or passive assumption of a particular ecclesial and cultural tradition detached from the new socio-cultural milieu. This is what happened in the context of the missionary colonial paradigm. Also, if transformation is understood in a unidirectional sense (simply as a "conversion of cultures") – though reducing Eurocentric and self-referential residues – culture is still conceived mainly as an "object," and the outcomes of evangelization diverge little from a superficial adaptation. This sort of church prevails a "foreign

the Gospel into local custom" (*Id., Temi e problemi dell'Evangelizzazione: Corso di aggiornamento teologico-missionario per le Missionarie di Maria-Saveriane* [Parma, 22.8.1976], cit. in Menin, Vanzin, 409-10).

⁷⁶ Menin, Vanzin, 410.

church.” Whereas, if transformation is understood as a reciprocal intercultural transfer of knowledge and meanings – albeit asymmetrical – between two subjective and mutually active poles (the churches and local cultures), the *receptio fidei*, by including the process of transformation, lends itself to the “epiphany” of polymorphic local churches. It is this direction imagined by the *passeurs* of missionary renewal that was embraced by the Vatican II.