



“The Paths of Mission”

Chapter V of John Paul II’s

Redemptoris Missio:

On the Permanent Validity

of the Church's Missionary Mandate

7 December 1990

Contents of *Redemptoris Missio*

Blessing

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CHAPTER V - THE PATHS OF MISSION

41. "Missionary activity is nothing other and nothing less than the manifestation or epiphany of God's plan and its fulfillment in the world and in history; in this history God, by means of missions, clearly accomplishes the history of salvation."⁶⁸ What paths does the Church follow in order to achieve this goal?

Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways. Among these ways, some have particular importance in the present situation of the Church and the world.

The First Form of Evangelization Is Witness

42. People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers,⁶⁹ in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ, whose mission we continue, is the "witness" *par excellence* (Rv 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Church along her way and associates her with the witness he gives to Christ (cf. Jn 15:26-27).

The first form of witness is *the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community*, which reveal a new way of living. The missionary who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities. But everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness;⁷⁰ in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary.

The evangelical witness which the world finds most appealing is that of concern for people, and of charity toward the poor, the weak and those who suffer. The complete generosity underlying this attitude and these actions stands in marked contrast to human selfishness. It raises precise questions which lead to God and to the Gospel. A commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion is also a witness to the Gospel when it is a sign of concern for persons and is directed toward integral human development.⁷¹

43. Christians and Christian communities are very much a part of the life of their respective nations and can be a sign of the Gospel in their fidelity to their native land, people and national culture, while always preserving the freedom brought by Christ. Christianity is open to universal brotherhood, for all men and women are sons and daughters of the same Father and brothers and sisters in Christ.

⁶⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 9; cf. Chapter II, 10-18.

⁶⁹ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41: *loc. cit.*, 31 f.

⁷⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 28, 35, 38; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 43; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 11-12.

⁷¹ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967), 21, 42: AAS 59 (1967), 267f, 278.

The Church is called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power; by not seeking her own glory and material wealth; by using her resources to serve the poorest of the poor and by imitating Christ's own simplicity of life. The Church and her missionaries must also bear the witness of humility, above all with regard to themselves—a humility which allows them to make a personal and communal examination of conscience in order to correct in their behavior whatever is contrary to the Gospel and disfigures the face of Christ.

The Initial Proclamation of Christ the Savior

44. Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the "Good News" about their being loved and saved by God. "Evangelization will always contain—as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism—a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy."⁷² All forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation, which reveals and gives access to the mystery hidden for ages and made known in Christ (cf. Eph 3:3-9; Col 1:25-29), the mystery which lies at the heart of the Church's mission and life, as the hinge on which all evangelization turns.

In the complex reality of mission, initial proclamation has a central and irreplaceable role, since it introduces man "into the mystery of the love of God, who invites him to enter into a personal relationship with himself in Christ"⁷³ and opens the way to conversion. Faith is born of preaching, and every ecclesial community draws its origin and life from the personal response of each believer to that preaching.⁷⁴ Just as the whole economy of salvation has its center in Christ, so too all missionary activity is directed to the proclamation of his mystery.

The subject of proclamation is Christ who was crucified, died and is risen: through him is accomplished our full and authentic liberation from evil, sin and death; through him God bestows "new life" that is divine and eternal. This is the "Good News" which changes man and his history, and which all peoples have a right to hear. This proclamation is to be made within the context of the lives of the individuals and peoples who receive it. It is to be made with an attitude of love and esteem toward those who hear it, in language which is practical and adapted to the situation. In this proclamation the Spirit is at work and establishes a communion between the missionary and his hearers, a communion which is possible inasmuch as both enter into communion with God the Father through Christ.⁷⁵

45. Proclamation, because it is made in union with the entire ecclesial community, is never a merely personal act. The missionary is present and carries out his work by virtue of a mandate he has received; even if he finds himself alone, he remains joined by invisible but profound bonds to the evangelizing activity of the whole Church.⁷⁶ Sooner or later, his hearers come to recognize in him the community which sent him and which supports him.

⁷² Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 27: *loc. cit.*, 23.

⁷³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 13.

