

the families, using books supplied by the FSPs of Portugal, while at the same time taking steps to produce books in the local language. The Catholics of Mozambique were especially interested in the Gospel, catechisms and prayer books.

Our missionaries also took charge of the book center promised to them by the bishop, which until their arrival had only been open half a day. When more FSPs arrived, the sisters rented a larger apartment on Via Gonçalo da Silveira, 32. Moving into their new residence on 30 June 1967, they made sure that the most beautiful room in the house was their chapel.

In the Spring of 1968, the sisters wrote:

In spite of the inevitable problems, everywhere we go we find that people like and admire our apostolate, which is completely new to them, and that they collaborate willingly with us. In this period, diffusion in the schools is yielding good results thanks to the cooperation of the principals and teachers.

The Lord has also given us the grace of being able to open a new book center. The old one, which belonged to the Bishop's Office, was on the outskirts of the city. Our new one is more modern and is located in the heart of downtown. It was inaugurated on 11 February 1968, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, by Bishop Manuel Ferreira Cabral. Various civil authorities and many missionaries who work in the diocese attended the ceremony.

In his speech for the occasion, the Bishop said: "Beira is honored to be the first city in Mozambique in which the Daughters of St. Paul opened a house. I pray that their work will go ahead well, powerfully and vibrantly, not only in Beira but in all the cities and villages of the province so that we will be able to share the Bread of the Word with God's little ones. In this way we will offer truth and justice to all those who are seeking not philosophy, which fails, but the perennial gift of the Gospel...."

**WHERE
THE LORD
IS LEADING US**

The Word

**Redesigns
Our
Journey**

AFRICA - MADAGASCAR

SUMMARY

*Entering the Continent of Africa-Madagascar
To Listen to What We Must Do*

Presentation of the Superior General

1. For Lectio
2. For Meditation
3. For Sharing
4. For Prayer

Entering “Vast Africa” with the Heart of Paul

*“Go into the city...”
Africa, the “Continent of Hope”
2nd Special Assembly for Africa*

Looking at Our Territory from a Worldwide Perspective

*The FSPs in Africa-Madagascar
Some Challenges for Our Circumscriptions of Africa-Madagascar
Other Important and Urgent Challenges for This Continent*

“Go into the city”: Giving the Gospel to “all those who seek truth and justice”:
In the footsteps of our first missionaries to Africa

*Beginnings Marked by Misunderstandings and Conflict:
Our Foundation in the Congo
In the Land of the Martyrs: Our Foundation in Uganda
“Simple instruments in the hands of God”:
Our Foundation in Nigeria
Sharing the Bread of the Word with God’s Little Ones:
Our Foundation in Mozambique*

SHARING THE BREAD OF THE WORD WITH GOD’S LITTLE ONES:

Our Foundation in Mozambique

Bishop Sebastiano Soares de Resende of Beira, Mozambique first became acquainted with the Daughters of St. Paul in Portugal, where he saw the good they did through their various apostolic activities. He was struck most deeply by their capillary dissemination of the good press, viewing this personal contact with every family as a very effective means of evangelization. Thus he invited our sisters to open a community in Mozambique, convinced that the Pauline apostolate would be a precious contribution to the apostolic work being carried out by the other missionary Institutes already established in his diocese. To encourage the FSPs to accept his invitation, he asked them to manage the small but busy book center that had been opened by the Bishop’s Office.

Our sisters referred his request to Superior General Maestra Ignazia Balla, who said that the only thing that prevented her from accepting the invitation of the Bishop of Beira was a lack of personnel. Toward the end of 1966, Bishop Soares was diagnosed as suffering from advanced throat cancer. When she heard this, Maestra Ignazia wrote to him, saying that the Daughters of St. Paul would accept his invitation to open a community in Beira. Delighted with this news, the ailing bishop did everything he could to ensure that our sisters would be warmly welcomed and smoothly inserted into his diocese. He did not have the pleasure of meeting the first FSP missionaries to Mozambique, nor did they have the pleasure of knowing him, but thanks to his sacrifice and to the orders he left, the sisters were indeed warmly welcomed and were able to immediately begin the Pauline apostolate.

Although Beira was not the capital of the country, it was nevertheless an important city equipped with an excellent port, and its population numbered many Catholics.

Our founding sisters—Sr. Giuseppa Panarello, Sr. Teresa Ramos Miranda and Sr. Vincenzina Lopez—arrived in Beira on 18 February 1967. They immediately began to disseminate the Word of God to

the bishops of the country said how happy they were to have the Pauline mission established there. In fact, every bishop wanted the Daughters of St. Paul in his diocese!

Our sisters found a house on 35 Jones Street, Ebute Metta—a very crowded, noisy part of the city. Here they opened a makeshift book center, using the rickety furnishing of the previous owner to display their stock. They got in touch with the Catholic Secretariat of the Nigerian Bishops and their collaboration with this office became so cordial and mutually-supportive that the apostolate of the Daughters of St. Paul came to be considered an extension of the Secretariat's activities.

