

Foreword

For a reconstruction of the history of the Catholic evangelization in Kenya, it is necessary to go back to the apostolic spirit and the missionary zeal of Don Giuseppe Allamano (1851-1926), a priest of Turin, who, as Rector of the most important Marian sanctuary of the city, had founded in 1901 and 1910 respectively, the male and female branches of the Consolata Missionaries.

With support from the *Propaganda Fide*, Allamano formed and readied the first young missionaries for departure, with his sights set on Eastern Africa. Thanks to the assistance offered by the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (in Kenya since 1890), he was able to send four missionaries – two priests (T. Gays, aged 31 and F. Perlo, aged 29) and two lay helper brothers (19 year old L. Falda and 18 year old C. Lusso) – in the immense and, at that time, little known Kenya. They reached Kenya in the month of May in 1902. Msgr. E. Allgeyer, the Apostolic Vicar of Zanzibar, received them in Nairobi, and saw for them the opportunity of getting established among the Kikuyu people (the majority ethnic group present in the vast mountainous region of the country), in the wake of an invitation he had received from the chief of Tuthu to start a school in his village. Thus, at the end of June 1902, the four missionaries were settled in Tuthu; in the course of years they were joined by other young missionaries both male and female. They together set in motion a fast and wide-ranging evangelizing mission of the Consolata among the Kikuyu in Kenya. They reached other, inaccessible regions, and courageously overcame difficulties with bold initiatives, so as to establish themselves in new places: first at Murang'a and then at Limuru, Nyeri, Wambugu, Metumi, Karima and Mugoiri.

All these events took place in a short time, between 1902 and 1905. As we know, it is the “scientific” task of a professional historian both to research the entire meaningful and trustworthy documentation on persons and contexts involved in the mentioned events and to reconstruct the “how” of their development within the boundaries of a narrative capable of privileging the attitude of consulting the more authentic testimonies/sources. Of this attitude, the present volume certainly represents a successful methodological exemplification. This seems all the more admirable when we consider that with this publication, achieved in by now distant 1983, its author, a Doctor in Church History, had begun his long scientific and academic career.

In this work, Alberto Trevisiol has let himself be guided by the lively and synchronic testimonies of diaries written between 1902 and 1905 by each one of the Consolata missionaries, not out of personal initiative, but to comply with a

special and prophetic instruction laid down by the Founder himself that was meant to promote in them a consciousness of their progressive insertion in the geo-cultural context to which they were complete strangers. (“The diary”, which Giuseppe Allamano obliged each missionary to write “had to contain information regarding the condition of one’s health, impressions about one’s voyage, apostolic efforts, the state of the mission to which one is attached, local customs, information on the geography, ethnography, natural history etc.”).

Drawing upon an immense, and for the most part unpublished, source of information, impressions, descriptions and reasoning and, above all, paying sharp attention to individual sensibilities of the missionaries, the authors of the diaries, Trevisiol has been able to design masterfully the architecture of the book. The testimonies of the missionaries presented with freshness and immediacy in their diaries have been especially valuable for the redaction of the third part of the book, dedicated to the cultural encounter between missionaries and the world of the Kikuyu, and the fourth part, entitled, not without reason, “missionary methodology”. Many are the motives that bring one to appreciate the contribution to theological and missionary epistemology offered in this last part. I would like to confine myself to mentioning the methodological approach that appears very strongly in line with the demand of the renewal of evangelical dynamism advanced by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. Despite the prevailing European colonial stereotypes at the beginning of the twentieth century, the matter exposed in each of the six chapters, of which the fourth part is composed, corresponds truly and properly to a missiological crossroads, that is to say, to a moment of tough discernment in relation to the attitudes to be adopted, the behaviour to be followed and the initiatives to be invented and actualized in order to create among the Kikuyu people concrete conditions for the spiritual and cultural appropriation of the Gospel message. As proof of this we see emerge from the diaries of the young missionaries, narrations in real time of their becoming individually and as a community “missionary disciples” in the specific contexts of the territories and socio-cultural dimensions of the life of the Kikuyu, whom they had grown to know and to whom they had witnessed and announced the Gospel.

A final note. The initiative of translating into the English language the present text, originally published by the author in 1983, in Italian, has come from the Pontifical Urbaniana University and, more specifically, from its Missiological Faculty. With this the University intends to repropose to the vast English language readership a work of objective worth for the study of the history of Catholic evangelization in Kenya. Equally, with this publication the University intends to pay its tribute to the long and generous academic activity of the author.

I make use of this opportunity to express the profound sense of gratitude and admiration which the whole of Urbaniana holds towards Alberto Trevisiol, its Professor Emeritus, Dean Emeritus and Rector Emeritus.

LEONARDO SILEO, *Rector Magnificus*