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Jesuit Missionaries in the Twentieth Century: Experiences and Reflections from the Magazine *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù* (1915–69)

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Jesuit Missionaries in the Twentieth Century: Experiences and Reflections from the Magazine *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù* (1915–69)

DAIANA MENTI

Introduction

First published in Venice in 1915, the Italian magazine *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù* (Society of Jesus's missions) quickly became the Society's official missionary magazine in Italy, providing for the first time a global perspective on the Jesuits' missionary work to an Italian-speaking public. In 1970, after entering into a collaboration with the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), the magazine became *Popoli e Missioni* (People and missions) and entirely entrusted to the Jesuit San Fedele center in Milan, where another important magazine, *Aggiornamenti Sociali* (Social updates), was published from 1950. That collaboration ended in 1987, but the Jesuit publication continued with the new title *Popoli* (People) until 2014, when it finally ceased.[1]

This essay focuses on *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù* (1915–69), the first phase of this long-lived and successful publication.[2] Compared to its European counterparts—the German *Die katholischen Missionen* (The catholic missions) and the Spanish *El Siglo de las Misiones* (The century of missions), for example—it is probably the most recent Jesuit editorial initiative of the twentieth century dedicated to the Society's missionary activity; it was also a pioneering publication in Italy, preceded only by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions' (PIME) magazine *Le Missioni Cattoliche* (1872) (The Catholic missions).

The Italian Catholic missionary press flourished during the first half of the twentieth century, particularly during the 1930s, when almost every order, congregation and missionary institute could boast its own publication with a wide circulation guaranteed by the cornerstones of "popular" publishing: an affordable price, the convenient (i.e.,

1. For a general excursus, see Nereo Venturini, "Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù," in *Problemi di storia della Chiesa dal Vaticano I al Vaticano II*, ed. Associazione italiana dei professori di storia della Chiesa (Rome: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1988), 375–82; Giacomo Martina, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia 1814–1983* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003), 358–59; "Extra-speciale 1915–2014," *Popoli* 12 (2014): 58–67. The idea of a missionary magazine dated back to 1910: *Proposta di un nuovo periodico "Le Missioni d.C.d.G."*, 1910, in Archivio Storico della Provincia Euro-Mediterranea della Compagnia di Gesù (hereafter AEMSI), *Fondo Provincia Veneto–Milanese* (hereafter *FPVM*), *Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Stampa—periodici 1910–1918*.

2. The study of this magazine (hereafter *Le Missioni*) is part of the PRIN2020 (Research Project of National Relevance) "Cultural Labs of Faith: The Production of Christian Popular Culture in Italy from the Unification to the Economic Miracle (1860–1960)," which focuses on Italian-language publications conceived by Christian institutions for a wide audience with the aim of informing, educating, and guiding social opinion and behavior. Through the research grant "Cultural Laboratories of Faith in the Mid-Twentieth Century: The Catholic Missionary Production," the project highlights how the missionary press had a significant cultural impact through its commitment to spreading the so-called "good press" between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

small) size of the publication and a circulation network based on the postal system, ecclesiastical circuits and a militant lay commitment.[3]

The lack of historiographical interest in this type of source—abundant, but very diversified in terms of quality and editorial commitment—is conditioned by an overall negative judgment, which regards mainly the so-called "missionary romanticism" (whose main features were the exoticism, the devotional language, as well as the traditional missionary propaganda).[4] More broadly, scholars have paid little attention to these publications because of their pietistic style, which was entirely aimed at gaining sympathy—and donations—for the missionary effort of a specific congregation, as well as their promotion of a missionary approach imbued with a sense of Western (religious and cultural) superiority. This "popular" literature contributed to the strengthening of long-term stereotypes in the collective imagination not only about non-Western populations but also about the missionary figure itself, through recurring *topoi*: the civilizing missionary, hero and martyr. The evangelization approach, presented to readers as a battlefield between good and evil, was very far from the ecumenical and interreligious perspectives opened by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65).[5]

Le Missioni represents an interesting case study to reconsider this reductive evaluation of the missionary press. First of all, the magazine can be considered a pioneering contribution to the promotion of missionary culture in Italy through the forms of the "good press" as first encouraged by Pope Pius IX (r.1846–78).[6] In order to achieve the magazine's original aim, which was to meet the interests of the widest possible audience, offering "an instructive, edifying and at the same time enjoyable reading for all kinds of people, especially for the young ones,"[7] the Venetian editorial team consistently experimented with both the magazine's style and its content. The magazine immediately gained public favor and consequently a prominent position among the Italian-speaking missionary publications of the time as well as in the post-Second World War period, characterized by a progressive competition with the lay press.

Attracting a wide and diverse audience was essential to ensure the magazine's financial stability, but the editorial team was also concerned with creating a publication worthy of the Society's reputation: Francis Xavier's letters inaugurated a long tradition of *ante litteram* missionary press apostolate, carried on by the edifying letters and later by almost a hundred magazines, including those published by many missionary print-

3. Isotta Piazza, *Buoni libri per tutti: L'editoria cattolica e l'evoluzione dei generi letterari nel secondo Ottocento* (Milan: Unicopli, 2009), 88. Concerning the importance of "militant diffusion" for the Catholic press, see Ernesto Preziosi, *Il Vittorioso: Storia di un settimanale per ragazzi 1937–1966* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 122.

4. Pietro Gheddo, *Giornalismo missionario in Italia* (Milan: EMI, 1958), 41, 93–96.

5. See Carlo Capuano, *La stampa cattolica in Italia* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1982); Mauro Forno, *La cultura degli altri il mondo delle missioni e la decolonizzazione* (Rome: Carocci, 2017).

6. Pius IX, "Nostis et nobiscum," https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/it/documents/enciclica-nostis-et-nobiscum-8-dicembre-1849.html (accessed September 21, 2025). "Recensione a *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù*," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 66, no. 1553 (March 6, 1915): 598

7. Giuseppe Petazzi, "Ai nostri lettori," *Le Missioni* 1, no. 12 (June 18, 1915): 221–22 Unless otherwise specified, all the translations from Italian are by the author.

ing press.[8] The Society, before and more than other orders, had entrusted to the press its image as well as the task of encouraging vocations, of informing and raising public awareness about its evangelizing work.[9] As emerges from the preparatory papers, these objectives were also at the heart of *Le Missioni*: the Society in Italy, some fathers claimed, was little known and mostly connected to the educational sphere rather than to missionary activity.

In 1919, it was reaffirmed that

> in Italy, the Society is little known, little appreciated and supported even by the good ones [...]. This magazine, unlike others, was founded with the explicit intention to make the Society known, to arouse vocations and to collect spiritual and material donations that are necessary for the missions. It is therefore a directly apostolic work: a work of penetration, of diffusion, of zeal.[10]

It was probably thanks to this long tradition of press apostolate as well as to the Society's fundamental contribution to missionary theology and practice that *Le Missioni* was able, unlike other coeval publications, to combine a popular approach—which characterized most of the letters and reports from the so-called "missionary front"—with a more specific one. Starting from the 1930s, later remembered as the "golden years" in terms of its sales and editorial standards, the magazine increasingly included in-depth articles, in which well-prepared missionaries and Jesuit scholars dealt with the political and socio-economic situation of the mission territories, the history of the missions, the history of religions, theological issues, native art, and so on.[11] The magazine's principal focus remained the progress of the Society's missionary work and the efforts to safeguard its results, threatened by growing anti-colonial protests. However, this aspect could not lessen the great effort of this magazine to give its readers an exhaustive and less rhetorical picture of the different scenarios with which the missionary apostolate had to deal, anticipating some aspects of the missionary journalism that fully developed only in the post-Second World War period.

