

The Future of Evangelization in Asia

Theological Reflections

edited by
Fabrizio Meroni and Clarence Devadass



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Preface

As observed by Jean Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Church's mission across the vast and populous Asian continent is faced with "multiple philosophical, theological and pastoral challenges" (EA 9). Proclamation and dialogue in countries where Christians live side by side with Muslim, Buddhist, Hinduist or Confucian majorities, require a constant work of discernment to figure out the most suitable approaches in the witnessing of the faith vis-à-vis other religions and cultures that have millennial roots. Furthermore, the widespread poverty and multiple forms of predicament that degrade and disfigure human dignity, call for increasing charitable efforts with a view to advancing justice and human integral development.

Amid the complex "social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia" (EA 5), how can the particular Churches overcome the "difficulties in proclaiming Jesus as the only Savior" (EA 20)? How can they best prepare the faithful to perform their tasks as Jesus' missionary disciples? What are the modes of effective Christian presence and witness to be followed? *The Future of Evangelization in Asia: Theological Reflections*, the latest editorial endeavor of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) within the series "Omnis Terra – PMU CIAM Publications", provides insights and food for thought on how to address these major issues that keep testing the Church's mission throughout the Asian continent.

This collection of essays springs from the research and study work carried out by scholars from South Korea, China, Japan and India, coordinated by Rev. Fr. Clarence Devadass, Director of the Catholic Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Executive Secretary for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' Office of Theological Concerns. His references to the *Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019*¹ highlight the importance to bring about in

¹ The publication of *The Future of Evangelization in Asia: Theological Reflections* is part of the PMU contribution to the engagement of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in laying the groundwork to the *Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019* announced by Pope Francis in conjunction with the 100th anniversary

Asia the missionary awakening urged by Pope Francis to revitalize the Church's mission "as engine and horizon of the faith" worldwide.² Mission needs to regain its actual significance, life force and evangelizing drive among Asian *Baptized and Sent*,³ in order for them to strengthen their process of Christian conversion in terms of conviction regarding one's personal faith and membership in the Church. The result would be a deeper personal encounter with Jesus Christ, an absolutely free giving up of oneself to Him, a spiritual discernment and a lifelong vocational commitment that would engender a firmer belief in the transformation of oneself, of the Church's life and pastoral activity,⁴ as well as of the whole existence (human relations, affectivity and labor) in the social and cultural structures of Asian countries.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*,⁵ Pope Francis recalled John Paul II's message to the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops: "If

sary of Pope Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*. On 22 October 2017, the same day as the Angelus Prayer held on the occasion of the World Mission Sunday, Pope Francis sent a letter to Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and President of the PMS Supreme Council, entrusting him with "the work of preparing for this event, especially by raising awareness among the particular Churches, the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and among associations, movements, communities, and other ecclesial bodies". The letter is available at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2017/10/22/0727/01588.html#ing>.

² POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*, 3 December 2015, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/december/documents/papa-francesco_20151203_plenaria-propaganda-fide.html/.

³ The chosen theme for *Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019*, "Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World", reveals "the missionary dimension of our Baptism", as being sent on mission is a call that comes with Baptism and is for all the baptized (POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*, 1 June 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180601_pontificie-opere-missionarie.html).

⁴ POPE FRANCIS, *Letter of the Holy Father Francis for the Centenary of the Promulgation of the Apostolic Letter "Maximum Illud" on the Activity of Missionaries in the World*, 22 October 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171022_lettera-filoni-mese-missionario.html/.

⁵ In *Evangelii Gaudium* 23, Pope Francis refers to Jesus' Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20) and encouraged the faithful "to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear". See also

the Church ‘is to fulfil its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority’ (EA 2)” (EG 110).⁶ The insistence of John Paul II on the “need for a renewed commitment to the proclamation of Jesus Christ” (EA 19), as “the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia” (EA 20), was endorsed also by Benedict XVI.⁷

Accordingly, the following chapters put forward useful guidelines and recommendations for all Asian “agents and co-workers in the Church’s mission” (EA 47) – pastors, consecrated religious and lay persons, catechists⁸ and lay faithful, especially the youth⁹ –, who reach out to their many brothers and sisters adhering to different faith traditions.¹⁰ In proclaiming the Gospel in the varied

POPE FRANCIS, *Go Forth: Toward a Community of Missionary Disciples*, American Society of Missiology Series, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 2019.

⁶ The Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops took place in the Vatican from 18 April to 14 May 1998.

⁷ Cf. *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Ordinaries of Central Asia on their “Ad Limina” Visit*, 2 October 2008, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20081002_adlimina-asia-centr.html; *Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Card. Stanisław Rylko on the Occasion of the Congress of Asian Catholic Laity*, 10 August 2010, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20100810_rylko-congress-asia.html/.

⁸ Among the laity, “catechists deserve special recognition and praise” (EA 9). To bolster the missionary and evangelizing capacities of the Catholic education system in Asia, the urgency to shore up their key role can no longer be disregarded. Catechists, baptized lay men and women, are essential actors in the proclamation of the Gospel and witnessing of the faith, prayer, preparation for sacramental life and liturgy, formation of the faithful, and community leadership. They are deeply rooted in the territory, live ordinarily in the cultural and social fabric of their brothers and sisters in the faith whom they serve in their ministry, ensuring a widespread and stable presence.

⁹ “A wider inculturation of the Gospel at every level of society in Asia will depend greatly on the appropriate formation which the local Churches succeed in giving to the laity” (EA 22).

¹⁰ “The Church has the deepest respect for these traditions [...]. The religious values they teach await their fulfilment in Jesus Christ” (EA 6). Some “have no problem in accepting Jesus as a manifestation of the Divine or the Absolute, or as an ‘enlightened one’” (EA 20, which quotes *Relatio ante disceptationem* 5 drafted by the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops and available in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 22 April 1998).

Asian contexts, the particular Churches shall firstly uphold their long history of strong evangelizing commitment, belonging to the Church and Catholic identity. At the same time, their engagement in proclamation is deeply intertwined with dialogue and Christian witness, which is a “characteristic mode of the Church’s life in Asia” (EA 3).

Dialogue is of paramount relevance to Asian Christians, primarily where their very existence, both as communities and individuals, and the everyday pastoral ministry are confronted with unforeseeable challenges and threats. The escalation of extremism and violence in some countries has greatly contributed to shape an overall regional ambience characterized by conflicts, ethnic and sectarian clashes, lack of religious freedom. Some Asian governments politicize religions and add political components to social and cultural tensions.

Yet, the doors of Asia remain “open wide to Christ” (EA 4) and, in support of the mission, the *Theological Reflections* featured in this book define an inclusive ecclesiology that makes the Church the *sacrament of communion* between herself and Jesus in dialogue with other religions, through Christian witness, contemplative prayer life and world transformative engagement. Mission theology shall encompass all multiple facets of the Asian dimensions (including the impact of secularism, technology and media communications on the long-established Asian systems of beliefs and values), and associate them to Christ’s Paschal Mystery, so that the particular Churches may adopt the appropriate pastoral methodologies for proclamation, witness and dialogue in tune with the local scenarios.

The popular religiosity, religious devotion and piety relating to other creeds are given special attention. Touching, kissing, prostrations, pilgrimages and simple bodily rituals performed with holy images, holy water, candles, vegetable offerings and the repetition of words or sounds: these manifestations imply a search for meaning and for the existential support necessary to bear the struggles and challenges of human life. Open proclamation of the faith can at times be illegal, yet processions and popular devotions are unofficially tolerated and even allowed. Therefore, they represent for Christians a *locus theologicus* for evangelization, as much as for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

Interactions at the grassroots level offer the mission *ad, inter* and *per gentes* the opportunity to manifest the truth while working to

build bridges of acceptance and respect. Asian Catholics are fully aware of their call to play a major role in promoting reconciliation and unity. Because of their belonging to the Universal Church, they transcend the local patterns and, even if considered a minority and treated unfairly, their hearts and minds continue to be opened to the encounter with other religions. A major channel conducive to this encounter is charity.

This book emphasizes that social and charitable engagements – not to be understood as a paternalistic action, but a launch pad for hope – remain in Asia of great importance to proclaim “the gift containing all gifts, namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ” (EA 19). Evangelization is always challenged facing tens of millions of poor people, who need concrete help to address poverty, illiteracy, sickness and other troubles. Moreover, the Christian presence among the suffering offers a concrete entry point for undertaking a process of dialogue.

By reconciling diversity and achieving unity through dialogue (cf. EG 230), the Church restores the Kingdom of God both in the human heart and history, acting as the *sacrament of salvation*¹¹ and fulfilling the project of the Holy Spirit, “the prime agent of evangelization” (EA 17).¹² “Looking to a new outpouring of the dynamism of the Holy Spirit” (EA 42), the book also outlines a set of principles for discerning His presence and activity in the Church’s mission¹³ of “proclaiming the Gospel, faith and the witness of

¹¹ Mission makes the Church a community of the saved, a true family of God, of sons and daughters in the only Son. Therefore, she is much more than an instrument for salvation or a sign that will one day be discarded. The Church is an eschatological design of all creation (Easter, Baptism, and Eucharist), she is the *universal sacrament of salvation* (cf. F. MERONI (ed.), *Mission Makes the Church*, Aracne Editrice, Canterano (Roma) 2017).

¹² Mission does not respond to a human initiative: it is *missio* and *actio Dei*. Therefore, the principal agent of the mission is the Holy Spirit: mission is His project (cf. *Redemptoris Missio* 21). It is the Holy Spirit who sends us, accompanies us and inspires us. He is the source of our mission. It is He who guides the Church forward, not us. [...] He, the Holy Spirit, does everything; we are simply His servants” (POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*).

¹³ Church’s mission is to proclaim the Gospel and to witness it among those “who have never encountered the person of Jesus in any clear and conscious way” (EA 19) and the Christian faith is absent. In doing so, the Church opens the way

charity” in Asia.¹⁴ Despite serious hardships and injustices, millions of Asian *Baptized and Sent*, women and men, have not abandoned the “missionary outreach” (EA 25). Their admirable “boldness” and “courage” recalls the “zeal of those who first proclaimed the Gospel”,¹⁵ and allows for the opening of new prospects of formal and informal dialogue, which the particular Churches shall continue to seek irrespective of the frustration caused by the lack of immediate results concerning peaceful coexistence, human rights and religious freedom.

This is the “witnessing Church” (EA 42) that Catholic communities, religious Orders and internal Church structures are called to embody for *The Future of Evangelization in Asia*, so that the third millennium may fulfil the hope that “a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent” (EA 1).¹⁶

Vatican City, August 6th, 2019
Transfiguration of Jesus

Fr. FABRIZIO MERONI
*PMU Secretary General
CIAM and Fides Director*

to the divine action of the Holy Spirit in places where women and men, religions and nations still yearn for salvation from sin and death (cf. F. MERONI, “The Mission of the Church and the *Missio Ad Gentes*: Some Initial Observations”, in CEP-PMS, *Baptized and Sent. The Church of Christ on Mission in the World*, EMMS OCT2019, San Paolo, Milan 2019, 70).

¹⁴ F. FILONI, *Speech at the General Assembly of the Pontifical Missionary Societies*, 27 May 2019, www.fides.org/en/news/66103-VATICAN_Cardinal_Filoni_at_the_PMS_Assembly_Extraordinary_Missionary_Month_catechist_formation_renewal/.

¹⁵ The “community of missionary disciples” that began evangelization from “Jerusalem [...] to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) is the main source of “inspiration” and guiding star for the *Baptized and Sent* of all times in the mission of evangelization they are called to execute as members of the Church. Their “regular book for prayer and meditation” cannot but be the *Acts of the Apostles* (POPE FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies*). See also F. MERONI (ed.), *Missio Ad Gentes in the Acts of the Apostles*, Urbaniana University Press, Rome 2019.

¹⁶ A precious contribution in coordinating the publication of this volume was provided by Mr. Emiliano Stornelli, Chairman of the Religion & Security Council.

The Mission to “Make Disciples” in Asia

❖ CLARENCE DEVADASS

Over the two thousand years of the Church’s history, the perennial question that has accompanied the Church to mission territories throughout the world is, “What does mission mean to the Church?” Though we understand that the very nature and characteristic of the Church is missionary, how this is actually translated into action has varied over the years, and depending on the particular context, may also vary. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* calls for a mission that is transformative rather than merely for the self-preservation of the Church, which is indeed a clarion call for the Church to revisit the perennial question. This is particularly timely, especially as the Holy Father has nominated October 2019 to be an *Extraordinary Missionary Month* “with the aim of fostering an increased awareness of the *missio ad gentes* and taking up again with renewed fervour the missionary transformation the Church’s life and pastoral activity”.¹ This has been a constant since the beginning of his pontificate, when Pope Francis announced a vision for a renewed missionary option for the Church which can offer greater clarity for the mission in Asia.