⁷⁴ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15: *loc. cit.*, 13-15; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 13-14.

⁷⁵ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 42, 64: *loc. cit.*, 857-859, 892-894.

⁷⁶ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 60: *loc. cit.*, 50f.

Proclamation is inspired by faith, which gives rise to enthusiasm and fervor in the missionary. As already mentioned, the Acts of the Apostles uses the word *parrhesia* to describe this attitude, a word which means to speak frankly and with courage. This term is found also in St. Paul: "We had courage in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God in the face of great opposition" (1 Th 2:2); "Pray...also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph 6:18-20).

In proclaiming Christ to non-Christians, the missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation, and so he does not become discouraged or cease his witness even when he is called to manifest his faith in an environment that is hostile or indifferent. He knows that the Spirit of the Father is speaking through him (cf. Mt 10:17-20; Lk 12:11-12) and he can say with the apostles: "We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:32). He knows that he is not proclaiming a human truth, but the "word of God," which has an intrinsic and mysterious power of its own (cf. Rom 1:16).

The supreme test is the giving of one's life, to the point of accepting death in order to bear witness to one's faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout Christian history, martyrs, that is, "witnesses," have always been numerous and indispensable to the spread of the Gospel. In our own age, there are many: bishops, priests, men and women religious, lay people—often unknown heroes who give their lives to bear witness to the faith. They are *par excellence* the heralds and witnesses of the faith.

Conversion and Baptism

46. The proclamation of the Word of God has *Christian conversion* as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith. Conversion is a gift of God, a work of the Blessed Trinity. It is the Spirit who opens people's hearts so that they can believe in Christ and "confess him" (cf. 1 Cor 12:3); of those who draw near to him through faith Jesus says: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn 6:44).

From the outset, conversion is expressed in faith which is total and radical, and which neither limits nor hinders God's gift. At the same time, it gives rise to a dynamic and lifelong process which demands a continual turning away from "life according to the flesh" to "life according to the Spirit" (cf. Rom 8:3-13). Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple.

The Church calls all people to this conversion, following the example of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ by "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4), as well as the example of Christ himself, who "after John was arrested,...came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God and saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; *repent* and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:14-15).

Nowadays the call to conversion which missionaries address to non-Christians is put into question or passed over in silence. It is seen as an act of "proselytizing"; it is claimed that it is enough to help people to become more human or more faithful to their own religion, that it is

enough to build communities capable of working for justice, freedom, peace and solidarity. What is overlooked is that every person has the right to hear the "Good News" of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ, so that each one can live out in its fullness his or her proper calling. This lofty reality is expressed in the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God," and in the unconscious but ardent desire of the woman: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst" (Jn 4:10, 15).

47. The apostles, prompted by the Spirit, invited all to change their lives, to be converted and to be baptized. Immediately after the event of Pentecost, Peter spoke convincingly to the crowd: "When they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, '*Repent*, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:37-38). That very day some three thousand persons were baptized. And again, after the healing of the lame man, Peter spoke to the crowd and repeated: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out!" (Acts 3:19)

Conversion to Christ is joined to Baptism not only because of the Church's practice, but also by the will of Christ himself, who sent the apostles to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them (cf. Mt 28:19). Conversion is also joined to Baptism because of the intrinsic need to receive the fullness of new life in Christ. As Jesus says to Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). In Baptism, in fact, we are born anew to the life of God's children, united to Jesus Christ and anointed in the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not simply a seal of conversion, and a kind of external sign indicating conversion and attesting to it. Rather, it is the sacrament which signifies and effects rebirth from the Spirit, establishes real and unbreakable bonds with the Blessed Trinity, and makes us members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

All this needs to be said, since not a few people, precisely in those areas involved in the mission *ad gentes*, tend to separate conversion to Christ from Baptism, regarding Baptism as unnecessary. It is true that in some places sociological considerations associated with Baptism obscure its genuine meaning as an act of faith. This is due to a variety of historical and cultural factors which must be removed where they still exist, so that the sacrament of spiritual rebirth can be seen for what it truly is. Local ecclesial communities must devote themselves to this task. It is also true that many profess an interior commitment to Christ and his message yet do not wish to be committed sacramentally, since, owing to prejudice or because of the failings of Christians, they find it difficult to grasp the true nature of the Church as a mystery of faith and love.⁷⁷ I wish to encourage such people to be fully open to Christ, and to remind them that, if they feel drawn to Christ, it was he himself who desired that the Church should be the "place" where they would in fact find him. At the same time, I invite the Christian faithful, both individually and as communities, to bear authentic witness to Christ through the new life they have received.

