

Editorial

Claus Arnold, Valentina Ciciliot, Giovanni Vian

This issue of *JoMaCC* presents studies that mainly focus on the non-European context, exploring experiences that vary greatly in terms of scope and level: from theology to diplomatic and political implications, from ecological issues to the field of missions and inculturation. They focus on the last 50 years of the history of Christianity and the Churches (with one exception that spans the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). The articles take an historical approach, sometimes combined with interdisciplinary implications.

Michele Rigodanzo's essay on the 1982 protests against a waste landfill in Warren County, North Carolina (USA) marks a point of convergence between environmental history and the history of Christianity. The author demonstrates how African American Protestant churches played a crucial role as representatives of the environmental justice movement: they did not limit themselves to theological motivations, but acted as important organisational centres, connecting local protesters with national networks of the US civil rights movement, thus playing a decisive political and social role in mobilising and supporting the protest. The Warren County protest went down in history as the symbolic birth of the environmental justice movement in North America, as it highlighted how African

American communities were the target of discriminatory decisions regarding environmental pollution due to their limited political and economic capacity to resist (environmental racism). It was shaped by African American churches thanks to the networks they had created during the civil rights movement of the 1960s to mobilise resources, maintain non-violence, and provide organisational support to protesters, thus transforming it into a structured movement that was characterised by a fusion of religious and political dimensions. Through extensive historical analysis, documentary evidence and interviews with key figures in the protests, the article highlights the importance of the role played by African American churches in the United States, which transformed their traditional pastoral mission, originally focused on racial and social justice, extending it to environmental justice and articulating an integrated political and theological response to systemic and local problems.

We remain in the United States with Claudio Ferlan's contribution on the Jesuit mission in Alaska between 1867 and 1919, which represented a case of experimental Catholic evangelisation. Here it is examined through a transnational lens that integrates religious history, colonial studies and spatial anthropology. The article argues that adaptation to extreme and isolated conditions, ethnic hierarchies and the tension between charity and control shaped the daily lives of missionaries, with material considerations often prevailing over doctrinal priorities. The conditions of these missions challenged traditional models of colonial evangelisation due to scarce resources, logistical difficulties, the absence of established infrastructure, and the sometimes-difficult coexistence with other Christian denominations, especially the Russian Orthodox Church, which forced missionaries to continually adapt. Through archival sources read with a methodological perspective based on the history of daily life, the author reconsiders Catholic evangelisation in a broader and more multidimensional light. In particular, the relationship between the missionaries and the local indigenous population clearly highlights the colonial perspective of Catholic evangelisation, which included a paternalistic approach and a devaluation of indigenous beliefs, but also the importance of meeting places and daily practice as sites of cultural and power negotiation, as well as religious ritual. The Jesuit mission in Alaska, with its specific territorial, climatic, cultural and gender characteristics, offers a critical perspective for rethinking the global history of Catholic missions: the article calls for further study through as yet little-exploited archival sources, particularly those relating to female congregations, in order to further explore the practical, material and emotional relationships of missionary life. This, in fact, is the intent of the first monographic issue of *JoMaCC* in 2026, entitled "North America. A Mission Landscape (1820s-1910s)", which will aim to capture how Catholic evangelisation between the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a complex process of lived and embodied modernity, marked by tensions between ecclesiastical ideals and frontier realities, between universalism and indigenous identities, between charity and control, and between solidarity and structural violence.

The extension and exercise of papal authority in relation to that of the episcopate in its collegial dimension are the real “crux” of the dispute that emerges from the analysis in Laura Ballestrazzi’s article of the interventions of the Archbishop of Durban, Denis Eugene Hurley, on Paul VI. They were prompted by the debate on contraception and the publication of the encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968). The author aptly points out the lack of persuasiveness of the natural law argument concerning the formulation of the teachings of the papal magisterium on contraception, the epistemic role attributed to conscience, and finally the difficulties in receiving the encyclical, which had a significant impact on the subsequent development of Montini’s pontificate. She emphasises how Hurley had suggested to Paul VI that the issue of birth control could be an opportunity for a rethinking of the ordinary magisterium’s methods of exercise, which, in the archbishop’s opinion, should have been accompanied by regular consultation with the bishops to determine the issues of greatest relevance to the life of the Catholic Church. This issue has recurred several times over the decades since Vatican II, including through specific – and differing – interpretations by certain popes in particular. This is particularly evident in the interventions of John Paul I during his brief pontificate and in the attitude that inspired the pontificate of Francis, where collegiality was accompanied by an unprecedented experience of synodality – at least when compared to the attitude of his immediate predecessors – even though it was not entirely satisfactory in the opinion of important Churches, such as the German Church.¹

Enrico Galavotti’s article reconstructs in great detail the complex and long-standing difficult relations between the Holy See and the actively anti-religious communist regime in Vietnam. Especially delicate was the question of episcopal appointments for the respective local dioceses. The Holy See’s relatively pragmatic approach, unconditioned by the prior resolution of all outstanding issues in relations between the Catholic Church and the state (according to an understanding of diplomatic relations precisely defined in those terms by Pietro Parolin in a 2007 interview with Vatican Radio), gradually achieved the possibility of reaching an agreement with

1 Cf. Gerhard Kruip, “Papa Francesco e il cattolicesimo in Germania. Da ultimo una grande delusione?”. *JoMaCC*, 3(2), 2024, 455-81. <http://doi.org/10.30687/JoMaCC/2785-6046/2024/02/004>.

the Vietnamese authorities and created a situation open to the establishment of official diplomatic relations. Galavotti's contribution confirms the important role played by Pietro Parolin, particularly since 2004, in establishing diplomatic relations in the Far East, first as Undersecretary of State of the Holy See in the final years of John Paul II's pontificate (but with the Holy See's official diplomacy taking a counter-trend stance to this line during the years of Benedict XVI, when it turned instead to marking Rome's positions towards the communist regime with greater firmness), and subsequently as Secretary of State to Francis, on whom, with reference to relations with the People's Republic of China, attention has already been drawn in this journal by Benoît Vermander.²

If in some of the articles mentioned the changes in perspective (or attempts to achieve them) concern fundamental aspects of ecclesiology, such as the relationship between primacy and collegiality, or of diplomatic policy, such as approaches in the early twenty-first century to relations with communist regimes operating in Asia, or even the criteria for conducting evangelisation, as in the case of the Jesuits' missionary initiatives in Alaska, or for approaching 'new' decisive issues, such as ecology, Enrico Cerasi's study focuses rather on the paradigm shift in the context of theological reflection itself, with specific attention to the contribution of post-liberal theology, developed mainly by George Lindbeck and Hans Frei. Cerasi's article shows how the post-liberal orientation has introduced a new theological paradigm, dependent above all on the philosophy of 'the second Wittgenstein.' With its considerably ecclesiocentric characterisation, this paradigm makes it difficult to accept the Protestant assumption that the Bible provides a reforming authority for the Church. Instead, the 'experiential-expressive' characterisation of the understanding of the nature of doctrines developed within liberal theology, with its assumption of the existence of cohesive ecclesial communities as the effective place for understanding the Bible, is conducive to ecumenical dialogue, even if it does not escape certain risks, such as that of a certain sectarianism of the Churches, which can be avoided if fundamentalist sectarianism is replaced by a model similar to that of the early Church, with sectarian characteristics that allowed it to welcome men and women of different social classes, ethnicities and interests into an ecumenical and Catholic unity.

2 Benoît Vermander, "Le Pape François et la Chine". *JoMaCC*, 4(1), 2025, 35-63. <http://doi.org/10.30687/JoMaCC/2785-6046/2025/01/002>.