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded

¹ Pope Francis, during the midday Angelus 22 October 2017, made a public announcement to the whole Church expressing his intention to call an Extraordinary Missionary Month for October 2019 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* issued by Benedict XV.

by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself (EG 27).

For centuries, the Church's missionary activity has been guided by and grounded in Jesus' Great Commission to his disciples: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). Given the context of the plurality of cultures and traditions in Asia, one must ask the question, *what did Jesus mean when he said and sent his disciples to "make disciples"*? It was not as if there was a machine that was churning out disciples nor was there a secret formula for creating them. After all, it is one thing for Jesus to utter these final words to his disciples, quite another thing completely what they understood by this 'commission'. Two thousand years later, this is intriguing for us in our own time given the numerous challenges that we are confronted with, not least the changing social landscape that we find ourselves in; therefore, the question that begs to be answered is: what does *making disciples* mean? Is *making disciples* only spreading the Good News and introducing others to Jesus Christ? How do we disciple others as Jesus intended? Is there some kind of dynamic relationship between *making disciples* and "baptising them"?

Today, if we speak to a Christian evangelist or missionary and ask what is it that drives and motivates them, we are almost certain to get a response that is linked to the Great Commission. Here, I may be being too presumptuous, but given the number of encounters that I have had over the years, there seems to be a determination to 'increase the flock' by establishing new Churches, and this is among the main objectives that drives many Christian evangelists. There is no doubt that in the Church established by Jesus, the missionary dimension occupies an integral role and that the proclamation of the Gospel is at the very heart of this mission: "Mission belongs to the very being of the Church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time,

it is necessary to do so according to Gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings”²

Yet, the Gospel principles are sometimes left to the individual to decipher and interpret. This is where problems arise when ‘disciple making’ is narrowly considered as increasing the size of the flock. Even though Jesus’ “call to discipleship was presented in astonishingly clear terms which left no one in any doubt about what he was looking for”,³ there remains a *lacuna* that has been the source of tension and conflict at times. Two thousand years later, the proclamation of the Gospel remains at the heart of the mission of the Church. Since Jesus himself did not provide his disciples a ‘blueprint’ to *making disciples*, this has been a cause of conflict in many parts of the world, especially in Asia. Throughout the region, Christianity is a minority and therefore for many Christian groups, the primary task seems to be to promote the Christian faith through means of evangelization. However, in wanting to be faithful to Jesus’ missionary mandate, this challenge often brings about much confrontation and unrest among the other religions and traditions. In a multi-religious and multi-cultural area like Asia, what does Jesus’ missionary command mean?

The sheer over enthusiasm of wanting to baptise as many people as possible has brought about division in families, communities and even a sense of animosity between religious traditions and communities. By pitting one religion against the other, it has brought about the displacement of communities and in extreme situations, even the loss of lives. In some ways “*proselytism* has been recognized as a scandal and counterwitness”.⁴ Such unfortunate circumstances have only created mistrust and suspicion of any form of missionary activity and amongst those who sincerely seek to ‘make disciples’ in the way presented by Jesus through his public ministry.

The prayer of Jesus to his Father (cf. Jn 17) before embracing the passion and death, “Father, may they be one just as you and I are

² PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20111110_testimonianza-cristiana_en.html.

³ T. PULLIN, *Making Disciples: How Did Jesus Do It?*, CWR, Surrey 2014, 63.

⁴ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Toward Common Witness*, 19 September 1997, www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/toward-common-witness.

one” was intended not just for the unity of the Church and Christians, for it was an earnest prayer that the world may be united. If unity is the Jesus’ intention, then the very act of evangelising cannot be against the idea of unity for it would be counter to Jesus’ prayer. The model of unity that Jesus prays for is the unity he shares with his Father. If this is the kind of ideal that we – the Church – would like to strive for, then there must be something much more than *making disciples* and baptism. Is baptism the intended outcome of the command to make disciples? It is my view that there must be something much greater than merely baptism in the journey of *making disciples*: “One of the aims of discipleship is to help someone to learn how to connect with God’s voice and his purpose for their life”.⁵ Therefore, baptism is not necessarily a direct consequence of the process of ‘discipling’ another person. Jesus’ parting words were “go and make disciples” and this commission precedes that of “baptising them”.

Discipling or discipleship would seem to be an invitation to a new state of life and it is my assertion that it is much more than just leading others to Christ. Therefore, if *making disciples* is more than spreading the Gospel and introducing others to Jesus, how do we disciple then? It could be said that it is about learning to help others to grow to become more like Christ: “Discipleship is a state of being [...] it is about how we live; not just the decisions we make, not just the things we believe but a state of being [...] Discipleship is about a relationship”.⁶ Even between Jesus and his disciples, the process of discipleship was taking place in the context of a personal relationship. Most often, the deeper meaning of Jesus’ actions and teachings were explained to his disciples when they were away from the crowds. It is here that they began to understand Jesus to a greater extent and continued to follow him. From the way that Jesus schooled his disciples, it was clear that “discipleship is not about learning a list of do’s and don’ts, ticking the boxes and feeling good about it, or missing out on a few boxes and feeling guilty”.⁷ It is quite clear that *making disciples* has greater consequences to merely bringing people to Jesus:

⁵ T. PULLIN, *Making Disciples: How Did Jesus Do It?*, 28.

⁶ R. WILLIAMS, *Being Disciples: Essentials of Christian Life*, SPCK Publishing, London 2016, 1.

⁷ T. PULLIN, *Making Disciples: How Did Jesus Do It?*, 28.

It is not anyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, who will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?” Then I shall tell them to their faces: “I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!” Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had! (Mt 7:21-27).

This is neither watering down nor disputing the fact that the Church needs to be on mission and that “the vocation of the Church to proclaim the transforming love of Jesus Christ to the whole world is unchanging”.⁸ It has been this way from the beginning and will be the same till *parousia*. However, in the words of John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, “there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel [...] for this is the first task of the Church” (RM 34). However, “today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church” (RM 40). Given the challenges that Churches are facing in continuing efforts to be relevant, it is worth revisiting the Great Commission of Jesus and consider what does this mission demand of the Church and the followers of Jesus.

1. Some Modern Challenges to Asia

The task of *making disciples* has remained the same from the moment Jesus commissioned his disciples. However, the social, cultural and economic landscapes have shifted over the centuries. If we are to revisit this mission, we also need to acknowledge some of the challenges confronting Asia. It is not possible to explore all the chal-

⁸ M. IRELAND – M. BOOKER, *Making New Disciples: Exploring the Paradoxes of Evangelism*, SPCK Publishing, London 2015, 35.

lenges, but I have made a choice of naming just four challenges that I consider relevant to helping us define a framework for the mission of *making disciples*.

a) Secularism

With the advancement of technology and man's capabilities to achieve greater heights, one of the threats of *making disciples* in this era is the threat of secularism. The ideology of secularism permeates society at all levels: government, education, media, industry, including religion. In its original sense, secularism has been defined as "the belief that religion should not be involved with the ordinary social and political activities of a country".⁹ Though secularism has its intellectual roots in Greek and Roman thought, the way in which it has evolved and penetrated into other aspects of life is quite different from when it was first conceived. Today, secularism states that "man does not need God",¹⁰ thus religion is no more than a relic of the past.

b) Relativism

In an address to the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America, held in Guadalajara, Mexico, on 7 May 1996, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who was then the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, pointed out clearly that "relativism has [...] become the central problem for the faith at the present time".¹¹

⁹ Definition of *secularism* drawn from the *Cambridge Dictionary of the English Language*, available at <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/secularism/>. More broadly, "secularism [...] can be defined as a 'system of doctrines and practices that disregards or rejects any form of religious faith and worship. Its primary objective is the total elimination of all religious elements from society'. Secularism, also known as secular humanism, teaches that there are no objective or absolute truths defining right and wrong. In essence, to secularize something is to make it worldly and unspiritual. Its intent is to deprive something of its religious character, its spiritual influence and significance" (Got Questions, *What is secularism?*, www.gotquestions.org/what-is-secularism.html).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ J. RATZINGER, *The Current Situation of Faith and Theology*, 11 May 1996, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/incontri/rc_con_cfaith_19960507_guadalajara-ratzinger_en.html/.

In his homily at the Mass for the election of the Roman Pontiff, Cardinal Ratzinger continued this theme when he told his fellow electors: “Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labelled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine’ (cf. Eph 4:14), seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognise anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely in one’s own ego and desires”.¹² On the occasion of the 2012 World Day of Peace, he went further by saying “today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of educating is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires”.¹³

c) Mission *Ad intra* and *Ad extra*

The very heart of discipleship is the Kingdom of God. As Jesus began his public ministry, the clarion call was, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). Mission is often conceived as purely *ad extra*, which means, to be able to go out and bring the Good News to those who have not yet known Christ or in a narrow sense, to bring others into a particular Church. However, the way in which Jesus made disciples had a two-fold character: one being to those whom he had called as his own and the other being the masses. What Jesus brought to them was not just a new teaching for he brought them a new ethos: “the practice of discipleship, Jesus style, is more about the values and ethos which permeate and characterise a church”.¹⁴

What attracted the crowds to Jesus was his message of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is much larger than a Church and the Church is part of the Kingdom: “The Church is not an end unto herself,

¹² J. RATZINGER, Mass “Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice”, 18 April 2005, www.vatican.va//gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html/.

¹³ POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Educating Young People in Justice and Peace*, 1 January 1992, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20111208_xlv-world-day-peace.html/.

¹⁴ T. PULLIN, *Making Disciples: How Did Jesus Do It?*, 63.

since she is ordered toward the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument” (RM 18). For this reason, mission should not be unidirectional but bidirectional: from within and without. As far as the Great Commission calls for *making disciples* for the Kingdom, there is an inherent mission to renew or restore those who have already encountered Christ because essentially “disciples are called to recognition, service and promotion of the Kingdom”.¹⁵ It is true that Christ cannot be separated from the Kingdom, for if we do so then we run the risk of putting forward only an ideology. “If the Kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the Kingdom of God which he revealed. The result is a distortion of the meaning of the Kingdom, which runs the risk of being transformed into a purely human or ideological goal, and a distortion of the identity of Christ, who no longer appears as the Lord to whom everything must one day be subjected” (RM 18).

d) Anti-Proselytization Laws

As recent as July 2016, Russia joined the list of nations which had introduced laws against proselytization. The laws were amended to include laws against sharing faith in homes, online, or anywhere except in recognized Church buildings. Those closely monitoring this situation say that “the law is unlikely to affect the Russian Orthodox Church, to which, according to the Christian Post, 70% of Russians (and 90% of ethnic Russians) subscribe, but it will affect all other evangelical groups and denominations, including Protestants (1% of the population)”.¹⁶

Russia does not stand alone in this area of legislation. In India, the state of Orissa was the first state to introduce such a law, namely the *Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967* and later on to be joined by other states in more recent times. Today, in countries where Christians are a minority, there is a high possibility that anti-proselytization laws or dominant cultures can impose obstacles to the notion of

¹⁵ E. McDONAGH, *The Making of Disciples*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1982, 5.

¹⁶ WORLD WATCH MONITOR, *Russia: Church reacts as ‘anti-missionary bill’ becomes law*, 15 July 2016, www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/07/russia-church-reacts-as-anti-missionary-bill-becomes-law/.

making disciples when understood in a strict sense, while in some places, it can also be a criminal offence. We have come to read how evangelical protestants and their enthusiastic proselytizing have been a major target of anti-missionary policies by governments. If we were to find ourselves in such a situation, would we not ask what does *making disciples* mean? It surely has to be much more than just introducing Christ to others.

Given all these challenges, it is clear that where we are today is an evolution and a consequence of a series of events. There is a direct connection between the understanding of Church and mission, but the way this has been expressed has also kept evolving. For mission in Asia, the concept of Kingdom and Church is crucial to understanding co-existence and how peoples of all religions and traditions can work together for the Kingdom – a mission for the Church.

For Jesus’ eleven disciples, the legacy of his parting words at Galilee would shape not only the rest of their lives, but also shape the direction of the Church for the generations to come. If the Church exists for mission, then there is no other question that should direct our vision and mission other than, how do we disciple others?