According to this perspective, the turning point of 1954, that is, the transformation of *Le Missioni* into a modern, illustrated news magazine (*rotocalco*) similar to the Italian *Epoca* and *Life* in the United States, cannot be compared to the forced update that the Italian missionary press adopted in the same period to face the progressive competition with the lay press[12] but rather the arrival point of an evolution—albeit not linear—of the magazine. This continuity probably ensured *Le Missioni*'s long-term

8. Claudio Ferlan, *Storia delle missioni cristiane dalle origini alla decolonizzazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2023), 117, 123, 133.
9. Flavia Cuturi, "Adattarsi, modellare, convertire," in *In nome di Dio: L'impresa missionaria di fronte all'alterità*, ed. Flavia Cuturi (Rome: Meltemi editore, 2004), 7–60.
10. [Giuseppe Petazzi], *Proposta di un assetto del Periodico delle Missioni*, [1919], in AEMSI, *FPVM*, *Serie residenze*, *Vol. Venezia—Missioni*, *Le Missioni 1918–1921*.
11. Concerning the traditional Jesuit interest in the fine arts, see Markus Friedrich, *The Jesuits: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 382.
12. Jean-François Zorn, "Crisi e mutamenti della missione cristiana," in *Storia del cristianesimo: Crisi e rinnovamento dal 1958 ai giorni nostri*, ed. Jean Marie Mayeur (Rome: Borla-Città Nuova, 2002), 13:313–48.

success, confirming itself as an authoritative instrument of information and orientation for public opinion but also for the missionary base, especially given the changes to the missionary paradigm requested by the Holy See and sanctioned by Second Vatican Council.

This article aims to provide an introductory overview of *Le Missioni*: it traces the publication's history and highlights its strengths and lively editorial approach, which, as the documentation preserved at the Historical Archive of the Euro-Mediterranean province of the Society of Jesus in Rome has revealed, benefited from the constant interaction between the Venetian editorial team, the Veneto-Milanese province in particular, and the general curia, proving the importance of this publication for the Society in Italy.

First Steps: Between Tradition and Experimentation (1915–29)

The first issue of the fortnightly magazine *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù* was published on January 1, 1915, with a scheduled release every first and third Friday of each month.[13] As the first director, Fr. Giuseppe Maria Petazzi,[14] explained in his inaugural editorial, the magazine not only aimed to provide the Italian-speaking public with a broader geographical perspective of the Jesuits' missionary work—thus absorbing two missionary bulletins *Fiori Cinesi* (Chines flowers) and *La Missione di Mangalore* (The mission of Mangalore), published by the province of Turin and the homonymous mission, respectively—but also to fill a void: while the Society published around a hundred magazines abroad, and "although Italy is not inferior to other nations in terms of evangelization," there was still no Italian-language publication that dealt directly with the Society's missions.[15]

To those who considered the timing of this new publication "inopportune," Petazzi replied that the missions were in great danger precisely because of the European war, having been deprived of traditional aid from the Catholic countries (France in particular) and of large numbers of missionaries who had been called to arms.[16] The magazine would join the pope's and the missionaries' appeals to all Catholics, who were called to contribute with prayers and offerings, each according to their own possibilities, to the missionaries' work, "work of moral and civil regeneration [...] for the benefit of the

13. The magazine kept the *Acta romana* format until 1954. The changes in the quality of paper, the number of pages (twenty, sixteen, twenty-four, twenty-eight in 1919, up to thirty-two during the 1930s), and the use of color were due to economic difficulties. An annual *Strenna* was also published until 1942. There were no missionaries on the editorial team; the only exceptions were the directors Fr. Pietro Repetto (1929–30) and Fr. Luigi Ambruzzi (1942–47).

14. Fr. Giuseppe Petazzi was actively involved as director from 1915 to 1929, when he was succeeded by Fr. Pietro Repetto. He got the role back from 1931 to 1942, but editorial responsibilities were *de facto* entrusted to Fr. Pietro Costa. See G. (?) Mellinato, "Petazzi, Giuseppe Maria," in *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jésus: Histórico–biográfico*, ed. Charles O'Neill and Joaquín María Domínguez (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2001), 3:3114–15.

15. The magazine reported five hundred Italian Jesuits out of a total of three thousand Jesuit missionaries, which made the Society of Jesus the most involved religious order in the missionary effort. The first proposal to give space only to the Italian Jesuits' missions was almost immediately revised.

16. Giuseppe Petazzi, "L'opera delle missioni," *Le Missioni* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1915): 1–4. Any reference to politics was strictly avoided.

infidels in the missions, [...] many poor souls who still lie in the darkness and in the shadow of death."[17]

The table of contents of these initial years already presented those strengths—stylistic care, a plurality of themes and approaches—that would be fully developed during the 1930s, thanks to which *Le Missioni* enjoyed a wide circulation almost from the beginning and a long-lasting success, despite an increasingly flourishing Italian missionary press.

Following the tradition of the edifying letters, greater space and visibility was reserved for the letters sent from the so-called missionary front. In the missionaries' reports, Petazzi explained, the reader could find "news about the life in the Mission, the results obtained [...] the methods, the hopes of evangelization, the ethnography, geography, flora and fauna, degrees achieved in the scientific and cultural fields etc. in the different regions."

Readers would be informed about the efforts made not only to convert "infidels, or heretics, or schismatics" but also to "keep in the truth" those Catholics who were forced to live among peoples "far from the true faith,"[18] such as the Jesuit flying missions in Islamic Albania. Initially, the authors were mostly Italian Jesuits, before later being joined by fathers of different nationalities from 1917. But the magazine also hosted—even if not systematically—letters from coadjutors, catechists and native priests, and missionaries of other orders and congregations, including female clergy, and laypeople, in order to give an exhaustive account of the church's involvement in the missions.

Other news, reflections, or oddities were briefly covered in the columns "Dall'Album del Missionario" (From the missionary's album), "Varietà" (Variety), and "Notizie varie" (Various news), a sort of missionary bulletin. In addition to the missionaries' reports and news, hagiographies of the most eminent Jesuit missionaries were another long-term feature, initially titled "Florilegio Apostolico" (Apostolic anthology): this section, primarily intended to serve the history of the missions in general, was described as "very suitable to gain full knowledge of the current state of the missions, and at the same time very instructive for those who aspire to follow the glorious footsteps of the Lord's messengers."[19]

Last but not least was "La Pagina dei Fanciulli" (The children's page), which can be seen as the Society's first contribution to Italian-speaking children's missionary literature. This section was originally reserved for short, edifying stories ("stories, novellas, parables, anecdotes"),[20] with child martyr heroes as protagonists, prototypes of Christian perfection, in the tradition of a pedagogical and moralistic Catholic literature that in Italy dated back to the end of the eighteenth century.[21] The Page's manager, the Pied-

17. This was a recurring expression; see for example Benedict XV's apostolic letter, "Maximum illud," https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xv_apl_19191130_maximum-illud.html (accessed September 21, 2025).
18. Petazzi, "L'opera delle missioni," 3.
19. Petazzi, "L'opera delle Missioni," 3.
20. *Programma*, [1914], in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Le Missioni d.C.d.G., Studi e programmi sul periodico 1914–1915.*
21. See Pino Boero and Carmine De Luca, *La letteratura per l'infanzia* (Rome: Laterza, 1996).

montese Jesuit Celestino Testore, initially translated the novels by Fathers Josef Spillman, Anton Huonder, Jón Stefan Svensson and Ambros Schupp, but from 1917 the magazine published Testore's own serialized stories, addressed to an audience aged nine to fourteen. These were later collected into forty-three volumes, sponsored and sold by *Le Missioni* until the 1960s as a collection entitled *Racconti di terre lontane* (Tales of distant lands).[22] At Testore's death in 1973, the collection had reached a circulation of two and a half million copies in Italy and abroad.[23] Despite being remembered as the "Jesuit Salgari," Testore always rejected this artistic affinity with the Italian novelist (both "sedentary travelers") and in general with the most famous adventure fiction authors such as Jules Verne and Robert Louis Stevenson. Despite the many similarities (a simple plot, references to geography, botany, zoology etc.), Testore's adventure stories in mission lands pursued an educational aim supported by Christian morality and were designed to be as close as possible to reality.[24]

The magazine met with a positive reception: subscriptions, initially three hundred, had already risen to five thousand by July 1915, reaching 7,800 two years later. The war only temporarily slowed the progress of the magazine, which sold ten thousand subscriptions at the end of 1919 and forty thousand in January 1924.[25] Its editor in chief, Fr. Pietro Costa, claimed that these numbers represented all social classes, "including senators, deputies, lawyers, professors, doctors, engineers, army officers."[26] However, as the historiography has pointed out, the subscriptions do not necessarily reflect the extent of the magazine's actual readership: subscription was often intended as a way to support the missionary effort, hence the difficulty of determining the real impact of these publications. Perpetual subscriptions, for example—totaling 950 in 1924, twelve hundred in 1925—required the editorial team to send a copy of the magazine even after a subscriber's death, fulfilling its one-off payment. This obligation gradually became

22. This collection was renamed *Serie Impero* (Empire collection) in 1937: "Serie Impero!!," *Le Missioni* 23, nos. 13–14 (July 2–16, 1937): 332.

