

EDITORIAL

Conversion practices and missionary works (12th-17th centuries)

Práticas de conversão e obras missionárias (sécs. XII-XVII)

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During a reformist synod held in 1377 by the notorious bishop of Oviedo, Gutierre Gómez de Toledo, he promulgated guidelines for the action of the clergy, including a constitution on catechetical action in the diocese. The prelate preached that "since, according to the ordinations of the holy fathers, the principal charge and cure for those who have some subjects" consisted in teaching them the lessons by which they would be saved". Therefore, archpriests and curates had to present "to their subjects and parishioners the divine and virtuous deeds."¹ During the Middle Ages and into modern times, there was no shortage of ecclesiastics who followed in the footsteps of the Bishop of Oviedo and proposed reforming the practices of clergy and laity, setting guidelines for Christian catechesis and missionary works. In the meantime, although there was

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¹ "Porque, segun las ordenaciones de los santos padres, la principal carga et cura deven aver los que han algunos subditos es a ensennarles aquellas cosas por que han a seer salvos, por ende estableçemos que los arçiprestes et curas et escudadores, por la cura que han, son tenidos de mostrar et ensennar a los sus subditos et parrochanos en los fechos divinales et vertuosos." Sínodo de Gutierre Gómez de Toledo, 19 Dic. 1377. In: GARCÍA Y GARCÍA, António (ed.). *Synodicon Hispanum III* - Astorga, Leon y Ovidedo. Colaboração de Federico R. Gil, Francisco Cantelar Rodríguez, Javier Fernandez Conde, António Garcia y Garcia, Jose Luis Perez de Catro e Jose Sanchez Herrero. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1984, v. III, const. 1, p. 396.

no continuous process between the reformist councils of Lateran (1215) and Trent (1545-1563), in which ruptures did not emerge and singularities emerged in each new reformist context, the monarchical and ecclesiastical powers undertook to root Christianity in Europe and other parts of the world by using different strategies and promoting specific religious orders for each mission². It is therefore possible to tell a story about the conversion practices and missionary works of this broad section, from the 12th to the 17th century, without disregarding the characteristics of each pastoral policy of the period.

The continuous renewal of the many institutional branches of ecclesiastical power in the Middle Ages, such as monasteries, churches and dioceses, was followed by a permanent policy of restoring the liturgy, preaching and teaching the rudiments of the faith. Based on this context, this dossier brings together a variety of papers that will investigate the implementation of a plan of ecclesiastical reforms - that is based above all on the effective pastoral power of bishops, the encouragement of the celebration of the sacraments and the preaching of the divine word - in specific locations and periods, highlighting the particularities of this broad process of expansion of Christianity. Therefore, it is not only a matter of exploiting the lesson prescribed by a particular sermon, but also of discussing the particular ways of teaching the faith, especially the motivations for preaching in a specific location and giving the public particular admonitions to correct their way of acting in the world.

Many were the documents (in Latin or vernacular) that echoed maxims and laws elaborated by the Fathers of the Church, such as decretals, scholastic treatises and constitutions of councils; the legal and edifying basis of ecclesiastical power, giving the impression of an almost fixed framework of policies whose application was desired for the whole of Christendom. However, during the Middle Ages, because of the heterogeneity of the kingdoms, there were constant updates of these norms and prescriptions, aspects related to local impasses regarding the naturalization of Christian customs.

In each paper, the reader will have access to an angle of missionary works and will be able to consider that, in each space and time, the local clergy used specific strategies to fulfill their duties. The group of accepted papers will aid in the analysis of how the actions of "preaching", "teaching" and "exercising" the

² Regarding the medieval period, see: SCHMITT, Jean-Claude; TEODORO, Leandro Alves; MARTÍN PRIETO, Pablo. Captivating souls - Guidelines for spiritual instruction (12th-15th centuries). São Leopoldo: Unisinos, 2022.

faith could have been practiced differently in various kingdoms or during transitions between two distinct periods. The *manual genres, treatises and summaries of confession or penitence*, written and disseminated in vernacular languages with an especially practical motivation, were prominent at the time. The interest of this branch of pastoral literature - like that of other similar ones - goes beyond the strictly doctrinal or moral sphere and allows us to extend the investigation to the cultural and sociological domain, transcending any conventional and scholastic division between "medieval" and "modern" times, since these writings develop without significant gaps, with great continuity, between the 14th-15th and 16th-17th centuries (with the additional interest of their printed diffusion).

The ecclesiastical summit attempted to restructure the field of action of the Church with a twofold aim: learn how to act in different locations - such as the countryside, cities and even in kingdoms ravaged by wars - and be able to preach to different audiences, having to make its message intelligible to kings, nobles and also to simple believers. The proposal for this issue is to examine, more precisely, the extent to which a particular treatise or policy helps to tell a story of the learning of Christian values of a particular group or kingdom; in other words, it provides evidence to historicize elements of the constitution of a court, monastery or diocese. Thus, the challenge for the authors of this dossier is to interrogate certain particularities of a group or location on the proposed theme.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the choice of the broad time frame to which our dossier refers allows us to prove the process of adaptation to the elements of the Church's pastoral action and the teaching of the faith to the dynamic context of passing centuries and geographical space, with the extension of ecclesiastical structures towards the New World, responding to the challenges of evangelization of the American continent in the early days of Modernity. At the same time that the European agents involved in the process of conversion and transformation of the peoples and societies of America were seeking to apply to the other side of the Atlantic cultural and power schemes already tested and in force in their countries of origin, (these same agents) faced the task of uniting these American peoples to the universality of Christianity, a process in which factors of unity would necessarily have to be combined with

those of adapting the message and forms of Christianity to the cultural diversity of the New World.

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