

## **Apostolic Priorities of the Conference of Redemptorists of Europe**

### ***The New European Reality***

In an effort to describe the new reality of Europe, for some time now people have spoken of Europe as a “Unit” or as an “Area.” Europe can be seen as an “Economic Unit” a “Political Unit” and as a “Cultural Unit.” It is within this context that “the ethical” and “the Religious” can best be understood.

Europe has a strong Christian legacy. Nevertheless, we need to recognise that in many ways we find ourselves in a new European “season” in relation to religion, with some objective data that we can’t ignore:

- A culture based and organised according to the “autonomy” of the subject and a “secular” perspective of reality.
- A social and political life based and organised according to a certain “Laicism.”
- What has come to be known as “the dictatorship of relativism.”
- A plurality of religions and faith perspectives within which the numbers of people involved in Christian Church communities is diminishing.

In trying to understand better this new European reality, it is also important to point to the phenomenon of migration.

It is from this perspective that we consider how Jesus Christ might once again be made present as “Good News” for the men and women of our Continent. And all from the conviction that nourishing Christian values in Europe and presenting faith in Jesus Christ will respond to the anxieties germinating in the hearts of the people of today. The challenge is to study how Christianity can be integrated into people’s lives and culture.

Redemptorists, we respond to these profound and rapid changes (*GS 4*) in Europe in various ways in our individual Units. But these changes also oblige us to make greater efforts to adapt our structures and pastoral planning at an inter-provincial level and at the level of the European Redemptorist Conference.

### ***The Response of the Redemptorist Conference of Europe to the New European Reality***

Fidelity to our Redemptorist charism demands that we continually discern where the most abandoned are, especially the poor, and how we are called to serve them (cf. Const. 1). The Redemptorist Conference of Europe provides a forum in which this dis-

cernment can be done. The Conference moved by “missionary dynamism” (Const. 14), determines its pastoral priorities and this discernment should always be made in the light of Const. 5, which states:

*“preference for situations, where there is a pastoral need, that is, for evangelization in the strict sense together with the choice in favour of the poor is the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church, and is the badge of its fidelity to the vocation it has received.”*

The Assembly of the Conference, after dialogue within the Units of the Conference, determines its apostolic priorities. This task requires a periodic evaluation and revision by the Assembly. These apostolic priorities, which correspond to the missionary character of the Congregation, shall be submitted to the General Government for approval (cf. Const. 17).

Though the pastoral priorities of each Unit should be in harmony with the pastoral priorities of the Conference as a whole, each Unit will continue to discern and develop its own pastoral priorities in the light of its own particular history, its personnel and resources, local Church realities and its missionary response to local pressing pastoral needs. In relation to pastoral priorities, no Unit should act in isolation. Therefore, the priorities of each Unit will be agreed in consultation with the Conference Coordinator and will be shared with the Assembly of the Conference at least once a quadrennium. Similarly, the General Council, the Conference Coordinator and the Conference Assembly will be included appropriately in relation to decisions about the leaving or closing of significant pastoral initiatives.

Meetings of the Conference Assembly should deal regularly with theological, pastoral and similar branches of knowledge and with the adaptation of methods in the apostolate. To develop the apostolate, the Coordinator and the Assembly, in conjunction with the Secretariat dedicated to the mission, will set up particular groups of members to experiment with new types of missionary work in Europe. Experiments of this kind should be carried out in collaboration with the local church (cf. Gen. St. 025).

In accordance with the structure followed by the Constitutions, we will follow a three-step process in determining the apostolic priorities of the Conference of Redemptorists of Europe:

***Step 1: To WHOM are we sent in the concrete context of the Conference? Who and where are the abandoned, especially the poor – whom the Conference is called to serve?***

We are sent to Explicitly Proclaim the Word in an increasingly secular Europe to:

- a. To all those affected by increased Secularization and of Contemporary Human Life Issues (of life and death, of sexuality, of relationships, of the new realities of family life, of addiction, promotion of social justice etc).
- b. To all those who are trying to stay faithful to the Church, and those who are estranged from the Church, at a very challenging time in the Church's history.
- c. To young people and young adults.
- d. To 'migrants' and to 'those left behind.'

*(The four priorities should not be read as given in the order of importance).*

***Step 2: WHAT is the content of the evangelization we proclaim within the concrete context of the Conference?***

### ***Ecclesiological Options from a Redemptorist perspective in Europe***

In this section we refer to some ecclesiological options to be borne in mind in carrying out the pastoral priorities adopted by the European Conference.