23. "Morto p. Testore, il Salgari gesuita," *Stampa sera*, November 10, 1973. Celestino Testore (1886–1973) was a teacher and writer who authored around four hundred publications, including articles, novels, textbooks, religious books, and biographies of saints. He also wrote for *La Civiltà Cattolica* and collaborated with the *Catholic Encyclopedia* from 1947. As well as articles and translations for *Le Missioni*, he also edited various collections for the magazine: from 1930, *Spighe di terre lontane* (Ears of distant lands), a collection of stories about conversions from Protestantism and non-Christian religions; from 1937, the *Serie anticomunista* (Anti-communist collection) analyzed Pius XI's encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*; from 1938, *La beata coorte* (The blessed cohort), a collection of biographies of the Society's saints and blessed.

24. Silvio Zarattini, "I nostri narratori," *Le Missioni* 37, nos. 7–8 (July–August 1951): 113–21. See Domenico Mondrone, "Un capitolo di narrativa per ragazzi: Celestino Testore," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1, no. 2365 (December 24, 1948): 37–50; Chiara Ferro, "Celestino Testore narratore d'avventura 1886–1973" (BA diss., University of Padua, 1995–96).

25. Eleven thousand copies of PIME's magazine *Le Missioni Cattoliche* were printed in 1925; see Archivio Generale del Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere (AGPIME), Titolo 3, scatola 19 (Progettazione case, stampa-propaganda, onorificenze 1917–70), VII. Tipografia PIME 1932–70, doc. 1137 and 1139. There are no data available on the circulation of Italian missionary magazines before the 1950s due to the lack of studies on the missionary press. I thank Prof. Valentina Ciciliot for providing me with this information about *Le Missioni Cattoliche*, which she is studying as part of the above-mentioned PRIN2020.

26. Pietro Costa, "La marcia ascensionale del Periodico *Le Missioni d.C.d.G.*," *Le Missioni* 10, no. 20 (October 17, 1924): 322–23. The readers' direct commitment, in particular that of young people, to the sale of subscriptions (rewarded with praise and prizes) was fundamental for the diffusion of the magazine, which had a page entitled "Milizia missionaria delle retrovie" (Missionary militia behind the lines).

a "very serious burden"—by 1941, there were sixteen thousand perpetual subscriptions—and many copies were even sent back by the deceased's family; nevertheless, the obligation could not be avoided, because the perpetual subscriber was considered a founder of the magazine.[27]

Despite an auspicious start, the increasing costs led to a first shortfall in the magazine's annual report of 1918, which only recovered in 1929.[28] The donations for the missions, on the other hand, sent directly to the magazine or collected through various initiatives—missionary boxes (*cassettine missionarie*), the sale of postcards and stamps, and so forth—were always profitable, which is probably a sign of public trust in the Society of Jesus's missionary commitment.

This first phase, between 1915 and the 1920s, was characterized by an intense exchange of letters between the Veneto-Milanese provincial Gioacchino Diamante Alberti, Giuseppe Petazzi, and the administrator Fr. Ettore Caselli about the sustainability of some formal changes to the magazine's management, which prove the general interest in its success.

The general curia itself was kept informed of the magazine's affairs and difficulties. The greatest difficulty concerned "the body of the magazine," that is, the missionaries' reports, which often needed revision. With regard to the reports from China, for example, Petazzi complained that "most of the time they have to be redone because they are almost always travel stories with little or nothing edifying," which often forced him to rely on missionary reports already published by other Jesuit magazines (most frequently the Spanish *El Siglo de las Misiones*).[29] In this case, the contribution of Testore as translator was fundamental.

Superior General Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (in office 1914–43) suggested to Alberti, the provincial, to rely on his blessing upon the magazine to encourage the collaboration of the missions' superiors (he refused to make such a recommendation himself "so as not to expose his authority too easily"), though without expecting great results. He therefore also suggested that Alberti seek out fathers as correspondents directly in the missions, "enticed with the prospect of some donations."[30] Petazzi put this suggestion into practice, which gradually led to new collaborations, giving the missionaries the opportunity to dialogue directly with the reader, often explaining their material needs and asking for help.[31] This was one of the characteristic features of many of the letters published by the magazine until at least the post-Second World War

27. Letter from Ettore Caselli to Luigi Ambruzzi, November 27, 1941, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Venezia—Missioni 1954–5*.

28. Letter from Ettore Caselli to the provincial Paolo Dezza, March 1, 1937, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Le Missioni: Trasferimento da Venezia? 1936–37*.

29. Letter from Giuseppe Petazzi, February 25, 1916, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Venezia: Le Missioni, 1913–17*.

30. Letter from Włodzimierz Ledóchowski to the provincial Gioacchino Diamante Alberti, February 12, 1916, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Le Missioni d.C.d.G. Curia e periodico 1910–1917*.

31. The magazine founded a Central Missionary Laboratory in 1923 in Venice for the preparation and collection of objects useful for the missions; new laboratories were later founded in other Italian cities. See Giuseppe Petazzi, "Un Laboratorio Centrale per le Missioni della C.d.G.," *Le Missioni* 9, no. 19 (October 5, 1923): 289–91.

period, that is, until the publication of the missionaries' correspondence allowed them to cultivate this kind of familiarity with the readers.[32]

The adjustments that characterized the issues of these first years probably benefited from the readers' feedback (missionaries included), but certainly from the superior general's remarks. Ledóchowski was "very concerned" that the magazine be "well edited" and intervened in February 1916 with some practical recommendations: "First of all, the editors must fully understand the importance, the seriousness, the authority that such a magazine can and must have on the public. It must avoid a popularity that I would say is too low, as if it wanted to entertain [*patullarsi*] the children."[33]

The editors had to persuade themselves that "writing is one of the Society's ministries." For this reason, he recommended three leading principles: first, the "choice" of reports and articles to be published, which should avoid events that were too old, "censoring with tact and prudent discretion." As regards "solidity," he hoped for more editorial articles and encouraged in-depth analysis of news that could stimulate the "wise curiosity of a sensible reader [...] so as not to disappoint and disgust the reader with dull and incomplete news, as sometimes happened," paying particular attention to the sources. Finally, "diligence" had to guide the accuracy of citations, of names of people and places, and the choice of "decent illustrations." A list of contents had to be published in the final issue of each year. Among the other things "to correct and improve," Ledóchowski suggested relegating "The Children's Page" to the end of the issue, as an appendix. This section was "certainly a good thing," but to "entice the honest youth to the perfect life, to the heroism of a holy apostolate," he encouraged the editorial team to focus instead on the biographies of the Jesuit missionary saints (*viterelle*) as one of the most valuable genres of writing to highlight the Society's great missionary work, "unfortunately unknown." The first attempts were undoubtably the product of "master pens," but they were not up to the standards of contemporary young people's mentality. The title "Florilegio apostolico" itself did not fit.[34]

Save for a few exceptions—the title "Florilegio Apostolico," for example, survived despite Ledóchowski's objections—these remarks encouraged some innovations that were introduced in the magazine from 1916. The new column "Le Missioni e la Scienza" (Missions and science), later "Missioni e Civiltà" (Missions and civilization), perhaps answered to Ledóchowski's invitation to include more in-depth articles:

> [The magazine] strives to be pleasant to all sorts of people: to children, with many educational and attractive narratives and with a page exclusively made for them; to friends of science, with some important and valuable news for

32. This was the case of the Jesuits Alessandro Camisa (Mangalore) and Giuseppe Greggio (Congo).
33. Petazzi's program of the magazine (originally titled *La voce dell'apostolo*, [The apostle's voice]) was also submitted to three Jesuit reviewers separately before the publication; see letter of Pietro Tacchi Venturi to Giuseppe Petazzi, October 8, 1914, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Le Missioni d.C.d.G. Curia e periodico 1910–1917*.
34. Letter from Włodzimierz Ledóchowski to the provincial Gioacchino Diamante Alberti, February 12, 1916. See also Ledóchowski, *De nostris libellis periodicis*, December 8, 1916.