Certainly, every convert is a gift to the Church and represents a serious responsibility for her, not only because converts have to be prepared for Baptism through the catechumenate and then be guided by religious instruction, but also because - especially in the case of adults - such converts bring with them a kind of new energy, an enthusiasm for the faith, and a desire to see the Gospel lived out in the Church. They would be greatly disappointed if, having entered the ecclesial community, they were to find a life lacking fervor and without signs of renewal! We cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted anew every day.

⁷⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 6-9.

Forming Local Churches

48. Conversion and Baptism give entry into a Church already in existence or require the establishment of new communities which confess Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is part of God's plan, for it pleases him "to call human beings to share in his own life not merely as individuals, without any unifying bond between them, but rather to make them into a people in which his children, who had been widely scattered, might be gathered together in unity."⁷⁸

The mission *ad gentes* has this objective: to found Christian communities and develop churches to their full maturity. This is a central and determining goal of missionary activity, so much so that the mission is not completed until it succeeds in building a new particular church which functions normally in its local setting. The Decree *Ad Gentes* deals with this subject at length,⁷⁹ and since the Council, a line of theological reflection has developed which emphasizes that the whole mystery of the Church is contained in each particular church, provided it does not isolate itself but remains in communion with the universal Church and becomes missionary in its own turn. Here we are speaking of a great and lengthy process, in which it is hard to identify the precise stage at which missionary activity properly so-called comes to an end and is replaced by pastoral activity. Even so, certain points must remain clear.

49. It is necessary first and foremost to strive to establish Christian communities everywhere, communities which are "a sign of the presence of God in the world"⁸⁰ and which grow until they become churches. Notwithstanding the high number of dioceses, there are still very large areas where there are no local churches or where their number is insufficient in relation to the vastness of the territory and the density of the population. There is still much to be done in implanting and developing the Church. This phase of ecclesial history, called the *plantatio Ecclesiae*, has not reached its end; indeed, for much of the human race it has yet to begin.

Responsibility for this task belongs to the universal Church and to the particular churches, to the whole people of God and to all its missionary forces. Every church, even one made up of recent converts, is missionary by its very nature, and is both evangelized and evangelizing. Faith must always be presented as a gift of God to be lived out in community (families, parishes, associations), and to be extended to others through witness in word and deed. The evangelizing activity of the Christian community, first in its own locality, and then elsewhere as part of the Church's universal mission, is the clearest sign of a mature faith. A radical conversion in thinking is required in order to become missionary, and this holds true both for individuals and entire communities. The Lord is always calling us to come out of ourselves and to share with others the goods we possess, starting with the most precious gift of all - our faith. The effectiveness of the Church's organizations, movements, parishes and apostolic works must be measured in the light of this missionary imperative. Only by becoming missionary will the Christian community be able to overcome its internal divisions and tensions, and rediscover its unity and its strength of faith.

⁷⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 2; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

⁷⁹ Cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, Chapter III, 19-22.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

Missionary personnel coming from other churches and countries must work in communion with their local counterparts for the development of the Christian community. In particular, it falls to missionary personnel - in accordance with the directives of the bishops and in cooperation with those responsible at the local level - to foster the spread of the faith and the expansion of the Church in non-Christian environments and among non-Christian groups, and to encourage a missionary sense within the particular churches, so that pastoral concern will always be combined with concern for the mission *ad gentes*. In this way, every church will make its own the solicitude of Christ the Good Shepherd, who fully devotes himself to his flock, but at the same time is mindful of the "other sheep, that are not of this fold." (Jn 10:16)

50. This solicitude will serve as a motivation and stimulus for a renewed commitment to ecumenism. The relationship between *ecumenical activity* and *missionary activity* makes it necessary to consider two closely associated factors. On the one hand, we must recognize that "the division among Christians damages the holy work of preaching the Gospel to every creature and is a barrier for many in their approach to the faith."⁸¹ The fact that the Good News of reconciliation is preached by Christians who are divided among themselves weakens their witness. It is thus urgent to work for the unity of Christians, so that missionary activity can be more effective. At the same time we must not forget that efforts toward unity are themselves a sign of the work of reconciliation which God is bringing about in our midst.