Two years after their arrival in Nigeria, our missionaries wrote:

From the north to the south of the country, from the highest Church authorities down to the last missionary, everyone takes advantage of our book center, considering it to be manna from heaven. Here, the people have grasped very well the spirit of our Congregation, whose face shines so brightly that it hides our limitations and inadequacies. All the missionaries here cooperate with us wholeheartedly and generously. This humbles us and makes us feel like simple instruments in the hands of God. At the same time, it makes us proud of our Congregation and its spirit.

Having initiated the book center apostolate and propaganda to the homes, our sisters then began to carry out collective propaganda and to organize book displays, which captured the attention and interest of the people. A small group of cooperators helped our missionaries disseminate books in Lagos and other towns.

To the Daughters of St. Paul of Nigeria, it looked as if all the areas of our apostolate (press, filmstrips, records, etc.) had a bright future.... On 3 November 1966, they were asked to join the national Catholic Radio Committee and to take an active part in its activities. One of the sisters was appointed Secretary General of the Committee and played a major role in preparing radio programs and broadcasts.

At the same time, the sisters diligently sought vocations....

ENTERING THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA-MADAGASCAR TO LISTEN TO WHAT WE MUST DO

Presentation of the Superior General



Dearest Sisters,

Let us continue our imaginary pilgrimage to the different continents to which *we have been sent under the thrust of the Spirit* (cf. 2 Co. 5:14).

After having read about, meditated on, prayed over and come to know and accept more profoundly the situations of immense Asia and diversified Oceania, we now want to “cross the threshold” of Africa-Madagascar, the “continent of hope,” as Pope Benedict XVI recently defined it.

We take this step at a truly “favorable time,” because right now the universal Church is preparing for the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, which will take place in Vatican City from 4-25 October 2009. We are sure that this Synod, centered on the theme, *The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, will cast light on our Continental Meeting for Redesigning Our Presences in Africa-Madagascar (Nairobi, Kenya: 13-23 November 2009).

Once again, we are awed by the way Divine Providence has interwoven our paths with those of the Church, which has given us the mandate to communicate the Gospel to all peoples through all the instruments and modes of communication.

With hearts overflowing with gratitude and ready to receive the gift of the Word that “redesigns our journey,” we welcome the following fundamental guidelines from the Synod's preparatory document and the words of the Holy Father:

- *the invitation to participate in the Table of the Word and of the Eucharist assiduously and meaningfully*, because both Tables provide us with light and nourishment, “medicine and food” for our journey in fidelity to the Teacher and Shepherd,¹ ensuring that the Church in Africa will carry out the service of reconciliation, justice and peace in harmony with the program of life sketched out by the Lord himself: “You are the salt of the earth ... You are light for the world” (Mt. 5:13-14), and defend those without a voice;
- *the appeal to be the friend of Christ, “to think like him, to want what he wants and to reject what he rejects*. Jesus himself said: ‘You are my friends if you do what I command’” (Jn. 15:14). May it be our common commitment to do his holy will all together;²
- *the plea to avoid the trap of tribalism*—a temptation to which even we are not immune;
- *the conviction that the liberation of Africa must be understood first of all in a moral sense* and that the heart of the Church’s mission—and therefore ours—is to educate young people, provide leaders with an ethical formation, promote the family, protect life and defend the dignity of women.

May Mary, “Our Lady of Africa,” accompany us on our journey and help us enter this continent with a listening heart so as to permit the Lord’s words of blessing and of life to resound there.

Affectionately,

Sr. M. Antonietta Bruscato
Superior General

¹ Benedict XVI, *Speech to the Special Council of the Synod for Africa*, Apostolic Nunciature of Yaoundé, 19 March 2009.

² Benedict XVI, *Homily during the Eucharistic Celebration with the bishops, priests, religious, ecclesial movements and catechists of Angola and Sao Tomé* in the Church of St. Paul, Luanda, Angola, 21 March 2009.

the great distances involved, our sisters sent out cyclostyled bulletins to keep them informed about new titles and catechetical material available in their book shop. By means of this system, the FSPs of Kampala were also able reach missionaries in Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia.

On 16 October 1965, a little over a year after the opening of our community in Kampala, Prima Maestra Ignazia Balla visited the sisters for 15 days.

“SIMPLE INSTRUMENTS IN THE HANDS OF GOD”: *Our Foundation in Nigeria*

The Daughters of St. Paul were invited to Nigeria by Bishop Sergio Pignedoli, at that time the Apostolic Delegate to the country. But Bishop Pignedoli was soon after appointed Apostolic Delegate to Canada and left for his new assignment before our Pauline missionaries arrived in Nigeria. So problems immediately arose. Sr. Daniela Baronchelli and the three other Italian sisters chosen to open the new community were forced to spend some time in the Congo. But relations between the Congo and Nigeria were not good, which meant that the sisters had a hard time obtaining visas to enter their new mission territory. They wondered if those precious documents would ever arrive, especially since they were applying for them through the local Catholic Secretariat and their dealings with this office were somewhat ambiguous. They had no idea as to where they would stay once they finally got to Lagos, or how they would manage to get their baggage released from the port authorities....