> their studies; to pious souls, with the spiritual pasture that is offered to them in various forms, especially in the "Apostolic Anthology."[35]

The magazine was later expanded with the addition of other sections, such as the "Spigolature Apostoliche" (Apostolic gleanings, later "Missionary gleanings") and Petazzi's editorials, while the main section "Dalle terre di Missione" (From the mission lands) gradually included non-Italian Jesuit correspondents.

As well as its other features, the magazine also promoted fundraising, including for the "salvation of the poor unfaithful children" (rewarded by Benedict XV [r.1914–22] with a plenary indulgence for the benefactors); long-distance adoption (with a contribution of sixty lire per year or five hundred lire one-off for their education); and "redemption": with a donation of twenty-five lire, the benefactors gained the right to give their name to the child or to act as their godparents.[36] Among the beneficiaries of the readers' donations were local children aspiring to the priesthood (eighty lire per year or one thousand lire as a one-off payment) and the catechists, "the missionary's right arm," whose work was considered vital because of their knowledge of the locals' language and customs, attracting them "with apostolic enthusiasm to the mission, instructing and preparing them for baptism."[37]

Following these consultations, the magazine's contents improved, and *Le Missioni* was gradually structured into easily recognizable sections, dealing with every aspect of its central topic, the mission.

The missionary was the protagonist, as first-hand correspondent, as the main character of his own stories, as a priest but also as an explorer, with his adventures, his routine, his physical and spiritual difficulties:

> I loved the missionary life from the beginning. I always love it. For me, the solitude, the wildness of these places and the ministry among the most miserable has an indescribable charm. The abject condition of the hill tribes, the hours of solitude—hours of deep thought and elevation to God—give me a broader and more wholesome understanding of life. The crowded and noisy cities with their thirst for pleasure and riches have lost attraction for me. City life has too many artificial conventionalities, while jungle life always allows the best development of nature with greater opportunities for the triumph of grace.[38]

Like their predecessors in the modern age, the Jesuit missionaries of the twentieth century effectively describe social and religious systems, habits, customs but also the natural phenomena, flora, and fauna of distant and exotic places. The meticulous observations mingled with anecdotes and reflections on the challenges of their daily lives and on the missionary method too.

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35. [Giuseppe Petazzi], "Gesù nasca nei cuori," *Le Missioni* 2, no. 24 (December 15, 1916): 417–18.
36. [Giuseppe Petazzi], "Beniamino Maria," *Le Missioni* 2, no. 16 (August 18, 1916): 289–90.
37. "Per le Missioni," *Le Missioni* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 1920): 2.
38. Edoardo Beretta, "Nella nuova colonia di S. Paolo a Vaytri," *Le Missioni* 12, no. 21 (November 5, 1926): 328–30.

These hybrid texts, a mix of reports, letters, and short essays, ranging from autobiography to spirituality, from botany to geography, from history to ethnography and provided with maps, illustrations, and photographs,[39] represented the great potential of the missionary press during the nineteenth and part of the twentieth century: despite the influence of the adventure genre, very popular at the time, it could be considered an instrument of mass culture, as an affordable channel, economically and culturally, through which a "popular" audience could acquire basic information about non-Western realities.

But what idea of mission emerged from the letters of Jesuits engaged on such different fronts? What are the common features that could have influenced the twentieth-century collective imagination about the missionary figure and the readers' approach to non-Western realities?

Petazzi's editorials contain many elements of the theological approach that was common in the missionary press of the time. Concerning the description of the first cover *S. Ignazio di Loyola invia S. Francesco Saverio a predicare il Vangelo nelle Indie* (St. Ignatius of Loyola sends St. Francis Xavier to preach the Gospel in the Indies), for example, he wrote:

> Ignatius of Loyola, as an army general, orders Francis Xavier to go and conquer a new world. Ignatius presents the Crucifix to Xavier as a mystical sword, an invincible weapon. It infuses a thaumaturge virtue to the Apostle's arm, and thousands and thousands of God's enemies will fall at his feet, guiding him to sure triumph. A fateful vision disclosed before the two great souls: unknown seas, wild lands, virgin forests where the new apostle will shout his faith and love, where he will spend the nights at the mercy of the trembling waves, or lost among frightening solitudes, exposed to the wild beasts of the forest, or to the inhuman attacks of human beasts; burning arenas, where his feet will be burned, where twigs and trunks will tear them to pieces. Finally, on an arid beach, in a poor hut, exposed to the elements [...], he will finally win the palm tree of heroes.[40]

Foremost among the different *topoi* in this description is the modern conception of the mission subjected to the mandate of an authority, promoted by Ignatius of Loyola and adopted by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide itself.[41]

In the traditional Jesuit iconography that characterized the first covers, this idea of mission was symbolically represented by the purifying light—"the light of Christ that purifies from filthiness through the work of regeneration"—that radiated from Christ—represented by the monogram IHS (the monogram of the Society itself) or

39. See Maria Francesca Piredda, "Istantanee d'Oriente: La fotografia missionaria dei padri del PIME," in *Santi in posa: L'influsso della fotografia sull'immaginario religioso,* ed. Tommaso Caliò (Rome: Viella, 2019), 405–25.

40. Giuseppe Petazzi, "La nuova copertina," *Le Missioni* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 1920): 16.

41. See David J. Bosch, *La trasformazione della missione: Mutamenti di paradigma in missiologia* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2000), 13–14; Giuseppe Buono, *Missiologia: Teologia e prassi* (Milan: Paoline, 2000), 52–55.

with human features in the following covers—on the missionary and on the mission lands.[42]

Another essential characteristic of the missionary rhetoric of the time emerges from Petazzi's explanation: the missionary figure was hyper-defined both iconographically (the portrait of the ideal missionary, Francis Xavier, the apostles etc.)[43] and verbally, through the multiple contexts of his action. He was in fact both a priest (hunter of souls, saint, father, angel of salvation, a refuge for the abandoned) and a secular administrator (the angel of charity, the teacher, the one who "possesses a science, a culture, a superior virtue").[44]

The so-called heathen world, on the other hand, was almost undefined and stereotyped through the use both of images—an exotic scenario represented by a palm tree or a pagoda; the allegories of the four continents[45]—and of adjectives that emphasized its otherness: the brave missionary who had left his homeland and his beloved ones to dedicate himself to the "poor savages" afflicted by misery, "horrendous squalor," cannibalism, slavery. In these "abject kingdoms of idolatry [...], he consoles, heals wounds, erects orphanages, hospitals, refuges of all kinds,"[46] deploying an effective form of humanitarian apostolate explicitly oriented toward conversion: he gained the trust of these populations through the example of Christian culture and civilization, and he restored their human dignity, preparing them for the acceptance of the Christian message.