On the other hand, it is true that some kind of communion, though imperfect, exists among all those who have received Baptism in Christ. On this basis the Council established the principle that "while all appearance of indifferentism and confusion is ruled out, as well as any appearance of unhealthy rivalry, Catholics should collaborate in a spirit of fellowship with their separated brothers and sisters in accordance with the norms of the Decree on Ecumenism: by a common profession of faith in God and in Jesus Christ before the nations - to the extent that this is possible - and by their cooperation in social and technical as well as in cultural and religious matters."⁸²

Ecumenical activity and harmonious witness to Jesus Christ by Christians who belong to different churches and ecclesial communities has already borne abundant fruit. But it is ever more urgent that they work and bear witness together at this time when Christian and para-Christian sects are sowing confusion by their activity. The expansion of these sects represents a threat for the Catholic Church and for all the ecclesial communities with which she is engaged in dialogue. Wherever possible, and in the light of local circumstances, the response of Christians can itself be an ecumenical one.

⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

⁸² Ibid., 15; cf. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

"Ecclesial Basic Communities" as a Force for Evangelization

51. A rapidly growing phenomenon in the young churches - one sometimes fostered by the bishops and their Conferences as a pastoral priority - is that of "ecclesial basic communities" (also known by other names) which are proving to be good centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach. These are groups of Christians who, at the level of the family or in a similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, Scripture reading, catechesis, and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment. These communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a "civilization of love."

These communities decentralize and organize the parish community, to which they always remain united. They take root in less privileged and rural areas, and become a leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and neglected, and of commitment to the transformation of society. Within them, the individual Christian experiences community and therefore senses that he or she is playing an active role and is encouraged to share in the common task. Thus, these communities become a means of evangelization and of the initial proclamation of the Gospel, and a source of new ministries. At the same time, by being imbued with Christ's love, they also show how divisions, tribalism and racism can be overcome.

Every community, if it is to be Christian, must be founded on Christ and live in him, as it listens to the word of God, focuses its prayer on the Eucharist, lives in a communion marked by oneness of heart and soul, and shares according to the needs of its members (cf. Acts 2:42-47). As Pope Paul VI recalled, every community must live in union with the particular and the universal Church, in heartfelt communion with the Church's pastors and the Magisterium, with a commitment to missionary outreach and without yielding to isolationism or ideological exploitation.⁸³ And the Synod of Bishops stated: "Because the Church is communion, the new 'basic communities,' if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church."⁸⁴

Incarnating the Gospel in Peoples' Culture

52. As she carries out missionary activity among the nations, the Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the Church's pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent.

The process of the Church's insertion into peoples' cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation "means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."⁸⁵ The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church's reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.

⁸³ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58: *loc. cit.*, 46-49.

⁸⁴ Extraordinary Assembly of 1985, *Final Report*, II, C, 6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, II, D, 4.

Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community.⁸⁶ She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within.⁸⁷ Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.

Thanks to this action within the local churches, the universal Church herself is enriched with forms of expression and values in the various sectors of Christian life, such as evangelization, worship, theology and charitable works. She comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ, all the while being motivated to continual renewal. During my pastoral visits to the young churches I have repeatedly dealt with these themes, which are present in the Council and the subsequent Magisterium.⁸⁸

Inculturation is a slow journey which accompanies the whole of missionary life. It involves those working in the Church's mission *ad gentes*, the Christian communities as they develop, and the bishops, who have the task of providing discernment and encouragement for its implementation.⁸⁹

53. Missionaries, who come from other churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations. Hence they must learn the language of the place in which they work, become familiar with the most important expressions of the local culture, and discover its values through direct experience. Only if they have this kind of awareness will they be able to bring to people the knowledge of the hidden mystery (cf. Rom 16:25-27; Eph 3:5) in a credible and fruitful way. It is not of course a matter of missionaries renouncing their own cultural identity, but of understanding, appreciating, fostering and evangelizing the culture of the environment in which they are working, and therefore of equipping themselves to communicate effectively with it, adopting a manner of living which is a sign of gospel witness and of solidarity with the people.