The sisters arrived in the Nigerian capital on 15 October 1964. Faced with seemingly insurmountable difficulties, they did the only thing they could: they turned with childlike trust to the intercession of Prima Maestra Thecla, who had wanted to open a house in Nigeria very much. The sisters prayed to her ceaselessly and with great faith, and their many problems smoothed out. The Archbishop of Lagos gave them a fatherly welcome and all

**IN THE LAND OF THE MARTYRS:
*Our Foundation in Uganda***

When the Daughters of St. Paul had been in Africa for six years and had opened two communities in the Congo, they began to look around for another “mission territory” and their gaze settled on Uganda. Accepting the invitation of the ecclesiastical authority of that country, they set out for the “Land of the Martyrs.”

An FSP team made up of Maestra Basilia Bianco and three other sisters of three different nationalities left Kinshasa on 2 February 1964 and landed at the Entebbe airport, where they were met by a small welcoming committee. One of these was Fr. Agostoni of the Catholic Secretariat, who had done all the paperwork necessary to admit the Daughters of St. Paul to the country and who had also found them a house. The missionaries took our sisters to the Franciscan Sisters in Nsambia-Kampala, with whom they spent their first days. Afterward, they moved to their own house on Nakasero Hill, 7 Kyadondo Rd., about 4 km. (2½ miles) from the heart of the city. The first thing they did was to transform one of the rooms of the house into a chapel.

While two of the sisters set up and stocked the book center, the other two began propaganda to the families, carefully studying the local context so as to adapt their apostolate to it. This was not an easy task, given the diversity of religions present in Uganda and above all in Kampala, whose inhabitants were from many different continents. But the Daughters of St. Paul, inspired by the example of the many different missionaries at work there, courageously faced the difficulties characteristic of every foundation period and tried to insert themselves well into their surroundings so as to carry out their apostolate as effectively as possible.

They had to overcome many obstacles in visiting the families, but once they had surmounted these hurdles they were comforted to see how rapidly the propaganda apostolate developed. The same was true of the book center, which attracted many clients. To accommodate missionaries and catechists stationed in remote parts of the country, who were unable to get to Kampala because of

Some directives with regard to method

- The first part of our itinerary consists of *lectio*, that is to say, a prayerful reading of the Word, which should be done personally, utilizing the Bible text(s) indicated.
- The second part consists of meditation: first carried out personally, and then shared on the community level.
- Afterward, each sister is invited to write a prayer to share with her community.
- Our meditation on the Word can then be expanded to contemplate our Congregation’s situation on the continent of Africa so as to welcome the invitation of the Word to *listen to what we must do*.

Here in Elizabethville, the people are beginning to recognize us. Not infrequently, cars and bicycles grind to a halt when they pass us on the street, and we are asked: "Sisters, what good things are you carrying today?" Often people cluster around us and the group gets bigger and bigger. Then, just when things are becoming really busy, a whistle blasts and the police come racing over to disperse the crowd because citizens are not supposed to gather publicly in these days. But when the law officers see that we are sisters, the machine guns they had been pointing at the people get tucked under their arms or between their legs, and then they too take the time to purchase a Gospel or a catechism.

However, I won't hide the fact that whenever this happens (which is frequently) we beg all the saints in heaven to make sure that nothing bad happens as a result of the crowd we attracted around us....

In the autumn of 1962, more consoling news about the apostolate reached Rome:

A few days ago we received 700 books from France. Unfortunately, we have already finished off the entire stock. We say "unfortunately" because with the current laws in place who knows how long it will be before the next shipment arrives.... It takes at least 45 days for packages shipped from Paris to reach us here in Elizabethville, even when they are sent right away.

Every day people ask us for rosaries but we don't have any. When a supply from Rome finally gets here, they are all gone within two days.

For us, Christmas 1962 was rich in graces and also in gifts, sent to us by our sisters in Livorno [Italy]. Thank goodness for that because here we are short of everything. But the grace of being missionaries and of dwelling in the house of the Lord makes up for a lot of things. [...] We have a lot of work in the typography—in fact, the work keeps increasing. Right now we are printing 2 weekly newspapers, 2 bi-monthly newspapers and 3 monthly newspapers, in addition to books and special requests.

As for the apostolate, for now do as you were told. For the rest, I am waiting to talk with Primo Maestro, who is not home right now. Once I have his advice, I will write to you. If you are to go to Elizabethville, then of course you must first visit the city and see what things are like. I will let you know what to do [about this].

I am writing in haste so that you will receive this brief note quickly. I will write again at the end of the spiritual exercises. Now I have to listen to the sisters.

I remember you all constantly and I am praying for you. Feel me close to you in spirit.

Don't be surprised that you have problems—they are always with us. Trust in God and in the Blessed Mother.