The military vocabulary deepened the center–periphery dichotomy: generally, the missionary was described as a soldier of Christ fighting the church's battle against the angel of darkness and error for the conquest of souls. The crucifix was considered the apostle's weapon against the enemy, that is, the peoples who rebelled against the Gospel. With the dichotomy between a "before"—"the most repugnant mud," "horrible stench of iniquity," "weak natures"—and an "after"—"sweet smell of pure lilies," "blossom of the most dazzling flowers of Christian virtues"—the missionary's arrival was clearly explained through a list of adjectives that highlighted the great transformations he carried out despite the extreme difficulties, arousing the readers' admiration

42. Michael Sievernich, *La missione cristiana: Storia e presente* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2012), 233–43.
43. Petazzi gave great importance to the cover, because "man acts more through the senses than through the intellect": letter from Petazzi, November 28, 1914, in AEMSI, *FPVM*, *Serie residenze*, *Vol. Venezia—Missioni*, *Venezia Missioni; 1913–1917*. Francis Xavier was presented as an icon, a heroic example to the young missionary "who leaves his homeland in a sublime outburst of generous zeal to bring the light of the Gospel to his distant brothers buried in the darkness of ignorance and error; he perfectly knows the sacrifices and pains that are waiting for him"; Carmelo Tranchese, "Dall'Oregon: Una missione di Padri Italiani in America," *Le Missioni* 1, no. 15 (August 6, 1915): 286–89.
44. Giuseppe Petazzi, "La Stella dei Gentili," *Le Missioni* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 1920): 6–8.
45. The prints by Cornelis Bloemaert II and Jan Miel for the covers of *Le Missioni* 2, no. 13 (July 7, 1916) and for *Le Missioni* 4, no. 13 (July 5, 1918). See Rachel Miller, "From 'Apostle of Japan' to 'Apostle of All the Christian World': The Iconography of St. Francis Xavier and the Global Catholic Church," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 9, no. 3 (2022): 415–37.
46. Petazzi, "La Stella dei Gentili," 6–8.

and enthusiasm:[47] "Insatiable hunter of souls, a conqueror [...]. The missionary is the ideal priest, because he sacrifices everything: homeland, family, friends, for the benefit of distant and unknown peoples, from whom he will receive often ingratitude, perhaps [...] a slow martyrdom."[48]

This emphasis on hardships, illnesses, loneliness was another salient feature of the missionary press of the time, whose goal was to involve readers emotionally, induce them to pray for the missionary effort, and provide financial support.

Nevertheless, Petazzi's editorials, characterized by rather rhetorical and virulent tones, were affected by the urgent need to resume the missionary effort in the post-war period:[49] the chronic shortage of missionaries—a third had been lost due to the war—the economic difficulties, and the Protestant missionary competition subsidized by US associations were recurring themes in the magazine from the 1920s in particular.[50]

This rhetoric proposed a model deeply introjected by the missionaries, who would struggle to detach themselves from this self-sacrifice and epic self-representation. The missionary effort was presented as a one-way relationship, a crusade, in which the missionary was engaged as an agent both of evangelization and of civilization, another central *topos*: "The Missionary was the true conqueror, the true colonizer, the true herald of civilization."[51]Introducing the "Missions and Civilization" column, Fr. Domenico Valle explained that civilization must be defined not only as material progress, to which the missionaries also contributed as explorers and men of science (not "scientists" in a strict sense, although they often show perseverance, attention, and observation qualities), revealing many unknown treasures to civilized Europe; but above all, civilization meant the development of human faculties, which contributed to the individual and social well-being of these peoples: "Civilization is the daughter of the Cross and the other civilizations, the Brahminical, the Buddhist, or worse, the Muslim, are nothing but a shadow and a larva."[52]

The political and economic strength of colonialism, the successes of imperialism, and the idea of the modern West's "manifest destiny" inevitably influenced missionary theology and practice between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[53] There were reports that more than others recall that "knowledge of otherness [that] became part of

47. The military vocabulary also affected the entry "Mission" of the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. Alfred Vacant and Eugène Mangenot (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1929), 12:1865–66; see François de Medeiros, "Verso una chiesa planetaria: Dalle missioni a un cristianesimo planetario," in *Chiesa e papato nel mondo contemporaneo*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Andrea Riccardi (Rome: Laterza, 1990), 417–83.
48. "Il fuoco sacro," *Le Missioni* 8, nos. 5-6 (March 12, 1922): 68–69.
49. See Claude Soetens, "Pie XI et les missions: Influences et circonstances majeures (1922–1926)," in *Achille Ratti pape Pie XI: Actes du colloque de Rome (15–18 mars 1989)*, ed. École française de Rome (Rome: Collection de l'École française de Rome, 1996), 719–34.
50. See Daniela Saresella and Paolo Zanini, "Cattolici e protestanti nel Novecento, tra sfida globale e dimensione italiana," *Memoria e ricerca* 27, no. 60 (2019): 8–9.
51. Mattia Sarasola, "L'Indocina francese," *Le Missioni* 3, no. 6 (April 6, 1917): 104–7.
52. Domenico Valle, "Le Missioni e la Civiltà: Considerazioni generali," *Le Missioni* 3, no. 1 (January 5, 1917): 15–16.
53. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Teologia per la missione oggi: Costanti nel contesto* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2010). Concerning the influence of eurocentrism on missionary thought and practice, see Agostino Giovagnoli, "Universalismo cattolico e missioni *ad gentes*," in *La Chiesa e le culture: Missioni cattoliche e "scontro di civiltà"*, ed. Agostino Giovagnoli (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2005), 15–35.

the model of Jesuit missionary practice," that knowledge that was instrumental but also indispensable for defining the most adequate preaching.[54] Nonetheless, the attempts to offer more detailed descriptions inevitably ended in a series of value judgments. In his explanation of the totemism practiced by the African Batonga tribe, for example, Fr. Ambrose Casset reaffirmed that "when man distances himself from true Religion, he falls more or less covertly into a state of barbarism":[55]

> Because of the lack of intelligence, the draining climate, (even more) the pagan environment in which he is forced to live, the atavistic fetishism [...], the negro adult requires a long preparation and a long trial to reach Christianity.
>
> The negro is a child, a child in his uninhibited joy [...], in his brief melancholy [...], in his inconstancy [...]; above all in his lack of will. Not knowing how to control himself, he is a thief and a liar when necessary [...]. However, he has the good qualities of a child, the usual gaiety, the openness [...]; he has an innate sense of justice [...], the affectionate temperament, not deep, no, rather superficial [...], which does not prevent him from being cruel, inhuman, unjust. He is selfless, in general, generous [...]; in a word, he is a hybrid mixture of contrasts, of good and bad qualities, he is a child. Christianity exercises its beneficial influence on the negro [...]. The black race, so degraded and in the most abject state of abandon, then will rise to true civilization through Christianity![56]

Through the missionaries' reports, the magazine offered an almost global perspective of the world missionary presence: from the missions of Canada to those in Latin America, from the Asian missions to those in Oceania, including missions in Africa, Albania, and among the Italian emigrant communities abroad.[57] Nonetheless, they were mostly descriptive texts, still linked to the episodic, to the local dimension of a specific mission, focused on the closed horizon of an individual commitment. Compared to the following decade, an overall vision, one encompassing the situation of Catholic missions in different countries, was clearly lacking.

This was partly due to the lack of editorial supervision, as confirmed by Caselli, who complained in November 1920 that "currently the magazine is abandoned: no one cares about it [...]. It seems to me that he [Petazzi] neglects it almost on purpose [...]. These are human miseries: Father Petazzi is discouraged; the magazine is no longer his thing as before."

Caselli was referring to the long-term conflict of competences between the editor and the nominal director of the magazine, the superior of the Venetian community (in this period, for example, the superior Fr. Ambrogio Maria Fiocchi exercised his decision-making power, causing financial damage to the magazine). But there was a second issue, namely Petazzi's long absences from Venice due to his many activities:

54. Cuturi, "Adattarsi, modellare e convertire," 15.
55. Ambrose Casset, "Costumi Batonga," *Le Missioni* 6, no. 6 (March 19, 1920): 85–89.
56. Hilarion Gil, "Cuore e fede dei negri," *Le Missioni* 6, no. 6 (March 5, 1920): 70–72.
57. During the 1920s, the magazine also published a series of articles on the Armenian genocide.

"A great quality of Fr. Petazzi is his ability to put together material and know how to organize it," but according to Caselli this was not enough to avoid "the major inconveniences that everyone complained about the language, orthography, childishness, etc."[58]

Despite an editorial approach still influenced by a traditional idea of the "good missionary press" with primarily religious and pedagogical objectives based on the model of the edifying letters, the first fourteen years of *Le Missioni* give the impression of a work in progress, that is, of an assessment of the magazine as a result of the constant editorial commitment for its improvement (confirmed by the archival papers), even if there were ups and downs. During the 1920s in particular, the fixed columns gradually disappeared, and the magazine opened to advertisements in an effort to resolve its financial difficulties, while the shortage of paper led to a variable number of pages. On the other hand, the corresponding Jesuits increased as, consequently, did the nationalities represented in the magazine.