2. What Does the Word ‘Church’ Mean?

In order to arrive at a better understanding of the mission to ‘make disciples’, we need to understand the nature, and identity of the Church itself. From an understanding of its identity so the Church’s mission becomes clearer. *Restore the Church*, St. Francis of Assisi heard these words at a time when the Church was in ‘crisis’ and needed to take a hard look at herself and move toward the path of renewal. It is no coincidence that in some ways we are here because we want to renew and restore the Church.

The Church has gone through many processes of restoration from the time it was founded by Jesus. The word *restore* ordinarily is understood as to bring something back to its original condition. The implication is that what we have before us is not as it had been intended. It can be said categorically that any deviation was not pre-meditated or intentionally carried out, but has been more often a consequence of extenuating circumstances that may have caused the deviation. Similarly, the journey of the Church has been a journey of self-definition based on the different circumstances that she has

found herself in. There are times when these circumstances have led to a positive outcome, while on other occasions the contrary has been the result.

The history of the Church shows us that there have been many moments when we could hold our heads high and be proud of our tradition, but there have also been moments which the Church would like to forget, although it is impossible for her to do so. Throughout history, the Church has survived surely because of the Holy Spirit's guidance which by its very nature brings about renewal. In the words of Didymus of Alexandria (313-398 AD):

The Holy Spirit renews us in baptism through his godhead, which he shares with the Father and the Son. Finding us in a state of deformity, the Spirit restores our original beauty and fills us with his grace, leaving no room for anything unworthy of our love. The Spirit frees us from sin and death, and changes us from the earthly humans we were, men of dust and ashes, into spiritual humans, sharers in the divine glory, sons and heirs of God the Father who bear a likeness to the Son and are his co-heirs and brothers and sisters, destined to reign with him and to share his glory.¹⁷

The very word "Church" that we use so often has also gone through a process of restoration over the centuries, while we often seem to understand the word depending on the context of its usage. For example, St Francis' initial response to seeing the ruins of the San Damiano's Church was that the word "Church" referred to the physical building. However, we know that there is a deeper theological meaning to the word "Church" which is sometimes independent of its context.

The New Testament biblical word *Ekklesia* is made up of two words: the verb *kelo* which means *to call* and the preposition *ek* which means *out of*. The combination of these two words forming *ekklesia* would give the idea of *to summon* or *the called out ones*.¹⁸

¹⁷ ST. ATHANASIUS THE GREAT – DIDYMUS THE BLIND, *Works on the Spirit*, Trans. by L. Ayres, M. Del Cogliano, A. Radde-Gallwitz, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York 2011, 95.

¹⁸ Cf. J. KOMONCHAK, M. COLLINS, D. LANE (eds.), *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1987, 186.

The Hebrew word *qahal* which is used in the Old Testament also gives a similar meaning: *a convoked assembly*. In the New Testament, the word *ekklesia* is almost never used to refer to a building where Christians met. In fact, in the early times there were no specific places assigned for worship. It is much later that the term was used to refer to a building as the place of worship and which was seen as a symbol of the community: “The primary reference of *ekklesia* in the New Testament is to the actual assembly meeting for worship (1Cor 11:18, 14:19, 35)”¹⁹

The word *ekklesia*²⁰ manifests itself through the use of Biblical imagery. One of the most exhaustive studies of the New Testament *ekklesia* was compiled by Paul Minear in his book *The Images of the Church in the New Testament*,²¹ where he provides 96 images which are grouped into different categories. In this text it is sufficient to note that in the New Testament the three images of the Church that are prominent are: Church as the *People of God*, Church as the *Body of Christ* and the Church as the *Temple of the Holy Spirit*. In some ways they reflect the Trinitarian dimensions of our faith.

3. The Church is for Mission

The objective of the Church is inevitably to continue the mission of Jesus. For this reason, the Church in its very nature exists for mission. If she does uphold this objective, what then is the mission of the Church? Many people would point to the great commission of Jesus as described in Mt 28:19-20 as continuing his mission. In

¹⁹ Ibid., 187.

²⁰ According to *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 751, “the word ‘Church’ (Latin *ecclesia*, from the Greek *ek-ka-lein*, to ‘call out of’) means a convocation or an assembly. It designates the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose. *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the Chosen People before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people. By calling itself ‘Church’, the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is ‘calling together’ his people from all the ends of the earth. The equivalent Greek term *Kyriake*, from which the English word *Church* and the German *Kirche* are derived, means ‘what belongs to the Lord’”.

²¹ P.S. MINEAR, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA 1960.

short, to the Church that was slowly beginning to develop, Jesus gave them four tasks: go, make disciples, baptise and teach them.

Scripture scholars agree that in the original Greek, of the four tasks, the word “make” remains the finite verb while the other three are participles. This simply means that the very heart of Jesus’ Great Commission is the task of *making disciples*, while all other tasks hinge on this. The task of *making disciples* comes from Jesus Himself. The Greek word *mathetes* (disciple) comes from the verb *manthanein* which means ‘to learn’, therefore, to be a disciple means to be a learner. When Jesus called his disciples, he called them to learn from him and the Church shares in this mission.

What was Jesus’ mission? His mission has to be seen from its very beginning to its end. Jesus began his ministry by making this call: “This is the time of fulfilment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:12-13). The mission of Jesus began with the proclamation of the dawn of the Kingdom. However, Jesus does not define the Kingdom. What is clear is that the Kingdom is much more than the Church that was established by the apostles. Therefore, the Church exists for the Kingdom.

From this perspective then, the task of *making disciples* is certainly much more than making mere believers. A limited understanding of history has caused much tension on this interpretation. One has to remember that *making disciples* need not be synonymous with making believers just like the Church is not synonymous with the Kingdom. There is a much larger understanding both in essence, character and objective, and the mission of the Church, which stems from its identity.

4. Models of Ecclesiology: An Asian Perspective

A quick glance at the history of the Church reveals that it has been described in many ways: the community; the body of Christ; an institution; a sacrament; a herald; a pilgrim; a people; and, a servant. However, over the centuries the Church has developed in different ways. For instance, as the Church grew, the institutional dimension became much more prominent. At other times, the missionary activities of the Church highlighted her role as herald. The following are some of the dominant models that we have seen throughout history:

28-100 AD	Building the Church as a community
100-800 AD	The Church as a herald to the gentile world
800-1500 AD	The Church as a prevailing institution in the medieval world
1500-1900 AD	The Church as pilgrim in a time of upheaval and confusion during the Reformation and Post Reformation period
1962-1965 AD	The Church as a sacrament and sign in a changing world around Vatican II
Today	The Church as a servant in the contemporary world

As we have seen above, the definition and understanding of the Church has gone through a long process and there are numerous variables that have contributed to its sense of identity. The Federation of Catholic Asian Bishops has also noted that the Church in Asia is not the same as the Church in other parts of the world. Our history, tradition, priority of values, environment, have in themselves a uniqueness that adds a *new* perspective to our understanding. The fact is that we live in a region where most of our neighbours are non-Christians which makes us distinct from other parts of the world.

In 1990, the Bishops of Asia met in Bandung, Indonesia, to share, discuss, and discern what it means to be the Church in Asia. In this Plenary Assembly which had as its theme, *The Emerging Challenges to the Church in Asia in the 1990s: A Call to Respond*, ten days were dedicated to understanding our challenges of being the Church in Asia more deeply. Included among the challenges that were discussed: inculturation of the Gospel; inter-religious dialogue; being the Church of the poor; liberation & freedom; overcoming human divisions; unity among Christians, forming the People of God and evangelization.

In a spirit of prayerful discussions and discernment, the Bishops identified four *ways* that the Church in Asia needs to incorporate in its very essence a new way of being the Church in Asia. These are not models that compete with one another; rather they complement one another in a way that makes the Church more wholesome.²²

²² FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, *Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium (Final Statement)*, 5th Plenary Assembly of FABC Bandung, Indonesia, July 17-27, 1990.

1. A **Community Church**. The Church in Asia has to be a Communion of Communities, where laity, religious and clergy recognise and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called by the word of God which, regarded as the quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small communities (e.g., neighbourhood groups, basic ecclesial communities and covenant communities). There they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they bare “one in mind and heart” (8.1.1).
2. A **Participatory Church**, meaning a Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful are recognised and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realised (8.1.2).
3. A **Dialoguing Church**. Built in the hearts of people, it is the Church that faithfully and lovingly witnesses the Risen Lord and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all (8.1.3). A dialogue that engages with religions, cultures and the poor (8.1.3).
4. A **Prophetic Church**, as a leaven of transformation in this world and a prophetic sign daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come (8.1.4).

5. Understanding *Making Disciples in Asia*

The growth of the Church in Asia is a result of the arrival of the colonial powers. Whether it was the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch or the English, the expansion of trade came with the expansion of the Christian faith. No matter under what circumstance the Christian faith arrived in Asia, one cannot deny that the Church is “missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father”, as stated by *Decree Ad Gentes 2*. We have all been reminded on many occasions of the missionary command of Jesus just before He ascended to his Heavenly Father (Mt 28:19-20).

But we do realise that the context that we live in brings about its own challenges if we are to take this command of Jesus literally, given the fact that there has been a revival in the other religions in the

recent past. That is why the Church in Asia needs to pray, reflect and discern what being the Church in Asia actually means. Allow me to provide some directions as to the process that is required for us to define our very own way of being the Church in Asia.

Fundamentally, we need a renewed understanding of mission itself: “Mission’ is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ”.²³ In order for this renewed understanding to take root, the missionary command of Jesus as seen in Mt 28:20ff must be seen in relation to Jesus’ own mission since the mission of the Church draws life from the mission of Christ: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21b). The mission of Jesus was clearly spelt out when he stood up at the Temple and read from the Prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4:18-19).

Even though Jesus had a large circle of disciples around him, both male and female, he selected twelve men whom he called Apostles. The task that was handed to them was to “preach the Kingdom and to heal” (Lk 9:2). These Apostles became witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection and guarantors of the truth about him. In other words, they continued Jesus’ mission. If his Jesus was defined by the text from the Prophet Isaiah, therefore, the missionary command must be seen from this perspective.

His mission has to be contextualised and therefore cannot be seen in isolation from the Kingdom as Jesus’ very first proclamation according to Mark the Evangelist: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the Good News, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near’” (Mk 1:14-15a).

What is this Kingdom then? John Fuellenbach in his book *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today*,²⁴ states clearly that the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today*, Orbis Books, New York 2002.

Church and the Kingdom are not identical. In fact, the Kingdom is present in the Church but they are not one and the same: “The nature and mission of the Church are always to be understood in relationship and in subordination to the Kingdom of God”.²⁵ In other words, one has to accept that the Kingdom is still broader than the Church.

The Dutch Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx describes the three characteristics and fundamental values of the Kingdom as:

THE KINGDOM OF GOD is the saving presence of God, active and encouraging, as it is affirmed or welcomed among men and women. It is a saving presence, offered by God and freely accepted by men and women, which takes concrete form above all in justice and peaceful relationships among individuals and peoples, in the disappearance of sickness, injustice and oppression and in the restoration of life of all that was dead and dying.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD is a new world in which suffering is abolished, a world of completely whole or healed men and women in a society where peace reigns and there are no master-slave relationships – quite a different situation from that of the society of the time. As things are there “it may not be so among you” (Lk 22:24-27).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD is a changed new relationship (metanoia) of men and women with God, the tangible and visible side of which is a new type of liberating relationship among men and women with a reconciling society, in a peaceful natural environment.²⁶

Seen from the above perspectives, the Church is at the service of the Kingdom. One must remember that “Although the Kingdom may not be identified with the Church, that does not mean that the Kingdom is not present in her. The word Church may not appear often in Jesus’ teaching but the very concept of the messianic community, intrinsically bound up with the Kingdom, implies the same

²⁵ R. MCBRIEN, *Catholicism*, HarperCollins, New York 1985, 686.

²⁶ Cf. E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Church: The Human Story of God*, SCM Press, New York 1990, 116-133.

thing as the concept of Church”.²⁷ If, therefore, Jesus’ mission is to establish the Kingdom, and given the fact that it is the Church that draws its mission from Jesus, the mission of the Church in Asia must also be aimed at establishing the Kingdom, which has far reaching implications, more than just establishing buildings or centres that we call Churches and trying to fill them with members.