Developing ecclesial communities, inspired by the Gospel, will gradually be able to express their Christian experience in original ways and forms that are consonant with their own cultural traditions, provided that those traditions are in harmony with the objective requirements of the faith itself. To this end, especially in the more delicate areas of inculturation, particular churches of the same region should work in communion with each other⁹⁰ and with the whole Church, convinced that only through attention both to the universal Church and to the particular churches will they be capable of translating the treasure of faith into a legitimate variety of expressions.⁹¹ Groups which have been

⁸⁶ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), 53: AAS 71 (1979), 1320; Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli* (June 2, 1985), 21: AAS 77 (1985), 802f.

⁸⁷ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20: *loc. cit.*, 18f.

⁸⁸ *Address to the Bishops of Zaire, Kinshasa*, May 3, 1980, 4-6: AAS 72 (1980), 432-435; *Address to the Bishops of Kenya, Nairobi*, May 7, 1980, 6: AAS 72 (1980), 497; *Address to the Bishops of India, Delhi*, February 1, 1986, 5: AAS 78 (1986), 748f; *Homily at Cartagena*, July 6, 1986, 7-8: AAS 79 (1987), 105f; cf. also Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli*, 21-22; *loc. cit.*, 802-804.

⁸⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 22.

⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹¹ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 64: *loc. cit.*, 55.

evangelized will thus provide the elements for a "translation" of the gospel message,⁹² keeping in mind the positive elements acquired down the centuries from Christianity's contact with different cultures and not forgetting the dangers of alterations which have sometimes occurred.⁹³

54. In this regard, certain guidelines remain basic. Properly applied, inculturation must be guided by two principles: "compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal Church."⁹⁴ Bishops, as guardians of the "deposit of faith," will take care to ensure fidelity and, in particular, to provide discernment,⁹⁵ for which a deeply balanced approach is required. In fact there is a risk of passing uncritically from a form of alienation from culture to an overestimation of culture. Since culture is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be "healed, ennobled and perfected."⁹⁶

This kind of process needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community's Christian experience. As Pope Paul VI said in Kampala: "It will require an incubation of the Christian 'mystery' in the genius of your people in order that its native voice, more clearly and frankly, may then be raised harmoniously in the chorus of other voices in the universal Church."⁹⁷ In effect, inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei* which must never be lost sight of. Inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research. The safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith.

Dialogue with Our Brothers and Sisters of Other Religions

55. Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions. This mission, in fact, is addressed to those who do not know Christ and his Gospel, and who belong for the most part to other religions. In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love. He does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain "gaps, insufficiencies and errors."⁹⁸ All of this has been given ample emphasis

⁹² *Ibid.*, 63: *loc. cit.*, 53: Particular Churches "have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language.... And the word 'language' should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological or cultural."

⁹³ Cf. *Address* at the General Audience of April 13, 1988: *Insegnamenti* XI/I (1988), 877-881.

⁹⁴ Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, (November 22, 1981), 10: AAS 74 (1982), 91, which speaks of inculturation "in the context of marriage and the family."

⁹⁵ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 63-65: *loc. cit.*, 53-56.

⁹⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

⁹⁷ *Address* to those participating in the Symposium of African Bishops at Kampala, July 31, 1969, 2: AAS 61 (1969), 577.

⁹⁸ Paul VI, *Address* at the opening of the Second Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, September 29, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), 858; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 2; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16; Decree on

by the Council and the subsequent Magisterium, without detracting in any way from the fact that *salvation comes from Christ and that dialogue does not dispense from evangelization*.⁹⁹

In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.