Before beginning propaganda, it would be a good idea to get to know the people, the environment and the language well. Otherwise, you run the risk of making mistakes. In the meantime, do what you are told and in this way you will learn.

Warmest greetings to each and everyone of you.

Always united in St. Paul,

Affectionately, M. Thecla, FSP

About a year after the opening of the community of Leopoldville, Prima Maestra Thecla accepted the invitation of the Benedictine Fathers and Bishop Cornelis to open a branch house in Elizabethville (today, Lubumbashi) and on 9 May 1959 Sr. Giuseppa Panarello and Sr. Concetta Motos initiated this new foundation. A month later three more FSP missionaries arrived: Sr. Norberta Zini, Sr. Nicolina Cavataio and Sr. Giovanna Morbini.

In Elizabethville too our beginnings were difficult and dangerous due to local uprisings which led to the secession of Katanga province from the ex-Belgian Congo.

On 7 December 1961, our sisters had to flee the city, leaving their house unguarded. When they returned on 10 December, they found the dead body of Fr. Michelino Gagna, SSP, who had gone to the sisters' residence to remove the Blessed Sacrament from their chapel.

But in spite of these sorrows and difficulties, the Pauline apostolate continued to develop. One of our first missionaries recounts:

1. FOR LECTIO



**“GET UP AND GO INTO THE CITY
AND YOU WILL BE TOLD WHAT YOU ARE TO DO”**

A Life-Orienting Word

Let us read and reread Acts 9:1-6, seeking to carve the words into our hearts without haste, because only in this way can the Word of God be savored and transformed into an act of obedience to the Master who is speaking to us.

Let us seek to grasp what the Word wants to tell us by reading it in its proper context. In this way, we will be better able to grasp its true and most profound meaning, which is also revealed by comparing it with parallel texts and with others that throw greater light on its significance.

“It happened that while Saul was traveling to Damascus and approaching the city, suddenly a light from heaven shone all round him. He fell to the ground, and then he heard a voice saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ he asked, and the answer came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Get up and **go into the city**, and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:1-6).

Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, Saul's adversary, commands him to “get up,” to “resurrect.” Indeed, the Greek term *anastas*, which means “return to life,” is the same word used in the New Testament to refer to the resurrection of Christ.

God, who had shattered the certitudes of the Pharisee Saul (cf. Acts 22:3), who prevented him from fulfilling his violent intentions, is the same God who “raised him up” after his fall and stood

him on his feet again, giving him a new life and revealing to him a new goal: *“God into the city and you will be told what you are to do.”*

Saul was not allowed to stop and contemplate the vision he had received. The Lord extended to him the same invitation he extended to the Apostles before his ascension: *“Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high”* (Lk. 24:49). This power will give Saul/Paul the ability to proclaim to the whole world what he saw and heard (cf. Acts 22:15). It is the same message and mission that the risen Christ entrusted to his Apostles: *“Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation”* (Mk. 16:15).

Forgiven, reborn, raised up...once Paul enters the city he will be given specific directives that will require complete obedience.

Before him lies that city—Damascus. He had been heading there to begin with, but now his attitude has been radically changed.

Previously, he had been entering the city in a towering rage, intending to angrily seek out the disciples of Jesus. *Now* he is not in any condition to confront them.

Previously, he had been entering the city to lay his hands on others. *Now* he himself is obliged to be led by the hand. The leader must be led by his traveling companions, and once in Damascus, he is entrusted to the care of Ananias.

“Get up and go into the city and you will be told what you are to do.” It is through the “city”—made up of individuals, situations, history—that we meet the Lord.

The city can lead us to God because God has placed us there.

The city can lift us to God because God descended into it.

The city can give us God because God completed his self-offering there.

The city can even become God’s “property” because he himself called it his own (“the city of the Lord”—Is. 60:14).

Often, cities (countries, continents) seem to be places of violence and solitude because of what takes place in them. They seem to be places it would be better to avoid; places from which it would be better to escape. We forget that the city—the people who live in it, who shape its story—is invited to participate in the eschatological banquet, the heavenly wedding: *“Go into the streets and lanes of the city and*

so far given them a very warm welcome.... Confronted with so much enthusiasm and missionary spirit, the Scheut Fathers finally agreed that our sisters could carry out the propaganda apostolate, provided they did not neglect the book shop.

In January 1959, the first stirrings of the struggle for independence began to ripple through the Congo. Rebels surrounded and burned to the ground several European-owned buildings in the center of the city, including the *Croix du Congo* book shop. Everyone, especially the Scheut Fathers, mourned its loss, but since their Congregation decided not to rebuild the shop, the Daughters of St. Paul had an open field for both the propaganda and book center apostolates.

By that time, the two activities were well initiated, enabling our sisters to venture beyond the Belgian Congo into the French Congo, Gabon, Cameroon and the Central African Republic. They also held Gospel Days, a Lenten catechesis for adults and a Bible display at Lovanium University.