With regard to mission, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

By her very mission, “the Church [...] travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world: she is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God” (GS 40 §2). Missionary endeavor requires patience. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ, continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are “a sign of God’s presence in the world” (AG 15), and leads to the foundation of local churches. It must involve a process of inculturation if the Gospel is to take flesh in each people’s culture. There will be times of defeat. “With regard to individuals, groups, and peoples it is only by degrees that [the Church] touches and penetrates them and so receives them into a fullness which is Catholic” (AG 6) (CCC 854).

The Church’s mission stimulates efforts toward Christian unity. Indeed, “divisions among Christians prevent the Church from realizing in practice the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her sons who, though joined to her by Baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her. Furthermore, the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its aspects” (UR 4) (CCC 855).

The missionary task implies a respectful dialogue with those who do not yet accept the Gospel. Believers can profit from this dialogue by learning to appreciate better “those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God” (AG 9). They proclaim the Good News to those who do not know it, in order to consolidate, complete, and raise up the truth and

²⁷ J. FUELLENBACH, *Kingdom of God as Principle of Action in the Church*, 20 November 1999, <https://sedosmission.org/old/eng/fuellenbach.htm/>.

the goodness that God has distributed among men and nations, and to purify them from error and evil “for the glory of God, the confusion of the demon, and the happiness of man” (AG 9). (CCC 856).

I would like to consider this understanding of mission by looking at the early Christian community: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Ac 2:42-47).

Many of us marvel at the fact of how the early Christian community grew and we are grateful that we are part of that expansion. But what we should note is that their numbers grew day by day not because of their missionary zeal and fixation to baptise in numbers, but the missionary zeal was expressed in the way they lived their lives. It is their faith, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer and communal living that drew the attention of many people. This is living the mission as Jesus commanded: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34-35). I believe St. Francis of Assisi understood this command of Jesus fully when he said to his companions: “Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words” and on another occasion he says, “it is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching”.

In this light then, the four models of Church in Asia – *community*, *participatory*, *dialoguing*, and *prophetic* – must then guide the task of *making disciples*. The Church as *community* calls for an understanding that the Church acts as a catalyst to be the bridge between communities (communion of communities). The Church is called to be the leaven in society not just for Christians but also for all communities. She is called to build peace among communities and not otherwise. If the task of *making disciples* then brings about division and unrest among the other communities that inhabit the Kingdom, then the task of *making disciples* comes into question.

A *participatory* Church calls for the Church to be immersed and relevant in the lives of all peoples. The Church cannot exclude itself in an attitude of *holier than thou* and be isolated from the world. The task of *making disciples* must facilitate the common good of humanity and work toward making the Kingdom a reality.

A *dialoguing* Church seeks to engage with peoples of all traditions and cultures without having a need to impose itself on the other. At the heart of the task of *making disciples* is to make disciples for the Kingdom and not disciples for the Church. This in no way belittles the task of *making disciples* of the faith but that should flow from *making disciples* for the Kingdom.

A *prophetic* Church speaks for humanity. She is the voice of the voiceless, marginalised, poor, oppressed and those in need. The Church cannot discriminate one against the other for she exists for all, irrespective of religion, race, social status, gender, etc.

In the light of the above, the task of *making disciples* in Asia must be defined in the context of a Church that builds community, seeks participation, engages in a spirit of dialogue, and finally, to be the prophet in the world.

6. Communion and Mission for Asia

It is significant that the year 2019 marks the 20th anniversary of the Post Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, and that we ask once again what being the Church in Asia means. Wherever these reflections lead to, the way toward defining the Church in Asia must include the word “communion”. Our faith is defined and “revealed only within the communion of life and action of the Trinity” (EA 12). For this reason, then we should look at how the Church in Asia can be a model of “communion”. In the words of John Paul II, “[the] *characteristic mode of the Church’s life in Asia* [is a] sincere and honest sharing of experiences, ideas and proposals proved to be the way to a genuine meeting of spirits, a communion of minds and hearts which, in love, respects and transcends differences” (EA 3). The “communion” that we share must transcend our differences and move in the direction of unity of mind and hearts which binds us in the commonality of being human.

In Christ we see that his mission not only restored communion between God and humanity; it also established a *new communion* between human beings irrespective of our differences:

In him, a new harmony has emerged, in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, [...] neither slave nor free, [...] neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Jesus is our peace, “who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14). In all that he said and did, Jesus was the Father’s voice, hands and arms, gathering all God’s children into one family of love. He prayed that his disciples might live in communion just as he is in communion with the Father (cf. Jn 17:11). Among his last words we hear him say: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:9, 12) (EA 13).

The bond of communion between Jesus and the Church is preserved by the Holy Spirit for it is this same Spirit that empowers the Church to continue the mission of Christ by witnessing to Jesus Himself. The Church has been blessed by the variety of the gifts that comes from the Holy Spirit and therefore “the Spirit gathers into unity all kinds of people, with their different customs, resources and talents, making the Church a sign of the communion of all humanity [...] The Spirit shapes the Church as a community of witnesses” (EA 17).

One has to remember that “communion and mission” (EA 24) are not opposed to each other; they in fact go hand in hand. Seen from this perspective, “the Church’s first purpose then is to be the sacrament of *the inner union of the human person with God*, and, because people’s communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of *the unity of the human race*” (EA 24).

The Church in Asia has a unique opportunity to be the *sacrament of communion* – not just between Jesus and the Church, but also amongst the many religions that we co-exist with. The Church must have a wider vision to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

In the midst of so many different peoples, cultures and religions the life of the Church as communion assumes greater importance. In effect, the Church’s service of unity has a specific relevance in Asia where there are so many tensions, divisions and conflicts, caused by ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, economic and religious differences (EA 24).

If the Church in Asia is to define its ecclesiology for mission, then we need to focus on “‘communion and mission’ and the ‘mission of communion’” (EA 25) as the way of being Church. Being in a country which is blessed with so many different faith traditions, the Church has a great opportunity to engage with peoples of different faith since we all share a common goal. Communion in itself implies that Churches are open to one another, mutual respect, and without prejudice. In fact, “communion and dialogue are two essential aspects of the Church’s mission, which have their infinitely transcendent exemplar in the mystery of the Trinity, from whom all mission comes and to whom it must be directed” (EA 31).

To the lawyer who asked Jesus, “which commandment in the law is the greatest?” (Mt 22:36), Jesus not only indicated the command to love God but in the same breath called to mind the need to love our neighbours. The Church in Asia as a *sacrament of communion* must engage in dialogue with others and in order to become this Church, we need to inculcate the “spirit of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences. For all this, love of others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment” (RM 56).

Mission *Ad-Inter Gentes*: A Polycentric Ecclesiology for the Church in Asia

❖ AGNÈS KIM MI-JEUNG

The Second Vatican Council, in an era of rapid development throughout the world, marked a 'new start' for the Church. By drawing on its missionary experience of the 19th and 20th century, the Church prepared for an *aggiornamento* in every aspect of its life. The majority of the Council fathers wanted to change the Church's direction, to make up for the delay in abandoning the neo-scholastic paradigm that it had sustained over the centuries. In his opening speech to the Council, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, John XXIII¹ proposed to go out into the world not as prophets of doom, but with a positive attitude of goodwill, to listen and to take note of its true situation and its development, in order to find better ways to spread the Good News. The 2,400 bishops from all over the world, who already symbolised a new ecclesial model, endeavoured to seek a new paradigm without using the existing template. Through compromising with those who longed to maintain the previous paradigm, they gained this achievement, and found "a new way of feeling, wishing and behaving"² for the Church, as Paul VI said, so that it could strike out once more in its saving mission, re-energising and regenerating its presence in the world. The Council thus succeeded in evolving from a more deductive, scholastic, speculative, centralised and doctrinal direction, to one which was more inductive, scriptural and pastoral, and established a means for promoting the individual, existential and cultural human experience.

¹ Cf. JOHN XXIII, *Address on the Occasion of the Solemn Opening of the Most Holy Council (11 October 1962)*, available in English at <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/god-man-and-the-universe-week-two/gaudet-mater-ecclesia/>.

² PAUL VI, *Catholic documentation*, n. 14171, col. 179.

What did this change of direction mean for the Church of Asia? At that time, Christianity consisted of a tiny minority on the Asian continent, and many Churches were still on a missionary footing. Although Vatican II was the first Council in which Asian bishops took part (out of the 2,449 participants in the first session, 298 came from Asia), nonetheless the vast majority were European and belonged to missionary institutes. Therefore, the Council was dominated above all by the concerns of the Western Church. The presence of bishops from Asia as well as Africa was not much relevant and none else besides, besides them, highlighted during the Council the need to adapt Christianity to the Asian and African contexts, amid a historical phase calling for new relations between ‘politics and church’ in many countries of the two continents:

In this period, almost all the territories of Asia and Africa represented at Vatican II were strongly marked by a process of decolonisation and political emancipation which raised issues common to all these young States. It implied redefining relations between the local church, and the state authorities, taking national sensitivities into account and rejecting any subordination to external interests, implementing true catholicity. Issues of liturgy, representation, links with the commitment to *Propaganda Fide* in this context, form just so many opportunities of confronting viewpoints.³

However, the future Cardinal Kim Su-hwan, who followed the Council attentively while he was studying in Germany together with other Korean priests, spoke of their immense joy at the proposed Council reforms, and constantly stressed its importance, hoping ardently for its thorough acceptance.

Whether for the Church in the West, or in Asia, nothing will be gained “unless the end is also a beginning”, as Karl Rahner wrote

³ C. PRUDHOMME, “Les archives d’Asie et d’Afrique”, in P. COULON – C. PRUDHOMME, “Le Concile Œcuménique Vatican II à la lumière des archives des Pères conciliaires. Colloque international pour le 50^e anniversaire du Concile Vatican II (1962-2012). Cité du Vatican, octobre 3-5, 2012”, *Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses*, n. 24, 2012, 134. All texts, sentences, and expressions in languages other than English were translated by the author and reviewed by Urbaniana University Press.

about the Council of Chalcedon.⁴ Since Vatican II, the changes throughout the world and in the situation of the Church, which have now become glaringly obvious, require the compass to be reset, with a reinterpretation of the Council documents. A change of direction does not however mean a complete rupture with the past, since Christian truth is not something which fluctuates as the world changes. The context of Asia, especially Korea, shaped as it is by economic neo-liberalism, globalisation, political change, scientific technology and communications media, requires the structures, styles, habits and languages of the Church, along with the missionary perspective, to be reset for a greater missionary fruitfulness. As Pope Francis emphasises in *Evangelii Gaudium*, we have to think about “the reform of the Church in her missionary outreach” (EG 17), so that the mission is better suited to today’s world. To deal with these concerns, first of all I will quickly set out the characteristics of the watersheds in the missionary perspective before, during and after Vatican II, to give a better idea of the changes to this perspective operating in *Ad Gentes*, the Decree on the Church’s missionary activity, and the consequent continuity and break with the history of the mission.

1. In the Continuity of History

To understand what stage the mission is going through today, I will briefly trace its history, from the time of certainty to the conciliar *Ad Gentes* mission and the post-conciliar period, a time of uncertainty.

1.1 Missionary Certainty

Writing about mission, Johannes Schütte, who was an active participant in the drafting of the Decree *Ad Gentes* says: “It is the Church indeed, in its awareness and self-discovery, which has been at the forefront of the discussions, the centre of the Council’s life and thought, but which was no less, always and in its essence, than the Church as missionary. During the Council, in a living experience,

⁴ Cf. K. RAHNER, “Current Issues in Christology”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, DDB, 1958, 115.

the Church was seen as missionary as never before”.⁵ This comment about awareness of mission astonishes us today, but the Council fathers were discovering that the Church “is missionary by her very nature” (AG 2), and that this role is “the greatest and holiest task of the Church” (AG 29). The word “mission” from the 16th century has had a particular, technical meaning which has described the apostolic mandate. Mission, regarded as the carrying-out of the saving will of God according to Christ’s commandment to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19), was from then on considered to be the sending of specialists to people located outside the Christian space, in order to spread the faith and set up Church institutions. This missionary perspective would endure until the beginning of the 20th century.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, mission turned to be closely associated with the expansion of colonisation triggered by the industrial, economic and social revolution in Europe. At that time, many new missionary congregations, as well as associations for aid to the missions, were founded with four main tasks: conversion (*conversio animarum*); establishing local Churches (*plantatio ecclesiae*) as a concrete expression of divine will; improving the human condition through investment in health and education; allowing the Church to play a civilising role. During this period, the Church was ‘certain’ of itself in its missionary perspective, which was based on a clear distinction between ‘baptised’ and ‘non-baptised’, and ‘outside’ and ‘within’ the boundaries of the Church.