I recently wrote to the bishops of Asia: "Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is 'the way, and the truth and the life.'...The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people."¹⁰⁰ Indeed Christ himself "while expressly insisting on the need for faith and baptism, at the same time confirmed *the need for the Church*, into which people enter through Baptism as through a door."¹⁰¹ Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.¹⁰²

56. Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills.¹⁰³ Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the "seeds of the Word,"¹⁰⁴ a "ray of that truth which enlightens all men";¹⁰⁵ these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind. Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the Spirit. Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.

This gives rise to the spirit which must enliven dialogue in the context of mission. Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretense or close-

the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 9; Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53: *loc. cit.* 41f.

⁹⁹ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964): AAS 56 (1964), 609-659; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 11, 41; Secretariat for Non-Christians, Document *L'atteggiamento della Chiesa di fronte ai seguaci di altre religioni: Riflessioni e orientamenti su dialogo e missione* (September 4, 1984): AAS 76 (1984), 816-828.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Asian Bishops' Conferences (June 23, 1990), 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 18, 1990.

¹⁰¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 14; cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7.

¹⁰² Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7.

¹⁰³ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 12: *loc. cit.*, 279.

¹⁰⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 11, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. There must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings. Dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful.

57. A vast field lies open to dialogue, which can assume many forms and expressions: from exchanges between experts in religious traditions or official representatives of those traditions to cooperation for integral development and the safeguarding of religious values; and from a sharing of their respective spiritual experiences to the so-called "dialogue of life," through which believers of different religions bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society.

Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way. The contribution of the laity is indispensable in this area, for they "can favor the relations which ought to be established with the followers of various religions through their example in the situations in which they live and in their activities."¹⁰⁶ Some of them also will be able to make a contribution through research and study.¹⁰⁷

I am well aware that many missionaries and Christian communities find in the difficult and often misunderstood path of dialogue their only way of bearing sincere witness to Christ and offering generous service to others. I wish to encourage them to persevere with faith and love, even in places where their efforts are not well received. Dialogue is a path toward the kingdom and will certainly bear fruit, even if the times and seasons are known only to the Father (cf. Acts 1:7).

Promoting Development by Forming Consciences

58. The mission *ad gentes* is still being carried out today, for the most part in the southern regions of the world, where action on behalf of integral development and liberation from all forms of oppression is most urgently needed. The Church has always been able to generate among the peoples she evangelizes a drive toward progress. Today, more than in the past, missionaries are being recognized as *promoters of development* by governments and international experts who are impressed at the remarkable results achieved with scanty means.

In the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, I stated that "the Church does not have technical solutions to offer for the problem of underdevelopment as such," but "offers her first contribution to the solution of the urgent problem of development when she proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation."¹⁰⁸ The Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla stated that "the best service we can offer to our brother is evangelization, which helps him to live and act as a son of God, sets him free from injustices and assists his overall development."¹⁰⁹ It is not the Church's mission

¹⁰⁶ Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 35: *loc. cit.*, 458.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 41.

¹⁰⁸ Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), 41: AAS 80 (1988), 570f.

¹⁰⁹ *Documents of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla (1979)*, 3760 (1145).

to work directly on the economic, technical or political levels, or to contribute materially to development. Rather, her mission consists essentially in offering people an opportunity not to "have more" but to "be more." by awakening their consciences through the Gospel. "Authentic human development must be rooted in an ever deeper evangelization."¹¹⁰

The Church and her missionaries also promote development through schools, hospitals, printing presses, universities and experimental farms. But a people's development does not derive primarily from money, material assistance or technological means, but from the formation of consciences and the gradual maturing of ways of thinking and patterns of behavior. *Man is the principal agent of development*, not money or technology. The Church forms consciences by revealing to peoples the God whom they seek and do not yet know, the grandeur of man created in God's image and loved by him, the equality of all men and women as God's sons and daughters, the mastery of man over nature created by God and placed at man's service, and the obligation to work for the development of the whole person and of all mankind.