Starting from 1929, Pietro Costa, the editor-in-chief, led the magazine's transition toward new, albeit still primitive, forms of missionary journalism, aware of the importance of topicality to attract the attention, and therefore the support, of public opinion.

Missionary Romanticism and Missionary Topicality (1929–39)

The change of the cover was the most immediate sign of the editorial turning point that opened the new decade. The traditional Jesuit-Christocentric iconography as well as the cliché verre technique were replaced by photography, providing a "cleaner," more modern appearance. For the first time, the missionary context acquired a visual specificity thanks to a round photographic close-up of a native, usually a child.

In this second phase, *Le Missioni* systematically pursued its original educational goal through thematic articles and reportage (also by the Vatican agency for missionary information Fides and its director, the Jesuit Herman Haeck), which coexisted, as a second register, with those hybrid texts previously mentioned. Facing a growing ideological conflict unfavorable to the presence of Christian missions, the magazine adopted a new approach and a more journalistic style, involving the reader in a more careful examination of political, social, cultural, and religious issues.

This change of approach concerned Asia, and India in particular, which dominated the magazine's coverage in this period.[59] Facing a precocious and effervescent (compared to the African continent) anti-colonialist protest[60] that considered religion as an element of national identity and Christianity as a "foreign agency of denationalization," the missionaries found in *Le Missioni* the opportunity to explain to the reader, through increasingly detailed reflection, their understandable concern for the safeguarding of the Catholic presence.

58. Letter from Ettore Caselli, November 6, 1920, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Le Missioni 1918–1921: Periodico Missioni*.
59. See for example the monographic issue *Le Missioni* 24, no. 3 (February 4, 1938).
60. See Bernard Droz, *Storia della decolonizzazione nel XX secolo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2010).

In 1921, for example, Fr. Domenico Ferroli described the Indian situation as resulting from a "fanatic nationalist spirit," born from hatred toward the Europeans who had brought India many benefits:

> The Europeans laboriously plowed the land and then the Indians enjoyed the fruits. They persuaded themselves that their homeland had not always been oppressed and degraded; that the conquests of Indian thought were equal with the conquests of Greek thought [...]; so they pity or detest the Missionaries who, at least through their work, deny such superiority of India.[61]

These first attempts to shift from an anecdotal narrative to a more contextualized analysis lacked in information and were affected by the missionaries' personal feelings at what they viewed as the unjust treatment reserved for the Catholic missionary, who, "son of the West," had brought Western civilization and splendor to Asia.[62]

During the 1930s, instead, the keyword was "missionary topicality" (*attualità missionaria*), and the missionaries supported their personal considerations with detailed descriptions of the instances and protagonists, [63] now focusing on the results that had been achieved and on the strategies that should be adopted in these new scenarios:

> Now for example, a lot is written about the Indian unrest [...], about the Congress, about Nehru [...]. The Magazine must not engage in politics but study the causes of political factors and their relationships with the Missions; it seems to me that this would be appreciated by readers who experienced the present issues, it would make the Magazine more interesting, it would break the monotony of the reports, which are beautiful but with the same color. Such articles can be written, with true competence, only by those who have lived in that context.[64]

According to this new approach, the reader was informed—thanks also to the collaboration of non-European correspondents—about the concrete missionary challenges represented not only by Indian nationalism but also by "Pan-Asianism" (led by Japanese Buddhism) by the "Pan-Islamic efforts" in the Arab world, and by communist propaganda, which in Asia and Africa "paints the priest and the missionary as the long hand of imperialist slavery."[65]

The magazine approached this issue from different perspectives. A recurrent theme of this decade concerned the missionary method. The example of Christian charity and the apostolate of medicine could still be sufficient to approach the back-

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61. Domenico Ferroli, "Nazionalismo Indiano e Missioni Cattoliche," *Le Missioni* 7, no. 22 (November 18, 1921): 313–15.
62. Luigi Martignone, "La Cina si sveglia," *Le Missioni* 9, no. 24 (December 21, 1923): 374.
63. E. Galthier, "Gandhi l'agitatore dell'India," *Le Missioni* 16, no. 22 (November 21, 1930): 481–83.
64. Letter from Pietro Costa to the provincial Paolo Dezza, April 19, 1937, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Le Missioni: Trasferimento da Venezia? 1936–37*. The archival papers do not reveal whether this approach was spontaneous or encouraged by the editor.
65. Pietro Costa, "All'alba del nuovo anno," *Le Missioni* 24, no. 1 (January 7, 1938): 3.

ward populations and convince them of the superiority and goodness of Christianity compared to the traditional religions ("With these charitable works, we show the charity that animates us, whose source is divine [...]. Yes, the pariah comes to us first of all for material bread").[66] But in the new scenarios, evangelization should also rely on the "Society's main weapons," that is, the press and the educational apostolate, and the scientific one, which aimed to sensitize the upper and most scholarly classes to the Christian message in the hope that they would represent an example for the lower ones and defend the rights of the Catholic Church in institutional contexts. Hence the need for a trained missionary clergy and the foundation of colleges and universities, "without which the Church, humble and despised, would be perpetually condemned to hold the last place in Indian society."[67]

But the prospects, at the beginning of 1939, were not promising if Petazzi hoped

> for missionaries well versed in the human and divine sciences, theology, philosophy, history, physical and mathematical sciences, who apply themselves with perseverance to the study of native languages, not to stammer a few words, as often, too often, happens today with our missionaries, but to read quickly and also, if possible, write gracefully. Then these missionaries will no longer be ashamed; on the contrary, they will have pleasure in dealing with the leaders of those regions to convert them and to convert the whole nation through them. Then, but only then, all the people will be converted.[68]

In this sense, compared to its first years, *Le Missioni* offered a modest contribution by carefully exploring non-Christian religions in their historical-cultural expressions and consequent impacts on mentality and customs.[69]

Christianity was still presented as essential for those countries seeking forms of political and cultural autonomy, because "to assimilate European civilization without that [Christianity] which is, like it or not, the very essence of that civilization, is like blowing up the tracks of all progress."[70]

Nevertheless, this paternalistic approach did not affect the objectivity pursued by the magazine's editorial line. This was clearly exemplified by the "Islamic articles," signed by Fr. Giovanni Fausti—and later, under his supervision, by Fr. Antonio Toldo—who tried to "cast an objective glance" over the Islamic awakening as a challenge for the evangelization effort: not only were Muslims notoriously resistant to conversion; Islam itself was seen as a "barrier that separates Christianity from paganism."[71] The

66. Alfred Bonhoure, "Psicologia della conversione," *Le Missioni* 24, nos. 17–18 (September 15, 1938): 376–79.
67. Giuseppe Taffarel, "Gesù Cristo nell'India," *Le Missioni* 23, no. 11 (June 4, 1937): 258–60; but see also Enrico Müller, "L'importanza delle scuole cattoliche nel Giappone," *Le Missioni* 16, no. 11 (June 6, 1930): 253–54 and others.
68. Giuseppe Petazzi, "Dopo 25 anni: Infedeli 1.300 milioni," *Le Missioni* 25, no. 1 (January 6, 1939): 2–4.
69. Enrique Heras, "Scultura cristiana indigena," *Le Missioni* 25, no. 6 (March 17, 1939): 139–42; E. Goossens, "L'arte nel Giappone," *Le Missioni* 25, nos. 13–14 (July 15, 1939): 309–12 and others.
70. Giuseppe Keller, "Che cosa desidera il Giappone," *Le Missioni* 21, no. 9 (May 3, 1935): 226–28.
71. Giovanni Fausti, "Noi e l'Islam," *Le Missioni* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1937): 7–10.

two Jesuits published a series of detailed articles on Islamic doctrine, which in 1924 was still defined as a "filthy superstition":[72]

> To understand the state of their souls [...], we must take them as they are, and show them that we know how to appreciate what is true in their religion [...]. Among the truths of the Gospel, there are many that agree with Muslim teaching [...]; the eternal and immutable truth of the Gospels must be, in its presentation to the Muslim element, adapted to their particular mentality, so as to be accessible and acceptable to them.[73]