1.2 On the Mission of *Ad Gentes*

At the Second Vatican Council, the ecclesial mentality, which had still not escaped from this perspective of the certainty of mission, would be overturned. The missionary perspective was significantly altered by the Church’s new awareness of itself, of the need for different relations with the civil society, other Christian denominations and other religions, of the changing post-colonial and post-missionary situation with the establishment of young Churches. To grasp the thinking of the Council on mission, *Ad Gentes* should be

⁵J. SCHUTTE, *L’activité missionnaire de l’Église, Décret Ad Gentes*, Unam Sanctam, Cerf, Paris 1967, 11.

read together with the Council's documents addressing ecumenism, religious freedom and relations with non-Christian religions, which led to the need to change some of the assertions previously made about the mission. Here following, the most significant aspects of the universal mission of the Church as defined by the Council will be addressed, so as to explain their impact on the missions.

1.3 Consideration of the Trinity, as the Source of Mission and its Impact within the Missionary Perspective

“The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (AG 2). Because of the fact that the Trinitarian God is the origin of the mission, mission itself can no longer be considered as a simple duty for Christians, but as the very nature of the Church and the Christian being, called to participate in the very life of the Trinity. The Church receives its mission from that of Jesus Christ, and in turn sends out men and women into the world to bear witness to the love of the Father in the Holy Spirit. “Thus, the Church goes from ‘having missions’ to ‘being missionary’”.⁶ Hence, it is this *missio Dei* which in some way orders the *missio Ecclesiae*, not the other way around. Rediscovering the *missio Dei* dimension has rebalanced the missionary perspective, understood for centuries as a one-sided *missio Ecclesiae*. The Church is called to be the sacramental presence of the love of this Trinitarian God, who wishes to communicate himself by offering a share in his own life and so, *the Trinitarian God is not only the origin of the mission, but also the source of the missionary's attitude and style.*

1.4 Impact of the Ecclesiological Change on the Missionary Structure

Given that the Church is understood in *Lumen Gentium* as the “universal sacrament of salvation” (LG 48) and not the Kingdom itself, even though the idea of establishing the Church still remains

⁶ R.J. SCHREITER, “Changes in Roman Catholic Attitudes toward Proselytism and Mission”, in J.A. SCHERER – S.B. BEVANS (eds.), *New Directions in Mission and Evangelisation*, Orbis Book, New York – Maryknoll 1991, 117.

important, this “no longer in and of itself was the be-all and end-all of mission”.⁷ According to the ecclesiology of *Ad Gentes*, “the charge of proclaiming the Gospel in the whole world falls primarily on the body of bishops, the Synod of bishops or that ‘stable Council of bishops for the entire Church’” (AG 29).

The prerogatives of *Propaganda Fide*, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, are reaffirmed in its capacity as the “only one competent office [...] which should direct and coordinate, throughout the world, both missionary work itself and missionary cooperation” (AG 29). However, the body of bishops is the first responsible for the mission and the missionary institutes are henceforward under the jurisdiction of bishops linked to the episcopal conferences. Maurice Pivot explains this change as follows: “The horizon given now is the expansion of the Church’s love through the love of God, the universal gathering of charity, presided over by the chair of Peter”.⁸ This is a major change from the period when the mission *ad extra* was considered the exclusive work of European Churches, directed by Rome.

1.5 Impact of the Change in Relations with the World and with Other Religions in the Mission

Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, emerged from a concrete and practical theology, wishing to join the *historical reality* with a lively awareness of the challenges of the world and the need to dialogue with it. Accordingly, this document put forward a new understanding of culture, whereby there is no single normative culture which has to be thought of as Christian. Hence, “we speak of a plurality of cultures” (GS 53). Culture itself has become a place of mission and *Ad Gentes* aims to contribute to the evangelisation of cultures.

However, *Ad Gentes* did not fail to note the importance of the inculturation of the Gospel itself, even though this new term had not yet been used: “The Church, in order to be able to offer all of them

⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁸ M. PIVOT, “Problèmes actuels et perspectives de la *Mission Ad Gentes*”, in T. TSHIBANGU (ed.), *L’avenir de l’activité missionnaire Ad Gentes. Perspectives pour le XXI^e siècle*, Congrès international de missiologie “Tertio Millennio”, 11-17 juillet 2004, Médiaspaul, Kinshasa 2005, 48.

the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, must implant herself into these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind himself, in virtue of his Incarnation, to certain social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom he dwelt” (AG 10). Even though “conversion of souls” (AG 40) and “the planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ” (AG 6) continue to be the goals of the mission, these two goals are interpreted more as establishing the fullness of the means of salvation, and they are closely combined with the dimension of proclamation, witness, dialogue and service. These all, moreover, imply changes to the style of language used, to one of love, respect, invitation and service.

1.6 Post-Conciliar Period: A Time of Uncertainty and Reform of Missionary Activity

After a brief period of missionary impetus driven by the implications of the Council’s decisions, from 1968 onwards, the Church, which formerly dispatched missionaries, entered a time of crisis and uncertainty about mission. The recognition that the Holy Spirit can act outside the Church made the boundary between ‘outside and inside’ much more fluid, and the main motivation for missionary work also became fluid from then on. The effort made to dialogue with society, with cultures and with other religions, to discover and recognize the *otherness* of others, reduced the enthusiasm for mission, which was formerly nourished by the certainty engendered by a clear boundary. The autonomy of local Churches also reduced the missionary zeal, at least initially in the post-conciliar period. The Decree *Ad Gentes* is certainly a culminating point, after a long period of certainty, but this missiological thought gradually matures depending on the context, with pertinent questions asked about meaning, purpose and the form of mission: What is mission? What are the missionary objectives? How can the missionary task be linked to the need for dialogue and inculturation? The predominant missionary models increasingly became a way of living and acting as a missionary of the Church within a particular society, rather than spreading the faith. The post-conciliar popes have endeavoured to promote the missionary engagement during this period of uncertainty, producing three major documents: *Evangelii Nuntian-di*, *Redemptoris Missio* and more recently *Evangelii Gaudium*.

This period of uncertainty has been experienced in a somewhat different way in the Churches in Asia because of their particular contexts. Mission in Asia needs to address major cultural, political and religious aspects. On a cultural level, the Council teachings had limited reception due to the unavailability or the inaccuracy of the translations of the documents, the latter being often caused by the lack of theological and canonical concepts susceptible to be phrased in Asian languages.

Therefore, Church's missionary activity and the rooting of the Christian tradition in Asia are often identified with the inculturation issue.⁹ Claude Prudhomme emphasises it thus: "In this sense, for these churches, young or old, the Council constituted a seminal moment, which opened up a new field of possibility in terms of liturgical, theological and social initiative".¹⁰

At the same time, for most Churches in Asia, the question of engagement in the socio-political and economic issues of the poor and marginalised took on a combative character. In particular, the Church in Korea was well supported for its commitment by the theoretical and theological foundations of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.

When preparing for the celebration of its bi-centenary, entitled "Vatican Council II in Korea" during the 1980s, the Korean Church underwent major reforms which gave a new dynamism to the missionary drive. During the preparation period, it entered another stage of its existence. It was said that in trying to read the signs of the times, it endeavoured to adopt for itself the conciliar spirit through reform at the diocesan and parish levels. Priests, collaborating with the laity, sought a new structure for the Church and a new missionary method based on the Council documents. Hence, for the first time, the Church officially proposed dialogue and collaboration with the world in the pursuit of the common good of humanity.

As for the Asian religious context, *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, has had

⁹ On 1 January 1965, the change to the language of the liturgy, according to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, probably the most dramatic and significant change from the Council, had a huge impact on these Churches. The missionary congregations played a very important part in this task.

¹⁰ C. PRUDHOMME, "Les archives d'Asie et d'Afrique", 134.

a profound influence on the Church in Asia. The continent is moulded from other religions and the vast majority of the population is non-Christian and poor. Therefore, interreligious dialogue, which is intimately linked to the socio-political and inculturation issues, has become an essential factor in the Church's mission. The language adopted by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) thus could no longer be absolute or exclusive, but became relational. But how does dialogue itself relate to the very nature of the Church which is missionary?

Through these efforts of inculturation, socio-political engagement and interreligious dialogue used by the Church in Asia, the teaching of Vatican II is implemented in a particular way, while bringing out the dominant model of the mission. Certainly, as Peter C. Phan points out, the missionary thrust of *Ad Gentes* in the Church in Asia needs to be considered, as mission has recently experienced a remarkable growth with the foundation of several missionary societies:

This phenomenon may be considered as welcoming the emphasis Vatican II places on the mission *ad gentes*, which is the duty of the entire Church, including those in so-called mission territories. There are six missionary societies *ad gentes*: The Society of the Missions for the Philippines, the Missionary Society of Saint Thomas Apostle (India), the Catholic Foreign Missions Society of Korea, the Missionary Society of the Heralds of the Good News (India), the Missionary Society of Thailand, the Lorenzo Ruiz Missionary Society (Philippines).¹¹

The essential elements of *Ad Gentes* remain as the main reference point, but they are applied in different ways according to context. Today, the change in the present context requires us to adjust the heading once more for a new beginning to boost the missionary drive. It would be necessary to first study the change to our ecclesial and socio-cultural context since the Council, and then re-examine the missionary perspective.

¹¹ P.C. PHAN, "Le Concile de Vatican II et l'Église en Asie", 29.

2. Change to the Global and Ecclesial Context

Since the Council, a major change has taken place in the Church by the implementation of the decisions taken at the Council, and above all, by the profound socio-cultural and economic transformation locally, and around the world.

2.1 Changes to the Ecclesial Landscape

The Churches founded by the ‘missions’ are now the majority in the ecclesial landscape. They have started to take on their own character, as we have been observing, and to become missionaries themselves in Churches born from the mission, as well as in those of their older siblings. This new situation certainly opens up a field for consideration of Christianity’s new historical face. A new embodiment of being Church has emerged, particularly in the Church in Asia, through the three characteristics described earlier, i.e. the issues of culture, interreligious dialogue and socio-political commitment. As for the Church in Europe, now a minority within a secularised society, it is also seeking to invent a new style so that it can manage a weakened infrastructure because of the falling numbers of priests and the regrouping of parishes into local pastoral units. This situation has allowed new ecclesial experiences to emerge, giving rise to an organisation governed more by hospitality and fraternity, and offering a message with meaning and practical service in a ‘style’ closer to that of Jesus. This change is clearly tending toward a reform of the Church which goes beyond clericalism, to encourage greater participation by the laity.¹²

2.2 Context of Pluralism and its Consequences in the Church

The Council repositioned itself as to the notions of catholicity and ecumenism, and allowed the Church to embed the Gospel in the plurality of cultures, by highlighting the ‘Gospel and culture’ rela-

¹² A. KIM MI-JEUNG et al., “L’unité et la diversité dans la rencontre de l’Évangile et de l’Église avec le monde et les cultures”, in M. LAMBERIGTS et al. (eds.), *50 ans après le Concile Vatican II. Des théologiens du monde délibèrent*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2016, 93.

tionship with the adage *Deus multifariam multisque modis locus est*.¹³ However, in recent decades, released by globalization and information technology, which free up space and time, and by the mass movements of people around the world, the global and local context has experienced a major shift, revealing the insufficiency of the Council's idea of plurality.

In today's world, with so much greater intermingling everywhere, there is a more profound awareness of pluralism with recognition of its legitimacy. The reality of the lives of women and men, very diverse and different as they are, are understood better as a true and irreducible, cognitive and existential reality. In this context, where plurality has become familiar, there is some consideration given to the uniqueness of each people – its religious and cultural bonds, its memory and language, etc. – which was and which is often discounted and subjugated by those who consider themselves to be at the centre. Those who were formerly considered as marginal are today beginning to reveal their *otherness*, which disturbs those who once considered themselves central and also upsetting their certainty. A phenomenon is appearing in the Church, similar to that which is seen in the world. The new context reveals that the Council documents too are the product of a particular centre, since the categories they use are well and truly Latin. The Council fathers certainly opened the door to the ecclesial principle of recognising the plurality of cultures, peoples, tribes, languages and nations, but we have to admit that this recognition still remains insufficient nowadays within the Church. Today's Christian majority is forged by categories which are neither Greek nor Latin. The transition to these other peoples, coincident with the decline in Eurocentrism, tends to engender another historical embodiment of the Church than that of the West linked to the Mediterranean basin. This new embodiment is disturbing – already disturbed by the present Pope – to those who have dominated for centuries.