In 1960, the FSP community moved to a larger house on 12th Street. Their greatest problems were a lack of vocations, the chaos that followed independence and, later, the political problems that arose in the newly-independent nation. The Congo’s difficult relations with other countries made it hard for our sisters to import essential items such as paper for the printing apostolate.

Like a good mother, Maestra Thecla was very concerned about our Institute’s first African foundation and kept in touch with its members through frequent, loving messages.

Rome, 26.07.1958

Dearest M. Basilia [Bianco] and sisters,

Today I received the letter from you that I had been expecting. The two sisters who were ready to leave will now wait. I am so sorry that my telegram did not reach you, especially since it was sent two days ahead of time. It is clear that the [Post Office] is still not familiar with your change of address. Give it to them again or else check your mail box every day. Would that be too much trouble for you to do?

by Fr. Van Ham of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (also known as the *Scheut Fathers*), who had worked very hard to get our sisters into the country. After providing the new arrivals with a meal, our Pauline priests accompanied the sisters to the furnished apartment they had rented for them in the European section of the city. The address was Première Rue Limite – BP 335.

On 2 July two more Daughters of St. Paul arrived from Italy. After reluctantly exchanging their beautiful black habits for white ones, the small group of missionaries were ready to begin the diffusion apostolate through visits to the families. But the Scheut Fathers did not think it was prudent for “white” sisters to visit the homes and villages of the “blacks.” They laid down the law in no uncertain terms: “You will work in our book shop, *Croix du Congo* (*The Cross of the Congo*), and in the Lovanium University Library.”

Our Pauline priests suggested that for the moment the sisters follow the directives of the Scheut Fathers. Meanwhile, they could study French and also Lingala, the principal local dialect. However, when other FSPs arrived from Rome to reinforce the little community, it seemed that the hour had come to begin the apostolate of disseminating the Word of God to the families. With the permission of the Apostolic Delegate, our first missionaries began the propaganda apostolate despite the fact that the Scheut Fathers had warned them not to do so. The Congolese people were happy to have the sisters visit their homes and they welcomed with joy and veneration the holy cards, rosaries and leaflets offered to them. Many children followed the FSP propagandists from house to house, dancing along the way.... Those first weeks of visits to the families were characterized by the distribution of holy cards, medals, and a few catechisms and Marian books that were as precious as gold. Later, the generosity of our sisters of Canada and France enabled our African pioneers to diffuse a wider range of books.

In spite of the fact that the sisters carried out their mission with great discretion, the Scheut Fathers heard that their orders had been “disobeyed.” When questioned, the FSPs told the priests with great simplicity that capillary dissemination of the Word of God was an essential element of the Pauline apostolate, that great good could be done through this initiative, and that the people had

bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame...press the people to come in to make sure my house is full” (Lk. 14:21, 23).

The challenge for us, as Daughters of St. Paul, is therefore fundamental. The Church, in which the Spirit acts, says once again today that it is vitally important for us to *go into the city*.

To go into the city in the sense of the Eucharist: to become bread and wine, to incarnate ourselves, “knead” ourselves into the problems of the people of our time; to be present in society, sharing the lot of contemporary humanity without privileges or discrimination.

The mission of the Daughters of St. Paul does not exclude any of humanity’s historical, cultural or political situations....

Today more than ever, we are called to be disciples of a Master who goes into the city; not a Master who remains outside of it, apart from it, indifferent or even irritated by it. Instead, like our Master, we must allow ourselves to become passionately involved in the situations of human beings so as to help redeem and transfigure them.

For us, *to go into the city* means to enter not only a geographical space but also one “in which we live and proclaim our message with new energy from the Spirit, in an attitude of continual listening to him, because *it is only there that we will be told what we must do*” (Sr. M. Antonietta Bruscato).

This calls for patience, obedience and the ability to wait. It is a commitment that forges saints. Fr. Alberione was firmly convinced that Paul began to travel the path to holiness on the day of his conversion:

“What must I do, Lord?” This question is a sign of Saul’s complete conversion, together with his total readiness to do the will of God. True holiness lies precisely in conformity to the will of God and the surrender of oneself into his hands. St. Paul had already reached perfection [during his experience on the way to Damascus] and thus he is our perfect Teacher of holiness. Instead, our attachment to our own ideas, whims, preferences and desires is an obstacle to holiness....

It should be noted that Saul submitted himself to a person of authority in the Church—the same Church he had been persecuting. No believer can serve as his/her own guide. All must submit to the Church: “Go to Damascus and you will be told what you are to do.” And Jesus sent Ananias to Paul.³

³ J. Alberione, *L’apostolo Paolo, ispiratore e modello*, St. Paul 2008, pp. 236-237.

2. FOR MEDITATION



Let us dialogue with the Word, allowing it to question us as individuals and as a community. What is it saying to me—to us—in the light of today’s situation? What is it prompting me/us to do?

The Word is Jesus himself, who is inviting us to convert our lives and conform them to his....