59. Through the gospel message, the Church offers a force for liberation which promotes development precisely because it leads to conversion of heart and of ways of thinking, fosters the recognition of each person's dignity, encourages solidarity, commitment and service of one's neighbor, and gives everyone a place in God's plan, which is the building of his kingdom of peace and justice, beginning already in this life. This is the biblical perspective of the "new heavens and a new earth" (cf. Is 65:17; 2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1), which has been the stimulus and goal for mankind's advancement in history. Man's development derives from God, and from the model of Jesus - God and man - and must lead back to God.¹¹¹ That is why there is a close connection between the proclamation of the Gospel and human promotion.

The contribution of the Church and of evangelization to the development of peoples concerns not only the struggle against material poverty and underdevelopment in the South of the world, but also concerns the North, which is prone to a moral and spiritual poverty caused by "overdevelopment."¹¹² A certain way of thinking, uninfluenced by a religious outlook and widespread in some parts of today's world, is based on the idea that increasing wealth and the promotion of economic and technical growth is enough for people to develop on the human level. But a soulless development cannot suffice for human beings, and an excess of affluence is as harmful as excessive poverty. This is a "development model" which the North has constructed and is now spreading to the South, where a sense of religion as well as human values are in danger of being overwhelmed by a wave of consumerism.

"Fight hunger by changing your lifestyle" is a motto which has appeared in Church circles and which shows the people of the rich nations how to become brothers and sisters of the poor. We need to turn to a more austere way of life which will favor a new model of development that gives attention to ethical and religious values. To the poor, *missionary activity* brings light and an impulse toward true development, while a new evangelization ought to create among the wealthy a realization that the time has arrived for them to become true brothers and sisters of the poor through the conversion of all to an "integral development" open to the Absolute.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Address to Clergy and Religious, Jakarta, October 10, 1989, 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 11, 1989.

¹¹¹ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 14-21, 40-42: *loc. cit.*, 264-268, 277f; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 27-41: *loc. cit.*, 547-572.

¹¹² Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 28: *loc. cit.*, 548-550.

¹¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, Chapter IV, 27-34: *loc. cit.*, 547-560; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 19-21, 41-42: *loc. cit.*, 266-268, 277f.

Charity: Source and Criterion of Mission

60. As I said during my pastoral visit to Brazil: "The Church all over the world wishes to be the Church of the poor...she wishes to draw out all the truth contained in the Beatitudes of Christ, and especially in the first one: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' ...She wishes to teach this truth and she wishes to put it into practice, just as Jesus came to do and to teach."¹¹⁴

The young churches, which for the most part are to be found among peoples suffering from widespread poverty, often give voice to this concern as an integral part of their mission. The Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla, after recalling the example of Jesus, wrote that "the poor deserve preferential attention, whatever their moral or personal situation. They have been made in the image and likeness of God to be his children, but this image has been obscured and even violated. For this reason, God has become their defender and loves them. It follows that the poor are those to whom the mission is first addressed, and their evangelization is *par excellence* the sign and proof of the mission of Jesus."¹¹⁵

In fidelity to the spirit of the Beatitudes, the Church is called to be on the side of those who are poor and oppressed in any way. I therefore exhort the disciples of Christ and all Christian communities - from families to dioceses, from parishes to religious institutes - to carry out a sincere review of their lives regarding their solidarity with the poor. At the same time, I express gratitude to the missionaries who, by their loving presence and humble service to people, are working for the integral development of individuals and of society through schools, health-care centers, leprosaria, homes for the handicapped and the elderly, projects for the promotion of women and other similar apostolates. I thank the priests, religious brothers and sisters, and members of the laity for their dedication, and I also encourage the volunteers from non-governmental organizations who in ever increasing numbers are devoting themselves to works of charity and human promotion.

It is in fact these "works of charity" that reveal the soul of all missionary activity: love, which has been and remains the driving force of mission, and is also "the sole criterion for judging what is to be done or not done, changed or not changed. It is the principle which must direct every action, and end to which that action must be directed. When we act with a view to charity, or are inspired by charity, nothing is unseemly and everything is good."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Address to the residents of "Favela Vidigal" in Rio de Janeiro, July 2, 1980, 4: AAS 72 (1980), 854.

¹¹⁵ Documents of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla, (1979), 3757 (1142).

¹¹⁶ Isaac of Stella, *Sermon* 31, PL 194, 1793.