2.3 The Socio-Cultural Impact of Globalisation

The Council fathers were aware of emerging globalisation. They had not, however, taken the measure of its consequences, which

¹³ *Ibid.*, 86.

deepened and expanded at an increasing rate, nor of its accompanying effects. Instead, they retained a somewhat over-optimistic attitude:

The increase of commerce between the various nations and human groups opens more widely to all the treasures of different civilizations and thus little by little, there develops a more universal form of human culture, which better promotes and expresses the unity of the human race to the degree that it preserves the particular aspects of the different civilizations (GS 54).

There are certainly women and men of conscience around the world, endeavouring to promote the unity of human families and striving to overcome divisions which have formed over human history. Their work certainly contributes to opening up of possible channels for reconciliation and solidarity in regions scarred by conflict. But the globalisation powered by techno-science and economics, prizes homogeneity, smoothing out differences and relativizing local values, so engendering a uniform, materialist and market-driven culture. This levelling-out of local values incites the rise in fundamentalism and various forms of isolationism. Such reactions can imprison the human person into a mindset of identity, presenting difference as a symbolic frontier which nothing is permitted to cross, ending even the idea of a common human family.

2.4 Two Trends in the Church

During this period of discovery of *otherness* and identity politics in the post-conciliar Church, some passionate research took place on inculturation in the Churches born of mission, due to them becoming aware of the importance of their own cultural setting. There are certain Asian theologians who worked on inculturation from their traditions and culture of origin, seeking out the elements in them which converged with Christian values. When the Decree *Ad Gentes* highlighted the option for evangelisation of culture in close relationship to that of Gospel Incarnation, this process of adaptation was valuable in missionary activity. This quest to restore value to their culture, denouncing the symbolic violence which the Church had committed in some countries, was certainly legitimate. But there is some remaining ambiguity in this search for incultura-

tion. In the confusing background to post-colonialism, the search for inculturation was sometimes pursued without asking whether or not this promotion of local culture led to evangelisation of that culture. Without such reflection, the efforts made toward inculturation, born from the will to be at one with the local culture, can become a narrow, false identity, leading to the Christian faith being seen as coincident with one particular ethnic group. This could lead “to endless, tragic conflicts, including ‘confessionalisation’ of political struggles”, confusing the pursuit of evangelisation with that of national or ethnic identity. In our world, above all, where isolationist and fragmenting trends threaten many areas of life, it is good to be aware of the potential for these efforts toward inculturation of Christianity to drift off course.

At the same time, there is also a certain ambiguity which remains in the understanding of the universal Church. Although the Council endeavoured to avoid “unrealistic” characteristics¹⁴ in its ecclesiological approach, *Lumen Gentium* remains “marked by a universalist, or even an abstract approach to ecclesial reality”,¹⁵ as Alphonse Borras, post-conciliar canonist emphasises: “The ecclesiological direction taken by the last Council is more of a theology of the Universal Church, stripped of excessive Roman centralisation certainly, and sensitive to its essential nature of communion, but still marked by a universalist, even abstract approach to ecclesial reality”.¹⁶ The concept of communion may be understood more as an incorporation of local Churches into the one already at the centre, which is considered as universal.¹⁷

At the heart of this global and ecclesial situation, how can a fresh perspective be brought to the idea of mission? For a good missiological vision, we first need a good ecclesiology, which would overcome

¹⁴ Cf. O. ROUSSEAU, “La Constitution *Lumen Gentium* dans le cadre des mouvements rénovateurs de théologie et de pastorale des dernières décades”, in G. BARAUNA (ed.), *L’Église de Vatican II*, Tome II, Unam Sanctam, Cerf, Paris 1966, 35.

¹⁵ A. BORRAS, “Le droit ecclésial à l’intersection du ‘particulier’ et de ‘l’universel’”, *Revue théologique de Louvain*, vol. 32, 2001, 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ The use of the category of Universal Church (*Ecclesia Universalis*) as opposed to the particular Church, could lead to the idea that the catholicity of the diocesan Church is located outside itself, in this case in the Universal Church.

both Roman centralism that persists despite the efforts of Pope Francis, and particularism, as we have noted.

3. Proposal for Polycentric Ecclesiology, for the Sake of Mission in the World Today

Mission is one of the greatest challenges for the Church in today's world. It needs to be encouraged by making progress along the path of Church reform, as Pope Francis emphasises. "Neither Vatican II nor Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation addressed this link (reform and mission)",¹⁸ but Pope Francis presents ecclesial reform as a condition for credibility of the salvation message. In the first chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* entitled *The Church's Missionary Transformation*, he speaks of "a Church which 'goes forth'" (EG I.20-24) to announce the Gospel to all, and for faithfulness to Jesus Christ. For the Church to be "going forth" (EG 20), its structures must be reformed, since "here are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them" (EG 26). Recently, in his speech announcing an Extraordinary Missionary Month in October 2019, he again traces an intrinsic bond between mission and reform of the Church, emphasising that a "renewed missionary commitment' [...] 'renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive'".¹⁹ He also seeks to encourage the efforts of evangelism, maintaining an outgoing dynamism in administrative style and our habitual ways of working.

Pope Francis's thus calls into question also the Church in Asia, where there is a serious risk of the initiative of the people of God being stifled by clericalism, nourished by the surrounding culture and the sense of the sacred. How can the Church in Asia establish a less clerical structure, by reducing administration, being less embroiled

¹⁸ CH. THEOBALD, "L'exhortation apostolique *Evangelii Gaudium* : Esquisse d'une interprétation originale du Concile Vatican II", *Revue théologique de Louvain*, vol. 46, 2015, 328.

¹⁹ POPE FRANCIS, *Letter of the Holy Father Francis for the Centenary of the Promulgation of the Apostolic Letter 'Maximum Illud'*, 22 October 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171022_lettera-filoni-mese-missionario.html/.

in parish issues and encouraging a community approach rooted in the faith of the Apostles? Within a society that is undergoing an anthropological and cultural crisis, how can Christians be helped to move beyond activism and confront positive pragmatism without spirituality? How can Christians confront the idea of an individualistic salvation and a self-centred spirituality of well-being which does not commit itself?

I have some modest points to propose when considering the horizon to which missionary activity is directed, and an ecclesiology adapted to this horizon which will appropriately establish guidelines for today's mission. From these few points will come about the new style, the new language and the new ecclesial structure which "can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" (EG 27).

3.1 The Unity of Humanity as a Missionary Horizon

The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* opens by affirming the unity of humanity as a fundamental horizon for the Church:

Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, she desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. This she intends to do following faithfully the teaching of previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ (LG 1).

As "sacrament of unity", the Church serves this divine plan of gathering together separated and dispersed humanity in Jesus Christ.²⁰ When Jesus prayed to his Father "that all of them may be one, [...] as we are one" (Jn 17:21-22), he was praying that we might resemble the Trinitarian God, by "constructing a human *we*, resembling the *Divine We*", as Joseph Moingt writes. This aim of a totali-

²⁰ *Nostra Aetate* also begins by reaffirming the Church's missionary task of "promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations" (NA 1).

ty of unified humanity is a call to “become human, to bond people together with this same bond of humanity” and “by the joint participation of all in their common aim”.²¹ Increasingly, in today’s world, it is especially urgent to review and rebuild globalisation, which is in itself the main driver of this cultural levelling and fragmentation, leading to our human love for others being placed in jeopardy by the narrow-mindedness of personal interest and isolationism within each country; so this calling of the Church to unity must become the very objective of missionary activity. In this situation, the proclamation of the Gospel is meaningless unless the Church focuses on this universal horizon, committed even more to unity, reconciliation and peace, in order for people to not remain trapped in their injured history or in their economic interests, but enter into dialogue and collaboration with each other.

According to this missionary perspective in Asian, where there are many ancient non-Christian religions deeply-rooted in the continent, the Church is not called to be one religion in competition with others, to present another unknown God to them. Rather, like Christ who “will draw all people to himself” (Jn 12:32), it is called to become the initiator, building a *human We* in the image of the Trinitarian God, forming bonds of peace and reconciliation among different peoples, to manifest the gratuitous love of God to all without exception. *Given that human beings are not saved alone but together by the bonds of humanity which unite them with each other, mission cannot be planned as a proselytising operation but as a work for human unity, related to a diversity of ways of living.* The Church must exist for all, in the hospitable way Jesus indicated, not as an exclusive religion or as a group separate from others, holding a monopoly of truth. The meaning of truth flows out from the encounter with others. The Church must be a rallying point, by healing the wounds of history and reconciling conflicting peoples.

3.2 Dimension of *Otherness* and of Communion

Recognition of *otherness* is vital for moving toward this horizon of unity. According to *Lumen Gentium*, it is in and from each particu-

²¹ J. MOINGT, *Dieu Qui Vient à l’Homme: de l’Apparition à la Naissance de Dieu*, vol. 2, Cerf, Paris 2008, 993.

lar Church formed in the image of the universal Church, that the one and unique Catholic Church exists (cf. LG 23). Each local Church rooted in its own cultural setting, bearer of its own history, is to be considered as one, unique and authentic centre, by the fact that it is an assembly around the Eucharist, following the crucified, risen Jesus Christ. Each local 'one and unique' Church therefore should be considered as having its own consistency and centrality on a cultural, historical, social and symbolic level, not as an emanation from any centre already present (in this case, unity would mean belonging to a centre which claims to be universal). While the irreducible singularity of each of God's people is a gift, it is a gift which is also a vocation. Rootedness in the singularity of memory of each people is the only way to establish an authentic relationship with other singularities,²² but it is meaningless without sharing in this gift.

Lumen Gentium describes the ecclesiology of communion in which the particular Church is invited to enter into relation with other particular Churches: "Each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the entire Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all, and by the common effort to achieve fullness in unity" (LG 13). It has to be said that communion among local Churches is only possible through the recognition of *otherness* of each local Church. At the same time, recognition of *otherness* must be lived in the dimension of *communion and reciprocity* with other local Churches and within itself. Without this recognition of *otherness*, the Church is reduced to a single feature, and it becomes difficult to enter into that communion which enables it to live in the fullness of God's gift; at the same time, without communion, the Church becomes a parallel add-on. The local Church is not an isolated Church, but it is fundamentally in communion with others. The local Church too, focused on its own preservation and internal affairs, is invited to enter into relation with other local Churches, near and far. In the Asian continent in particular, where Christianity is the minority, it is important to live this bond of communion among local Churches.

²² For the Council, it was therefore important to rework the relationship between 'pope and bishops', between 'centre and periphery'. This subject was the 'spark to the fuse' during the Council and is the focus of chapter III of *Lumen Gentium*.

The theological perspective of inculturation, based on the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, cannot be considered without that of Easter and Pentecost; in other words, without the new birth through purification symbolised by the Paschal mystery and without openness to others, which Pentecost symbolises.²³ As Fr. Arrupe has defined it, inculturation is “rootedness in a specific cultural area”, which allows the Christian experience to be expressed “with the elements proper to the local culture (this would again only be a superficial adaptation)”, but also that “this experience may also become a principle for inspiration, at once a benchmark and force for unification, which transforms and recreates the culture, in this way being the origin of a new creation”.²⁴ As a caterpillar metamorphoses into a butterfly, a new creation, which remains rooted in its deepest identity, becomes possible through faith in Christ. At the same time, this new creation is open to other singularities, through the power of the Holy Spirit which opens and establishes communication among those who are different. In fact, it is not enough to highlight otherness, but we must also endeavour to enter into the spirit of *Wê* in communion, the diaconate of relationship, of the “inter” which links people of very different cultural and ethnic origins. The paradigm of inculturation through interrelationship, therefore, has to become one of communion reciprocity.

The Council fathers wanted to rebalance Roman centralism, which had become unilaterally papal, modelled on an absolute monarchy. They set about doing this by reviving the ecclesiology of communion, through ‘episcopal collegiality’, and considering the pope and the apostolic college not as two contrasting entities, but as two entities in hierarchical communion (the Pope is a member of the college). They strengthened the status of the bishops’ conferences, making them mandatory, for the sake of a dynamic episcopal collegiality.²⁵ As the bishops’ conferences were not sufficiently con-

²³ Moreover, culture itself is also created through a continual encounter with others, through racial mix, and through transformation; instead, if it becomes closed, it stagnates and dies.

²⁴ P. ARRUPE, “Lettre sur l’inculturation”, *Ecrits pour évangéliser*, DDB, Paris 1985, 169.