The "missionary topicality" approach was not unanimously shared, however. Although Costa considered the Islamic issue "highly topical" and defended these articles, which were appreciated by readers "who had no other opportunity to learn about the problem," they were eventually abandoned in the face of Testore's complaints (supported by the provincial) that they had no relevance to the Society's missions.[74]

While the mission territories in Asia and North Africa gradually acquired a sociopolitical and cultural dimension, the missionary presence in the rest of the African continent was still portrayed through the lens of heroism and civilizing sacrifice:[75]

> The twenty-five years I spent in Africa seem very short to me. Over there, you don't have time to get bored. [...] Deformed fingers, chapped palm, because he [the missionary] has been a bricklayer, a peasant. [...] The lines of this hand show the man of action, the man of reality.[76]

The Italian–Ethiopian conflict (1935–36) provided an opportunity for Testore to publish a series of long articles on Abyssinian Christianity and on the Jesuit presence at the end of the sixteenth century (for which, however, Costa received several complaints because "people prefer topicality"),[77] as well as to reaffirm "the civilizing evolution that the church directs"—by multiplying road works, the conflict had facilitated communications and commercial relations, indirectly making evangelization easier:[78]

> The missionary is an apostle who turns every savage into a man, every man into a Christian, every Christian into a citizen, every citizen into an instrument that cooperates for the benefit of the community; he is the first and most beneficial civilizer who elevates the customs of the natives, provides them with the

72. [Petazzi], "Per la conversione dei maomettani," *Le Missioni* 10, no. 7 (April 4, 1924): 97.
73. Giovanni Fausti, "Noi e l'Islam," *Le Missioni* 23, no. 2 (January 15, 1937): 43–45.
74. Letter from Pietro Costa to the provincial Paolo Dezza, January 18, 1939 in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Missioni*.
75. Concerning the "African missionary methodology," see Aldo Gilli, "La Chiesa in Africa dalla Conferenza di Berlino alla Grande Guerra (1885–1918)" and Fidel González, "La formazione delle chiese africane (1914–1965)," in *Storia del Cristianesimo 1878–2005: Le missioni cattoliche*, ed. Elio Guerriero (Milan: San Paolo, 2005), 1–18, 19–43
76. Gauthier, "Cose curiose ed edificanti," *Le Missioni* 20, no. 5 (March 2, 1934): 124–26.
77. Letter from Pietro Costa to the provincial Paolo Dezza, January 18, 1939.
78. Angelo Mizzi [O.M.I.], "Stato attuale delle missioni in Etiopia," *Le Missioni* 21, no. 20 (October 18, 1935): 456–57.

> notions of their duties and rights, settles their quarrels and disputes, brings them to a peaceful and honest coexistence and helps them make that pact of brotherhood, which, made in the shadow of the Cross, is the foundation of good and real progress.[79]

The articles and reports on the threat represented by Soviet and Chinese communism, the Spanish Civil War,[80] the political tumult of anticlerical Mexico—which caused many losses among the Jesuits, justifying the more exasperated tones—enriched the magazine's content during this decade. However, the rise of *Le Missioni*, which also resisted the pressing competition of other missionary publications (including those of the other Jesuit Italian provinces)[81] suffered its first setback in 1939, when restrictions on the supply of cellulose imposed a reduction in pages.[82]

Despite the increasing difficulties during the Second World War, particularly in staying in touch with the missionary correspondents abroad, the magazine continued to be published, but it switched to a monthly publication in 1942, with only eight to ten pages and stopping the yearly *Strenna*. Subscriptions almost halved (from forty-four thousand in 1938 to twenty-six thousand in 1946): this was certainly due in part to the "tragic conditions" Italy experienced, divided into two since 1943, but probably also the significant deterioration in editorial quality may have led to a decline in the magazine's popularity.[83]

Missionaries without Romance (1945–69)

After the Second World War, the magazine slowly recovered, eventually restoring the twenty pages: the goal was to sell fifty thousand copies, "as in the best pre-war times."[84] Perhaps because of this objective, the magazine pursued that successful model until 1953.

However, the idea of a renewal was already under discussion. It was a troubled process due to the "complete difference of views" between the two protagonists of the editorial turning point of 1954, the director Fr. Egidio Marcolini (1947–62) and the editor-in-chief Fr. Silvio Zarattini:[85]

> Whoever loses the field today, with eighty missionary magazines in Italy, [...] is lost forever! [....] Italy is not America. The magazine needs to be improved, I'm

79. [Pietro Costa], "Mobilitazione universale," *Le Missioni* 21, no. 19 (October 4, 1935): 417.
80. See "Nella Spagna terra della nuova crociata," *Le Missioni* 22, no. 24 (December 18, 1936): 519–22 and others.
81. The most cited example was that of the Canossian Daughters of Charity: their institutes cancelled a thousand subscriptions in a few weeks in favor of their own magazines *Vita canossiana* and *Fanciulla missionaria*.
82. [Pietro Costa], "Quando si provano i veri amici," *Le Missioni* 25, no. 19 (October 6, 1939): 403.
83. *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù: Promemoria*, n.d., in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Le Missioni: Trasferimento da Venezia? 1936–37*.
84. Letter to Egidio Marcolini, July 17, 1947, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Venezia Missioni 1947–51*. Starting from the post-Second World War period, unlike the previous decades, the archival documentation does not preserve annual reports of subscriptions.
85. Letter from Fr. Antonio Barbanti to the provincial Pietro Dalle Nogare, April 14, 1953, in AEMSI, *FPVM, Serie residenze, Vol. Venezia—Missioni, Missioni 1952–53*.

> the first to say it [...], but it must remain a missionary magazine, beautiful but not luxury; interesting but unpretentious; decent but not very expensive [...]. If we try to compete with the big press, we will be crushed [...]. The beautiful, big press, people already have it [...]. We are barely tolerated [...]. A mistake in the approach could be irreparable [...] I would therefore believe it would be more prudent to improve little by little [...]. Is it worth killing an old magazine that in the last year, for our province alone, has provided four scholarships of 250,000 lire each (just a million) without counting the other donations?[86]

Marcolini's proposal for a "prudent evolution" did not prevail over the "new formula" or "Zarattini's formula," for whom the superiors asked "the freedom necessary to launch a renewed magazine [...]. The magazine is too important for us not to make every sacrifice for it at this moment."[87]

Very similar in style to the most popular Italian news magazines *Epoca* and *Tempo*—characterized by a large format and photographic reports—*Le Missioni* now presented itself as an international magazine, entrusted to a fixed editorial staff, including laypeople, in collaboration with the correspondents of the seventy Jesuit magazines around the world.[88]

Missionary topicality definitively assumed a preponderant weight: the analysis of socio-political (Fr. Max Taggi's "Il Problema del Mese" [The problem of the month]), theological (Fr. Jean Danielou's articles), and cultural (for example Camillo Bassotto's column about ethnographic cinema, "Il Film del Mese" [The movie of the month]) issues pursued the traditional objective of "helping understand and live Christianity on a global scale,"[89] informing readers about both "the Church's difficulties in mission lands on the political and social level" and the cultural and artistic expressions of the peoples "among which the missionary lives and works,"[90] expressions of a complexity "that the Church respects":[91] "We do not talk about politics, art, cinema etc. like any other news magazine, but only insofar as politics, art etc. are connected with the immense work of Christianization of the world."[92]

The missionary church's priority was not to "miss the bus": it had to work for the material and, above all, spiritual development of these people, beside the newborn international agencies, "the apostles of mechanical civilization," herald of an "exclusively materialistic conception of life."[93] Catholic participation in the political and cultural life