Today, the Lord is urging us to “go into the city,” that is, to “enter” the continent of Africa, made up of thousands of “faces.” He is telling us this forcefully through the disconcerting experience of our father, St. Paul. He has sent “Ananias” (the Church of our time in the form of the African Synod) to take us by the hand and lead us into the city so as to be taught by divine Wisdom which paths the Lord wants us to follow in redesigning our presences on this “continent of hope.”

It is not easy to enter the “city” of Africa. Indeed, the compelling urge is to *leave* it—an exodus that began thousands of years ago when our earliest ancestors crossed the isthmus of Suez to spread throughout the world. There seems to be an almost instinctive refusal on the part of humanity to “see” and “know” this continent.

The Western world in particular often pretends to be uninformed about its history, traditions and cultures and to persistently view it as a place marked only “by tragedies and the need for charity.”⁴ Perhaps this is an attempt by the West to absolve itself of any responsibility in Africa’s situation because, as the Synod’s pre-

⁴ B. Obama, *Speech to the Ghana Parliament*, 11 July 2009.

“GO INTO THE CITY...”

*Giving the Gospel to “all those who seek truth and justice”:
In the Footsteps of Our First Missionaries to Africa*



In the context of redesigning our presences, let us take a look at the “miracles” that were realized thanks to the great faith of our first missionaries, who were prophets of hope and messengers of truth and justice.

BEGINNINGS MARKED BY MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND CONFLICT:

Our Foundation in the Congo

The yearning of the Daughters of St. Paul to establish themselves in “vast Africa” was realized in November 1957, when the first group of FSP missionaries left for the Belgian Congo to open a community in Leopoldville (today, Kinshasa). The two sisters chosen to initiate this great “adventure” were Maestra Basilia Bianco, who had been recalled to Rome from Canada, and Sr. Giuseppa Panarello.

On 27 June 1958, surrounded by a crowd of emotional and curious sisters, the two pioneers were taken to Ciampino airport (on the outskirts of Rome), where they received some last-minute advice and a fond farewell from Prima Maestra Thecla. It was midnight when their plane revved its motors and lifted off the ground. Its first stop was Kano, Nigeria, where the sisters caught a connecting flight to Leopoldville. There, Maestra Basilia and Sr. Giuseppa were welcomed by some members of the Society of St. Paul and

Africa is not easy-- because we must take into account its complexity and the profound wounds inflicted on it by history.

We should explore the “nerve centers” of this continent with great humility and also great respect, following the logic of *incarnation*, which is the matrix of inculturation.

What better groundwork could we have for *allowing the Lord to lead us in the direction he desires?*

All the same, let us ask ourselves if we are ready, like St. Paul, to:

- enter this city and listen to what the Master has to say to us, putting aside our certitudes and preconceptions;
- pour all our energy into doing what will be asked of us.

SOME CHALLENGES FACING OUR CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS OF AFRICA-MADAGASCAR

Forty years ago, on 31 July, Pope Paul VI said, “At this point, you Africans must be your own missionaries. The Church of Christ is truly rooted in this blessed land!” Today Africa is the world’s “Third Church” (after Europe and Latin America), and a radical revision of the role of the Congregations and missionary Institutes that live and work there is underway. These are assuming an always more local role or are being replaced by indigenous Congregations that are now sending missionaries to other parts of the world.

This can also be confirmed by the data concerning our Pauline presence in Africa-Madagascar, which in the last years has seen a modest increase in members (19.23%). And while some of our circumscriptions are seriously redimensioning through the closing of communities and apostolic centers, we are in the process of expanding our presence in Africa (and Asia). We can truly say that our Congregation is becoming always more Asian and *African*.

Even if almost all our circumscriptions and communities dependent on the General Government in Africa-Madagascar have to cope with major problems due to the socio-political situations of the countries in which they are present, they are nevertheless truly on the move and view these difficulties as “favorable opportunities” to strengthen their faith, spirit of communion and solidarity.

All this offers great challenges to the Pauline mission on this continent, prompting us to make an even greater commitment to:

- pastoral work for vocations and initial formation, which must be always more integral, Pauline and mission-oriented;
- spiritual and community life, integrating the different dimensions of the Pauline life and avoiding the risk of tribalism;
- an apostolate that gives voice to the need for reconciliation, justice and peace in this part of the world and aims at the formation of youth and of leaders;
- new forms of itinerancy in carrying out the apostolate;

LOOKING AT OUR TERRITORY FROM A WORLDWIDE PERSPECTIVE

THE FSPs IN AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR UP TO 30 JUNE 2009

Circumscriptions	Foundation	Members	Communities	m. age
East Africa - Nigeria - South Sudan - Zambia				
	1964-2008	52	7	45.23
Congo/Ivory Coast	1958/94	34	5	46.97
Madagascar	1983	20	3	37.80
Angola	1999	5	1	55.60
Mozambique	1967	8	1	52
South Africa	1994	9	1	55.11

Vocations

	Aspirants and postulants	1 st and 2 nd Year Novices
East Africa	22	7
Congo/Ivory Coast	11	–
Madagascar	7	2
Angola	6	–
Mozambique	6	1
South Africa	–	–

3. FOR SHARING



Let us share with one another what we feel the Lord is asking of us with regard to our own life and with regard to our redesigning journey, in the conviction that “by combining the lights and experiences of each person, we will come to better understand the Word. Questions, answers and objections prompt us to search more diligently and consequently everything becomes clearer” (Isidore of Seville).