²⁵ In the Synod of bishops, episcopal conferences are invited to join with the people to allow him to understand the situation of local Churches: this Synod is also the sign “that all the bishops in hierarchical communion partake of the so-

ceived as subjects of specific functions that have certain authentic doctrinal authority, Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, wrote of his wish for decentralisation: “The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position ‘to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit’” (EG 32). The reason for decentralisation is missionary: “Excessive centralisation, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach” (EG 32). However, he does not fail to stress the importance of communion, especially in today’s world:

The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds (EG 67).

3.3 Polycentric Ecclesiology

Along with the contemporary world, characterised by cultural polycentrism, the Church too has entered into a new stage in its history. In this context, the importance of Gospel inculturation in each local Church goes without saying, but here a new paradigm is needed which may hold together otherness and reciprocal communion. “Speaking of God”, limited within a single context, and “speaking of salvation and happiness” in isolation from other contexts, have little meaning, especially today with the emergence of a polycentric world and a global Church. Each local Church can only consider the context of where it is located, as it inevitably bears the mark of its own historical contingency. However, given that it is linked to other contexts, the effort of listening to each other and of hearing God’s call addressed to each other becomes a necessity. Fraternal interrelationships with other places, also bonded in Christ, help toward better self-understanding, better perception of one’s own structures of sin, relativize our immediate problems, refuse to make one’s particularity absolute and be nourished by new ways of reading both the Gospel

licity for the universal Church” (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, 5).

and the situation. Along with Michel de Certeau, we have to recognise that the other is always necessary to our truth: “You, who is another, you are necessary to my truth”.²⁶ God is God. He is not the property of any single person, even though he is present in every existence. Hence, the reciprocity of the different Churches, from North to South and from East to West, with their history, religious context and socio-cultural situation, becomes a gift which helps communion grow among Churches to their mutual enrichment. This poly-centrism requires a new way of structuring the Church and a new way of developing missiology, to respond together to God’s call.

A polycentric ecclesiology is founded on the model of the *perichoresis* of the three Divine Persons, who are without confusion, or separation, while within them circulates unceasingly the perpetual movement of love through which the Father engenders the Son in the Spirit. This *diakonia* is also experienced as an “inter” relationship that connects local Churches to each other and also people of very different cultural and ethnic backgrounds who often live in the same place, within a parish for instance. The polycentric ecclesiology based on this mystery of the Trinitarian God will help the circulation of the anthropological and spiritual riches of peoples within a fertile relationship, intrinsic to overcoming ethno-centric inwardness.

3.4 Mission *Ad-Inter Gentes* and some Guidelines for the Mission

Over history, and throughout the world, mission has taken on a different meaning and today globalisation has opened up a new geography of mission. We are living in tense times, caused by conflicts arising from this globalisation, which brings different groups together with their specific interests and conceptions of the world. This new context, characterised by multiple and interdependent global relations, could give us an opportunity to realise the divine plan for a universal communion, while calling for new ways of expressing Christian charity and announcing the Good News of salvation.

As we have seen with the new ecclesiological paradigm, based on a horizon that embraces all humanity, there is a seeking to enter into a reciprocal, rather than a unilateral relationship. Today’s world

²⁶ M. DE CERTEAU, “Y a-t-il un langage de l’unité ? De quelques conditions préalables”, *Concilium*, n. 51, 1970, 88.

invites us to consider mission from the perspective of respect for the other, while initiating interchange among people of different origins and cultures, for unity and to live together in peace and reciprocity. Faced with the risk of fragmentation and homogenisation, it is all the more important to consider mission from this perspective. In this way, we can no longer conceive mission from one direction *ad gentes*, but as that of a reciprocal process, *ad-inter gentes*. This is all the more appropriate in today's world, where there are some reservations about a one-way aid relationship, understood as giving to those who have nothing. Whether it is about truth, moral teaching, hope of salvation or material wellbeing, it is seen as somewhat presumptuous, paternalistic and stifling. Charity is not a paternalistic action, but it helps the other to stand up in order to be able to find for himself or herself a launch pad for hope.

Like the polycentric ecclesiology, the *missio ad-inter gentes* provides mutual support in the "inter" relationship, with a view to sustaining the birth of a new human being. Therefore, it is right that the paradigm of the *missio ad gentes* or *contra gentes* should become one of *missio ad-inter gentes*. For the latter, mission has a style of dialogue, interaction, reciprocity and integrity, which helps everyone to grow and experience redemption and grace together. The credibility of our faith in the world today lies in the way we witness, enter into relationship and fruitful reciprocity, and practice hospitality to those who are different. Faith in the Trinitarian God requires us to enter continually into the *perichoresis* relationship, to come out of our sense of self-sufficiency and never cease to discover God as Other, as more necessary than ever. Having thus defined the *missio ad-inter gentes*, I would finally like to indicate some areas needing special attention. Certainly, the purpose of missionary work, announcing the Good News of salvation, and that of its horizon, gathering the scattered children to Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 12:32), remain the same, but the style is different because of our circumstances. In my view, it is in three areas that we can better contribute to this purpose and this horizon of mission today in an integrated way.

a) Mission *Ad-Inter Gentes* to Connect People to Each Other

On the Asian continent, where there is a multiplicity of cultures, religions, ethnic groups and languages, it is even more important to work to bind together these divided and fragmented people. Pope

Francis, when emphasising the risk of isolation in today's world, mentions: "the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction" (EG 88). This kind of encounter allows us to overcome stereotypes and prejudice about the other, disarming fear or rejection of the other, or traumatised withdrawal, and thus encouraging different peoples to live together. The world has to know that what differentiates us is not to be treated as a reason for separation, but as a distinction which links people together, as an opportunity for fruitfulness. It is also right to work in big cities, which are becoming more and more multicultural, so as to transform the 'multi' to a context of 'inter', and encourage this 'meeting' and 'recognition'. Recognition of diversity is not enough, but we have to work with passion to enter into a relationship of unity, through exchange, circulation, sometimes through confrontation with different people, religions and ethnic groups. As the embryo of the unit of humanity in diversity, and as credible witnesses of the Trinity, the Church is called to work *ad-inter gentes* to gather in Jesus Christ, so that all the children of God could be united in a world where global conflicts never seem to end.

b) Mission *Ad-Inter Gentes* for Reconciliation

In the Asian world, wounds and resentment caused by historical conflicts have left lasting scars. Considering the various human groups, as Cardinal König said in 1965, "Christianity has to be revealed as a force for reciprocity and reconciliation".²⁷ After the death of Jesus, which broke down the wall dividing human beings, the Church was called to work for the reconciliation²⁸ of peoples in a state of conflict, rivalry and hatred:

²⁷ F. KÖNIG, *Documents conciliaires*, vol. 2, Centurion, Paris 1965, 201.

²⁸ In the early years of the Church's history, the word reconciliation described the aim and outcome of a long and painful penitential process, intended to reintegrate the repentant Christian, reconciling him or her with both God and with the Church community. The increase in private confession, with penalties and bound by secrecy after the High Middle Ages, discouraged the term and it fell into disuse, especially after the Council of Trent. Although Vatican II rarely used the term reconciliation, it opened the way to an increased use of this concept, which today has become widespread within the Church's context.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near (Eph 2:14-17).

Salvation is synonymous to reconciliation, for the latter is a work of humanisation and conversion by dialogue. Reconciliation with God is confirmed first of all within the self, by overcoming any interior divisions, and among individuals, groups and nations, in so far as these human realities form legal entities. The reconciling love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ is at the centre of the Church's life and ministry, as its essential mission. Pope Francis states that "diversity is a beautiful thing when it can constantly enter into a process of reconciliation and seal a sort of cultural covenant resulting in a 'reconciled diversity'" (EG 230). In our world of multiple cultures, the mission *ad-inter gentes* is called to work so that diversity is reconciled, with the help of the Holy Spirit who alone can recognize diversity and achieve unity.

c) Mission *Ad-Inter Gentes* against Dehumanisation

In the context of globalisation, the missionary option must be directed more toward solidarity in salvation, especially by raising awareness of the collective aspect and structures of sin in every culture and in global culture. We have to work together with all people of goodwill, against everything that dehumanises the human – the culture of death, the environmental issues, the logic of Babel in the technical, scientific, economic and political spheres, increased racism and nationalism – to establish a new form of humanity in solidarity. The mission *ad-inter gentes* involves establishing dialogue among cultures and religions to bring the Kingdom of God into being both in human hearts and in the paths of history, which fundamentally involves humanising humanity through conversion of the dehumanising traits.

Mission must also be found in this globalised world in the Church's very vocation, namely the sacrament of the unity of the human race. According to this horizon, we need to think of the mission in the Asian continent, where we live amongst a deeply diverse humanity, as being *ad-inter gentes*. This new paradigm for mission is rooted in the Trinitarian God, where the basis for the dimension of respect for otherness and reciprocity, communion and communication is found. Since the centrality of the Church is not in itself but in the relationship of God with the world, its mission is imaged in the action through which it accompanies God's path to the people. In the demand to come out of itself and to enter into 'inter' relations, the Church is the "universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48) for the world.

The Presence and Activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church's *Missio Ad Gentes* in Asia Today

A Reflection on Popular Religiosity and Piety

❖ JOHN JUNYANG PARK

A major task in the evangelization of Asia is to proclaim the salvific event and mystery of Jesus Christ within the religio-cultural reality of Asia which is predominantly non-Christian.¹ Indeed, Asia comprises diverse, complex, and multi-layered societies where poverty and religiosity intersect.² Therefore, to sow the “seed of the Gospel”³ and help it grow in such a reality, we need to earnestly and meticulously examine the soil in which it will take root. In fact, it can even be said that the need for such care and attention is more urgent in Asia compared to other parts of the world. The reality in East Asia is further complicated by the poverty and lack of economic growth on the one hand, and the intersecting of traditional reli-

¹ The religio-cultural reality of the Asian continent is very well described by John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*: “The most striking feature of the continent is the variety of its peoples who are heirs to ancient cultures, religions and traditions. We cannot but be amazed at the sheer size of the Asian population and at the intricate mosaic of its many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions, which comprises such a substantial part of the history and patrimony of the human family. Asia is also the cradle of the world’s major religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions, with varying degrees of structured ritual and formal religious teaching” (EA 6).

² Aloysius Pieris (1934 -), a famous Asian theologian from Sri Lanka, proposed “a polarity of ‘religion-poverty’ as the context of Asian theology” (A. PIERIS, *Asian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis Books New York – Maryknoll 1988, 61).

³ See the expression and concept adopted by the Second Vatican Council as regards the “seeds of the Word” (*semina Verbi*) in the Decree *Ad Gentes* 11 and 15, and the “preparation for the Gospel” (*Praeparatio Evangelica*) in *Lumen Gentium* 12.

giosity with science and technology on the other.⁴ Reflecting on the Asian reality will help us to identify the hopes and aspirations of the Asian people, and to feel their despair and suffering. It will reveal the situations that desperately call for salvation, leading us to search for ways to guide the people to faith in Jesus Christ through whom we are saved. This constitutes the very mission entrusted to all Christians in Asia.

1. Christologico-Pneumatological Reflection on Asian Theology

1.1 Proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Only Savior in the Context of Asia

It was in this context that the late Pope John Paul II, in his 1999 Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, emphasized that “the Church must be open to the new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia” (EA 20). He further explained that “the presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Savior needs to follow a *pedagogy* which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery.” The reference to this “pedagogy” signifies that “the presentation of Jesus Christ could come as the fulfillment of the yearning expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples”. In other words, “the ontological notions involved which must always be presupposed and expressed in presenting Jesus, can be complemented by more relational, historical and even cosmic perspectives”. This leads to the conclusion that evangelization in Asia requires “an evocative pedagogy, using stories and parables and symbols so characteristic of Asian methodology in teaching”.

This approach has been evaluated as an original, ground-breaking reflection on the methodology of evangelization in the contemporary world. The foundation of such an Asian methodology has been adopted by Pope Francis, whose Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* draws from *Ecclesia in Asia* 2 in defining evangelization as “the joyful, patient and progressive teaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (EG 100).

⁴ Regarding this reality of the East Asia region, cf. J.J. PARK, “Fundamentalism and Relativism: Why Young People Are Leaving the Church,” in V. TIRIMANNA (ed.), “Youth in Asia: Challenges of Fundamentalism and Relativism”, *FABC Papers*, n. 135, 2012, 87-100.