#### ***a. A Christianity of self-esteem***

*"To know Jesus is the best present anyone can receive; for us to have found Him is the best thing that has happened to us in our lives and to make him known with our word and our works is our pleasure" (Aparecida Document no. 29).*

To be a Christian is the best thing that can happen to any man or woman. All our lives and all our pastoral options must both *be* and *be seen to be* imbued with *healthy self-esteem*. For that self-esteem to be "for real", one must live and experience Christianity:

- As religious *citizenship*: we are not "subjects" but "citizens".
- As citizenship which makes people (believers) *free*: Christianity supports freedom and is expressed in freedom.
- As citizenship of free people who are at one and the same time *equal*: in the Church, "no one is more important than anyone else" is made fully real.

### ***b. A Christianity of awareness***

Christianity today is a free choice. In order to accept the choice to be Christian “in freedom” and to follow it “in freedom”, a permanent effort to be “aware” is called for. Saint Alphonsus said that conversions born out of fear or any other fleeting emotion did not last long (*Opere*, III, Turin 1847, p. 288). Consequently, to be and to stay Christian requires the exercise of freedom and of knowledge. Moreover, Redemptorist tradition has always attached importance to “enlightening” ordinary people and also to “forming” priests. The printed word (in books, magazines, pamphlets, fliers, illustrations etc.), as a symbol of the choice to be “aware”, has been an identifying feature of the Redemptorists.

Our pastoral options in Europe must be conceived and carried out from the perspective of “awareness”:

- Promoting piety, but with ongoing “enlightenment” (importance of catechesis).
- Eliciting belief, but confronting *faith and culture* (importance of theological thought).
- Promoting personalized faith, but at the same time *proclaimed* faith, i.e. with a public presence and with the normal doses of healthy apologetics.

### ***c. A Christianity of healing***

Every religion has, amongst its other functions, a function of *healing* the spirit. Christianity is a religion of total *salvation*. It is part of our theological-spiritual-pastoral Redemptorist tradition to emphasize the salvation aspect of the Christian faith: *Copiosa Redemptio*. Obviously, this is not a matter of “reducing” Christianity to psychological healing (and even less to somatic healing). What we aim to do is highlight the integrative, liberating and uplifting capacity of the human being who has Christian faith. When we introduce this feature into our pastoral options, we see the following:

- We shall always seek to “save” the person, taking as our guideline the Church’s norm that “... *the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church, is to be kept before one’s eyes*” (canon 1752).
- Our pastoral concern will be focused more on the “lost sheep” than on those who did not stray (cf. Matthew 18, 12–14).
- We shall develop a special sensitivity to ecclesiastical and social situations in which people feel they need “special” attention.

#### ***d. A Christianity with an outlook on the future***

The foregoing feature leads us to underscore dynamism for the future in our pastoral options. We neither propose nor support a Christianity that is merely a “conservation” operation. In our pastoral priorities, we look to see:

- Christianity that is “creative” and “enlightening”.
- Christianity that opens up new directions.
- Christianity that is committed to “dialogue”.
- Christianity that is hope-filled in times of suffering and failure.

***Step 3: HOW will the Conference respond to these pastoral needs? What strategies and pastoral methods should be used?***

#### **Some Pastoral Strategies for Mission:**

So that our explicit Proclamation of the Word in Europe might be most effective, we need to:

- Retain the Alphonsian itinerant spirit of seeking out the most abandoned.
- Proclaim the Gospel with simplicity and in popular ways.
- Show missionary dynamism having a passion for the Gospel, a joyful availability for the mission and apostolic zeal (Const. 20).
- Facilitate personal encounters with and between people.
- Build open Christian communities including Redemptorist communities.
- Use ‘new language’ in our proclamation, responding creatively to the reality of people’s lives / questions and including the use of modern media and the internet.
- Avoid dogmatism, offering the Gospel and its truth as Good News.
- Proclaim the Word according to well prepared processes of Pre-Mission/ Mission and Post-Mission (where appropriate consideration of interreligious dialogue).
- Accompany and offer spiritual direction/guidance to those to whom and with whom we minister.
- Promote pastorally engaged International Communities.

#### **Some Concrete Forms of Missionary Activity**

In our respective Units and also at Conference level, these are some of the various ways in which we engage in ministry:

- Popular Missions / Novenas / Retreats.
- Shrine Ministry.
- Missionary Parishes.
- Mission Stations (for longer term pastoral ministry).
- Youth & Young Adult Ministry.
- Theological Reflection on Moral Issues.
- Communications Ministry: mass media (TV, radio, web, etc.).
- Social Ministries.
- Co-operation with other Congregations etc.

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(The original text is in English)