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86. *Promemoria sulla situazione delle Missioni di Venezia*, from Egidio Marcolini to the provincial Pietro Dalle Nogare, May 10, 1953, in AEMSI, *FPVM*, *Serie residenze*, *Vol. Venezia—Missioni*, *Missioni 1952–53*.
87. Letter to Egidio Marcolini, September 5, 1953, in AEMSI, *FPVM*, *Serie residenze*, *Vol. Venezia—Missioni*, *Missioni 1952–53*.
88. In 1958, the number of pages increased from thirty-two to forty-eight, and a brief section summarized the main issues in English, French, German, and Spanish, respectively. The archival documents don't explain the involvement of lay personnel, which should probably be considered an attempt to offer the reader an expert's point of view on the different fields.
89. [Editorial], *Le Missioni* 40, no. 11 (November 1954): 2.
90. "[Letter no. 48] Nella vostra rivista mescolate tante cose!," *Le Missioni* 61, no. 1 (January 1955): 2.
91. Silvio Zarattini, [Editorial], *Le Missioni* 41, no. 7 (July 1955): 2.
92. "[Letter no. 48] Nella vostra rivista mescolate tante cose!," 2.
93. Max Taggi, "Industrializzazione cristiana," *Le Missioni* 39, no. 9 (September 1953): 169–70.

of those countries was indispensable, but the church had to respect their peculiarities: for the first time, the term "adaptation" (*adattamento*) became part of the magazine's vocabulary, claimed to be the bedrock of the Society's missionary method.[94]

However, apart from its aesthetic modernization, the magazine did not actually change but rather developed the potential that had already emerged during the 1930s. The presence of two registers, that is, content suitable for a popular audience beside more specific articles, was guaranteed hereafter by the extensive and modern photographic reports (which gradually led to a considerable increase in pages but also to a proportional reduction of the content, often reduced to short captions), as well as by more familiar content, such as the serialized stories, the most important Jesuit missionaries' biographies, and Fr. Pierignazio Filippetto's short column "Le Religioni" (The religions). The magazine also reserved new spaces for radio and television programs.

Considering the magazine as a whole, the real change of 1954 was the detachment from the edifying letters model, required by the new needs of missionary journalism, which consequently led to the gradual replacement of the missionary base as author and first-hand correspondent. This meant a change in focus from the narrow field of the missionaries' action to the problematization of the missionary effort in its complexity.

This editorial decision answered to a change of perspective clearly expressed by Fr. Pierre Charles but progressively clarified also by Pius XII (r.1939–58):[95]

> Talking about the Missions with enthusiasm has always been fashionable; but we have paid dearly for this declamatory rhetoric. [...] First it was the fight against the devil who holds all pagans in bondage. But the boundaries between the domains of Satan and those of God are not drawn with such precise lines on our maps. And finally it was the Missionary armed with his crucifix, who left his weeping mother and went to preach and baptize the kneeling crowds, challenging the lions of Africa and the snakes of India, to then fall martyr under the blows of bloodthirsty executioners. Here, too, the perspective needs to be corrected.
>
> The Missionary's first battle, a rough and long and annoying battle, is to sit and learn a language. What really matters is to know the real conditions and concrete needs of the apostolate; and this is not achieved with four blasts of the oratory trumpet.[96]

Some of the letters that *Le Missioni* published at the beginning of the 1950s showed how difficult it was for missionaries to abandon the romantic self-representation and civilization perspective. The new approach did not reject the past missionary figure, whose primary work as a pioneer required muscular strength and courage, "the predispositions of a cowboy." "Purity, courage for ordinary daily sacrifice, supernatural

94. "India difficile," *Le Missioni* 37, no. 6 (June 1951): 2.
95. "Fine del romanticismo," *Le Missioni* 36, no. 11 (November 1950): 192–93; the article reported Pius XII's letter to Cardinal Pietro Fumasoni Biondi on the occasion of the International Missionary Congress, Rome, September 5–7, 1950.
96. Pierre Charles, "Missionari senza romanzo," *Le Missioni* 34, no. 11 (November 1948): 145.

vision [...], balance and practical sense, the good mood that supports optimism"[97] were still necessary qualities, but the magazine increasingly stressed the new challenges, which required knowledge and training in particular, both from the missionaries and the native clergy ("many vocations are required, but [...] they must also be selected").[98]

The magazine's new top-down perspective, adopted to the detriment of the missionary base's point of view, did not go unnoticed. During the first two years, thanks to the new space reserved for the readers' letters (who lost their traditional role as magazine propagandists), the editorial team collected their impressions about the "new formula." The most negative opinions came from the Jesuit missionaries themselves, while the positive ones were "all from laypeople":

> Why do you talk about so many things that have nothing to do with it, why do you admit so many non-Jesuit contributions, almost forgetting that the title is *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù*? Don't we have four centuries of missionary glories and currently five thousand Missionaries to talk about? [...] The Society of Jesus has only this magazine in Italy to talk about its Missions. If you distort it, it will no longer have any. [Fr. Bobbio S.J., Manila][99]

> The magazine is certainly beautiful, but it is done on paper [*a tavolino*]. Here on the front line, we sweat and bleed quite differently. [Fr. Taffarel S.J., India]

> It seems that the Editors are excessively concerned with covering up miseries with oblivion and silence [...]. Doesn't missionary work largely consist in alleviating miseries? [Fr. Tescaroli F.S.C.J., Sudan][100]

"Printing means exposing yourself [...]. The press is cause, but also somewhat effect of public opinion: it creates and directs it, but it is also influenced by it":[101] probably in order not to lose the support of the missionary base, the magazine partially restored, beside the so-called "documenting articles," new "nice"[102] descriptive reports that joined other contents particularly appreciated by the missionaries, that is, the serialized stories *Il grande Vestenera* (The great black robe). Nonetheless, the editorial team's answer to criticism recalled, with different words, the objective already set out by Petazzi forty years earlier: *Le Missioni* was "neither a general magazine of missionary culture nor a bulletin [but] a complex magazine" intended for everyone but "not all of it for everyone."[103]

In the following decade, the magazine expanded to a monthly publication of eighty to one hundred pages. The progressive articulation of the content corresponded to

97. "[Riservato ai giovani] L'Italia deve dare di più," *Le Missioni* 40, nos. 7–8 (July–August 1954): 28.
98. Max Taggi, "Perché il clero indigeno?," *Le Missioni* 40, no. 10 (October 1954): 5. See Agostino Giovagnoli, "Pio XII e la decolonizzazione," in *Pio XII*, ed. Andrea Riccardi (Rome: Laterza, 1985), 179–209.
99. "[Letter no. 38] Calda, fredda, tiepida?," *Le Missioni* 40, no. 10 (October 1954): 2.
100. "Risultati di un'inchiesta," *Le Missioni* 41, no. 3 (March 1955): 2.
101. "Risultati di un'inchiesta," 2.
102. Silvio Zarattini, [Editorial], *Le Missioni* 41, no. 12 (December 1955): 2.
103. "Risultati di un'inchiesta," 2.

the growing ferment inside the Christian world before and after the Second Vatican Council: new sections such as "Notizie dal Concilio" (News from the council), "Notizie ecumeniche" (Ecumenical news), "Cosmorama Africa," "Uomini e fatti al vaglio" (Men and facts under examination), and so on confirmed the traditional editorial commitment of *Le Missioni* to inform and help the readers' understand, from a Christian perspective, the great geopolitical, economic, and social issues of the twentieth century and the consequent new challenges for the missionary church. According to the different languages, sensitivities, practical and ideological constraints of each time, but also to the Jesuit approach, the magazine was able to pursue its original mission, skillfully combining the traditional focus on the Catholic missionary presence and the valorization of local cultures in their encounter with Christianity.

Thanks to this continuity, but also as an official organ of the Society of Jesus, the magazine could present itself as an authoritative guide even to the missionary base itself, partially disoriented by the progressive modernization of the forms of religious communication and by the conciliar reformism, which opened to a rethinking of the Catholic missionary presence and to a renewal of pastoral strategies. Illiteracy, economic inequalities, civil rights, international migration, climate crises: these were the new themes that the magazine approached, trying to indicate the way for a growing solidarity between the church and the world, based on the acceptance of an unprecedented institutional, cultural, and religious pluralism.

At the end of this first phase as *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù* (1915–69), the magazine was one of the few widely circulating missionary magazines in Italy besides the Combonian *Nigrizia* and PIME's *Mondo e Missione* (the new title for *Le Missioni Cattoliche* from 1969), resisting a general impoverishment of the editorial offer (despite the positive trend that Italy—and Spain—showed compared to the crisis of missionary mobilization in the West)[104] and the progressive identity crisis of the missionary world.

104. Zorn, "Crisi e mutamenti della missione cristiana," 316.