4. FOR PRAYER



At this point, the Word is transformed into prayer—a plea to the Spirit that the possibilities we glimpsed in meditation might become reality through “metanoia”—a change in our way of living and being.

Each one can welcome what the Lord is inviting her to do personally by writing, in the form of a prayer, what conversion she feels called to undergo by “entering the city”:

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Prayer

Lord, you have placed in our hands
the construction of the world
and the edification of the Church.
You have entrusted us with the proclamation
of your Gospel of salvation.
You continually wait for us
in the poor, in the suffering,
in all our brothers and sisters.

Many paths lie before us
and many conflicting voices bombard us.
Among them, your call
is a strong yet sweet invitation
that in no way curbs our freedom.
Help us respond to that call
wholeheartedly, joyfully
and with great responsibility.

Increase our generosity
and “free our freedom”
so that each one of us,
no matter what our condition in life,
will serve you with great love
up to the very end.

(Paul VI, *Prayer of Commitment*)

missionary methodologies implemented on the continent were valid, while others definitely were not. It admitted that inculturation has vast potentials with regard to methodology and theology that absolutely must be taken into account—a need felt now as never before, as can be noted in official documents (for example, *Ecclesia in Africa*, nn. 59-62), opening the door, at least theoretically, to the equal dignity of different liturgical rites and to the request for a Canon Law for Africa.

Furthermore, it was repeatedly pointed out that it is essential to involve the African people directly in missionary activities, inviting the laity to become protagonists of evangelization above all on the societal level, thus counter-balancing the serious risk of clericalism.

Finally, the importance of scientific research was underscored as essential for inculturation and social action alike: an invitation all the more significant on a continent where such research is sorely lacking due to a shortage of financial means and the fears of religious and civil authorities. So much so that it would not be out of place to say, by way of commentary, that an awareness of the identity of the African Church emerged *in spite of* the synodal structure and the fears that characterized the eve of this event. And that “although perhaps the bishops might not have been daring enough (some of their input showed that they had not studied the problems of their territories sufficiently),” taking the Synod as their point of departure “they now know that the people of Africa can set out... that there is a Red Sea, a desert and, further on, the land of freedom promised to the children of God.”

Looking to the future, it is clear that the stakes in this regard are very high! On the other hand, according to Senegalese writer Cheick Anta Dip, it can be undeniably said with regard to North-South relations that “although we did not have the same past, we have the same future”—a common and planetary destiny that should be allowed to fully emerge. All those who deeply feel the needs of Africa and the Church on this continent carry this hope in their hearts as they look to the Synod scheduled for October.

*The Special Assembly for Africa*⁶

The first Synod: the dark side... [...] On 6 January 1989, when Pope John Paul II announced his decision to convoke an extraordinary Synod of Bishops for Africa, many of those who had urged the celebration of this event were unable to hide their disillusionment. In the words of Fr. Francesco Pierli, a Comboni missionary active in both Uganda and Kenya: "The element of change, of a shift from North to South, that was the great innovation of the proposal made in Abidjan to hold a Council on Africa, had disappeared. It was still the North dictating to the South, like in the colonial period. From this point of view the 'Third Church'—to use a phrase coined in those years—was no longer at the door." Several years later, in February 1993, the Pope announced during his visit to Kampala that the Synod would be held in Rome, not Africa, and doubts increased.

How would it be possible to fuse together the Synod's bureaucratic regulations with the distinctively African way of communicating? On 6 April 1994, just four days before the official opening of the Synod, one of the most tragic events of the continent's entire history exploded in Rwanda, a nation that is 65% Catholic. This coincidence did not fail to strike many of the organizers of the Synod, who were presented with an observation difficult to negate: the fact that the practice of the Christian Faith lived according to important criteria was not able to free the people of Rwanda from ancestral fears and enmities; that their encounter with Christ had not led to reconciliation. [...]

And the bright side: Having mentioned these unresolved problems and doubts, it would be ungenerous to fail to point out that the celebration of the first Synod for Africa (and the resulting *Ecclesia in Africa*) favored the emergence of many positive elements on which to base a new itinerary. We can mention just a few of these, starting with a strengthening of the Local Churches' sense of belonging to the Universal Church and an improved view of the Church itself as a protagonist in transforming society.

For example, *anamnesis* (remembrance) of the history of Christianity in Africa clarified that Christianity is an integral part of the continent's entire story. In addition, it clearly pointed out that some mis-

⁶ B. Salvarani, "Dal Concilio al primo Sinodo. Verso la seconda Assemblea speciale per l'Africa," in *Settimana*, n. 21, 31 May 2009.

ENTERING "VAST AFRICA" WITH THE HEART OF PAUL



"Go into the city..."

As a Congregation, let us contemplate the immense and diversified continent of Africa, welcoming the invitation springing from the redesigning process to "enter" our Pauline communities present in Africa-Madagascar so as to get to know their contexts, learn to love their cultures, and pray for their joys, challenges and worries.

Aided by Pope Benedict XVI, who recently visited this "cradle of Christianity," and also by Brunetto Salvarani, a Catholic theologian involved for many years in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and the author of various articles on the 2nd African Synod, let us seek to penetrate this continent at a moment in which the universal Church is attentively following the work of the Synod Fathers.

*Africa, "the Continent of Hope"*⁵

Dear friends, at the beginning of my address, I consider it important to stress that your continent has been blessed by our Lord Jesus himself. At the dawn of his earthly life, sad circumstances led him to set foot on African soil. God chose your continent to become the dwelling-place of his Son. In Jesus, God drew near to all men and women, of course, but also, in a particular way, to the men and women of Africa. Africa is where the Son of God was weaned, where he was of-

⁵ Benedict XVI, *Meeting with the Special Council of the Synod for Africa*.

ferred effective sanctuary. In Jesus, some two thousand years ago, God himself brought salt and light to Africa. From that time on, the seed of his presence was buried deep within the heart of this dear continent, and it has blossomed gradually, beyond and within the vicissitudes of its human history. As a result of the coming of Christ who blessed it with his physical presence, Africa has received a particular vocation to know Christ. Let Africans be proud of this! In meditating upon, and in coming to a deeper spiritual and theological appreciation of this first stage of the *kenosis*, Africa will be able to find the strength needed to face its sometimes difficult daily existence, and thus it will be able to discover immense spaces of faith and hope which will help it to grow in God.

The intimate bond existing between Africa and Christianity from the beginning can be illustrated by recalling some significant moments in the Christian history of this continent. According to the venerable patristic tradition, the evangelist St. Mark, who “handed down in writing the preaching of Peter” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III, I, 1), came to Alexandria to give new life to the seed planted by the Lord. This evangelist bore witness in Africa to the death of the Son of God on the cross—the final moment of his *kenosis*—and of his sovereign exaltation, in order that “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11). The Good News of the coming of the Kingdom of God spread rapidly in North Africa, where it raised up distinguished martyrs and saints, and produced outstanding theologians.

Christianity lasted for almost a millennium in the northeastern part of your continent, after being put to the test by the vicissitudes of history. With the arrival of Europeans seeking a passage to the Indies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the sub-Saharan peoples encountered Christ. The coastal peoples were the first to receive Baptism. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sub-Saharan Africa saw the arrival of missionaries—men and women from throughout the West, from Latin America and even from Asia. I wish to pay homage to the generosity of their unconditional response to the Lord’s call, and to their ardent apostolic zeal. Here, I would also like to speak of the African catechists, the inseparable companions of the missionaries in evangelization. God prepared the hearts of certain African lay persons, men and women, young and old alike, to receive his gifts and to bring the light of his Word to their brothers and sisters. Laity

in the midst of laity, they were able to find in their ancestral languages the words of God that would touch the hearts of their brothers and sisters. They were able to share the salt of the word and to give splendor to the light of the sacraments which they proclaimed. They accompanied families in their spiritual growth, they encouraged priestly and religious vocations, and they served as a link between their communities and the priests and bishops. Quite naturally, they brought about a successful inculturation which yielded wondrous fruit (cf. Mk. 4:20). The catechists allowed their “light to shine before others” (Mt. 5:16), for in seeing the good they did, entire peoples were able to give glory to our Father in heaven. This was a case of Africans evangelizing other Africans. In evoking their glorious memory, I greet and encourage their worthy successors who work today with the same selflessness, the same apostolic courage and the same faith as their predecessors. May God bless them generously! During this period, Africa was also blessed with numerous saints. I will content myself with naming the martyrs of Uganda, the great missionaries Anne-Marie Javouhey and Daniel Comboni, as well as Sister Anuarite Nengapeta and the catechist Isidore Bakanja, without forgetting the humble Josephine Bakhita.

We find ourselves presently at a historical moment which coincides from the civil standpoint with regained independence and from the ecclesial standpoint with the Second Vatican Council. During this time the Church in Africa contributed to and accompanied the building of new national identities and, at the same time, sought to translate the identity of Christ along its own ways. As the hierarchy became increasingly African following Pope Pius XII’s ordination of bishops from this continent, theological reflection began to ferment quickly. It would be well for your theologians today to continue to probe the depth of the Trinitarian mystery and its meaning for everyday African life. This century will perhaps permit, by God’s grace, the rebirth, on your continent, albeit certainly under a different and new form, of the prestigious School of Alexandria. Why could we not hope that Africans today and the universal Church might thereby be furnished with great theologians and spiritual masters capable of contributing to the sanctification of those who dwell on this continent and throughout the Church? [...]