1.2 Theological Methodology of Dialogue and Proclamation

It is in this vein that *dialogue and proclamation* constitute the first theological and pastoral step toward evangelization in Asia. This means that we must engage in dialogue with the wide array of cultures and religions in Asia, as well as with the Asian people who are suffering from a plethora of reasons, most significantly poverty. The lives of the Asian people understood and experienced through this dialogue then need to be interpreted from a theological and pastoral perspective. This ultimately forms the backdrop against which the salvific event and mystery of Jesus Christ are to be effectively proclaimed. The key to evangelization in Asia thus lies in finding balance and harmony between interreligious dialogue and proclamation of the Gospel. This is especially emphasized in John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* 55.⁵

Proclaiming the Gospel in Asia can be carried out much more effectively by adopting 'storytelling' and 'narrative' approaches of the East in lieu of the West's philosophical approach that strictly applies logic and causality. Stories and narratives enable the message to be conveyed more vividly and intriguingly through dialogue, as affirmed in the following words of *Ecclesia in Asia*: "In general, narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms are to be preferred. In fact, the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do" (EA 20). In a sense, the event and mystery of Jesus Christ can be understood as the *story of true God who became man*. The evangelizing mission of all Asian Christians today entails the passing on of this beautiful story *ad* and *intra gentes*, beyond the boundaries of the Church and the Christian faith.

⁵ "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 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" (RM 55).

Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, the Archbishop of Manila, has also suggested that telling the story of Jesus can be an important means of mission in Asia. According to him, the Church has to keep the memory of Jesus dynamic, and tell the story of Jesus from its experience in a multiplicity of ways. With an approach of this nature, the story of Jesus manifests the identity of the Church among the poor as well as the cultures and religions of Asia, since the story of Jesus provides meaning to the Church's symbols of faith. Moreover, the story of Jesus generates the Churches in Asia, which in turn should be the voice of suppressed stories.⁶

1.3 Discovering the “Seeds of the Word” in the Asian Soil

The integrative mission in Asia through *dialogue and proclamation* ultimately seeks to uncover and interpret, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the “seeds of the Word” (*semina Verbi*) buried within the Asian soil. The true significance and meaning of the “seed” as illuminated by the light of Christ can be made manifest through these efforts. This shows that the missiological vision based on the *fulfillment theory*, taken from the *Christologico-pneumatological* perspective presented by the Second Vatican Council and inherited in *Redemptoris Missio*, can be effectively applied to Asia. In short, evangelization in Asia involves discovering and fostering such seeds buried in the Asian soil.

Indeed, there are still many “seeds of the Word” in the Asian region that have yet to bear fruit. We must uncover these seeds, for they are part of God's plan despite not having explicitly confessed the Christian faith within the Church. As underlined in the *Decree Ad Gentes*, “all Christians should be familiar with the national and religious traditions of others and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them” (AG 11). Helping these seeds to grow and thus bear fruit is a key task for the evangelization of Asia. These “seeds of the Word” are like God's codes that we are called upon to decipher. Our evangelizing mission invites us to decipher these codes and interpret their hidden meaning through continuous *dialogue and proclamation*.

⁶ L.A. TAGLE, *Telling the Story of Jesus: Word – Communion – Mission*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 2015, 62-72.

Justin (100?-165), in his *First Apology* and *Second Apology*, declared that philosophers who lived before the coming of Christ were in a way already Christians, for they exhorted us to unveil the deceptions of the devil and to seek the true God. This was grounded on Justin's belief that the "seed of the Word" can be found within every human being. We can apply this idea analogously to the various religious traditions of Asia. If Asians of different religious traditions led a life firmly grounded in human reason and conscience, adhering to their faith that – though still oblivious and incomplete – ultimately has its roots in Christ the sole and eternal Word (*logos*), they can be led to discover at least the shades of the Christian truths. The Second Vatican Council adopted this reasoning as it mentioned in *Nostra Aetate* 2 that: "What is true and holy in other religions, the manners of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines, although differing in many ways from the own teaching of the Catholic Church, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men".

1.4 Experiencing the 'Empty Tomb' of Jesus in Asia

The methodology of Asian theology thus entails two approaches. On the one hand, Asian theology listens to the various voices resonating within the lives of the Asian people. This is linked to the efforts to recognize, with the help of the Holy Spirit, today's challenges and the signs of the times found within such voices. This requires us to know and experience the complex realities of the Asian continent, and to discern the Church's reality and mission therein from a *pneumatological* dimension.⁷

On the other hand, Asian theology calls for Christological reflections and proclamation that interpret such realities in relation to the mystery of Christ. This is tied to the need to discover the ways in which the dynamic power of the Gospel penetrates to work in and through the complex realities of Asia.⁸ After all, it is this dy-

⁷ Cf. the fifth chapter titled "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today" of the following book: V. TIRIMANNA (ed.), *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil: Collection of TAC and OTC documents (1987-2007)*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2007, 167-254.

⁸ Cf. V. TIRIMANNA (ed.), *Asian Faces of Christ: OTC Theological Colloquium*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2004.

dynamic power which purifies, transforms and eventually leads to wholeness. In the end, this overall experience will have to find its proper linguistic and theological expressions. How are the Christians of the various particular Churches in Asia experiencing the mystery of Christ, who was crucified and yet is now risen to bestow eternal life to humanity? What language are they using to express this Christological confession as well as their experience of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection? How are they living out and proclaiming such an experience? These are the questions that Asian theology must ask and answer as it searches for the mystery of Christ in the Asian soil, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁹ For the leaders, pastors and theologians of the Asian Church, the most important task at hand is to aptly respond to the highly complex realities of Asia, in order to effectively discern them and bring forth a new evangelization.

The number of people explicitly professing faith in Jesus Christ remains scarce in Asia. Evangelization in Asia is in its early stages, for it is in the initial phase of reflecting on and realizing how the Holy Spirit is working to nourish the seeds of the Gospel of Jesus Christ notwithstanding the seemingly barren soil of Asia. Accordingly, Asian theology is also in the process of sprouting the "seeds of the Word" in the Asian soil. The seeds have begun to grow, carrying in them the signs of hope for Asia. Asian theology embraces this hope, the hope for a future where the dynamic power of the Gospel will have penetrated the Asian realities of poverty and suffering through the Holy Spirit to realize true salvation.

Asia has many latent codes and symbols that guide us to the presence of the Risen Christ. We thus need to have our eyes turned inwards, and desire to discover and decipher them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By deciphering and discerning these codes and symbols, we can eventually encounter the Risen Christ as experienced in the realities of Asia. This will transform us, as did the experience of the "empty tomb" (Mk 16:1-8) of Jesus on the dawn of Easter, thereby empowering us to commit our entire life to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of Asia.

⁹ Cf. ID. (ed.), *Harvesting from the Asian Soil: Towards an Asian Theology*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2011.

2. Popular Religiosity and Piety as a *Locus Theologicus* in Asia

For mission in Asia, it is crucial to establish a theological methodology of *dialogue and proclamation*. In order to efficaciously engage in dialogue and proclamation as a process of evangelization in Asia, it is necessary to reflect and uncover the “seeds of the Word” hidden in the Asian soil, wherein also lies the ‘empty tomb’ of the Risen Lord. This task requires us to carefully examine the hearts and the disposition of the Asian people. For Asians, it is often the case that affective approaches take precedence over the logical approaches when they come to evangelization.

A critical element for this task is to look at the popular religiosity and piety held and practiced by the Asian people. To reflect upon the Holy Spirit’s activity in the hearts of the people, guiding them to union with Christ, is a highly effective means to specifically establish and apply the methodology of Asian theology in the context of evangelization. This, then, raises the need for a *pneumatological* reflection on popular religiosity. Since the Asian context places great importance on the *heart*, popular religiosity can become a significant *locus theologicus* in Asia. Such a *pneumatological* reflection on popular religiosity will enable us to realize how we may discern and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church’s mission *ad* and *intra gentes* in Asia.

2.1 Popular Religiosity and *Sensus Fidei*

The need for a *pneumatological* reflection on popular religiosity and piety arises from its intimate relationship with *sensus fidei*, whose effect is revealed in and through popular religiosity and piety. In a word, *sensus fidei* refers to the participation of the People of God in the prophetic office of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. *Sensus fidei* is regarded by the Second Vatican Council as the Church’s ecclesial reflection, discernment and judgment that, as stated in *Lumen Gentium*, are “aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth” (LG 12). It is in this vein that the Second Vatican Council presented *sensus fidei* as follows:

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. Jn 2:20, 27), cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples’ supernatural

discernment in matters of faith when from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals (LG 12).

In what way, then, are popular religiosity and piety so intimately linked to *sensus fidei*? It can be said that the very phenomenon of popular religiosity itself reveals how “there is a ‘religiosity’ that is natural for human beings; religious questions naturally arise in every human life, prompting a vast diversity of religious beliefs and popular practices”.¹⁰ From a theological perspective, it can be further specified that popular religiosity refers to “the great variety of manifestations of Christian belief found among the people of God in the Church” or “the Catholic wisdom of the people that finds expression in such a multitude of ways”.¹¹ It is this “wisdom” that holds an integral place within the life of the Church, for it acts as “a principle of discernment and an evangelical instinct”.¹² That is why this wisdom holds a prophetic function, of which it can be said that “such a wisdom, principle and instinct, popular religiosity is clearly very closely related to the *sensus fidei*”.¹³

2.2 Popular Religiosity and Piety as Mystical Wisdom

Popular religiosity and piety can be understood as “the wisdom and insight into the things of God that is given to those of humble faith”, or even the “privileged access to the deep truths of God”¹⁴ bestowed upon the faithful. Simply put, “popular religiosity arises particularly from the knowledge of God vouchsafed to such people.”¹⁵ Hence, popular religiosity can be construed as the *mystical wisdom* entrusted to the faithful, to be distinguished from *theological wisdom*. This distinction has been clarified by the International Theological Commission, which pronounced that:

¹⁰ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, 2014, 107, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html/.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Theological wisdom and mystical wisdom are formally distinct and it is important not to confuse them. Mystical wisdom is never a substitute for theological wisdom. It is clear, nonetheless, that there are strong links between these two forms of Christian wisdom, both in the person of the theologian and in the community of the Church.¹⁶

Such mystical wisdom has always held a central place in apophatic theology, which emphasizes the knowledge stemming from a mystical union with God, as illustrated in the following explanation:

Mystical wisdom or “the knowledge of the saints” is a gift of the Holy Spirit which comes from union with God in love. Love, in fact, creates an affective connaturality between the human being and God, who allows spiritual persons to know and even suffer things divine (*patri divina*), actually experiencing them in their lives. This is a non-conceptual knowledge, often expressed in poetry. It leads to contemplation and personal union with God in peace and silence.¹⁷

It can thus be concluded that popular religiosity or popular piety is a form of *mystical wisdom* made accessible to the faithful. Popular religiosity and piety are none other than the manifestation of a theological life nourished by the working of the Holy Spirit “who has been poured into our hearts” (Rom 5:5). Citing the *Aparecida Document*¹⁸ in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis also referred to popular piety as “popular spirituality” or “the people’s mysticism”, describing it as “a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly” (EG 125).

2.3 Participation in the Prophetic and the Priestly Office of Christ through Popular Religiosity and Piety

The bond between popular religiosity and *sensus fidei* is strengthened especially through divine worship: “Both as a principle or instinct and as a rich abundance of Christian practice, especially in the

¹⁶ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, 2012, 92, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_tologia-oggi_en.html.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁸ Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, 29 June 2007, www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf.

form of cultic activities, e.g. devotions, pilgrimages and processions, popular religiosity springs from and makes manifest the *sensus fidei*, and is to be respected and fostered”.¹⁹ In turn, popular religiosity plays a pivotal role for the inculturation of faith. Hence, “it needs to be recognized that popular piety, in particular, is the first and most fundamental form of faith’s inculturation”.²⁰

The implication here is that the People of God may participate in both the prophetic and the priestly office of Christ through popular religiosity. Such piety is “an ecclesial reality prompted and guided by the Holy Spirit”, by whom the people of God are indeed anointed to a “holy priesthood”.²¹ It is natural for the priesthood of the people to find expression in a multitude of ways.

2.4 Popular Piety as ‘Religion of the People’

Yet, when encouraging popular religiosity, considerations must be given to its potential dangers. Popular religiosity has limitations and can even have detrimental effects, as cautioned by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

Popular religiosity, of course, certainly has its limits. It is often subject to penetration by many distortions of religion and even superstitions. It frequently remains at the level of forms of worship not involving a true acceptance by faith. It can even lead to the creation of sects and endanger the true ecclesial community (EN 48).

But the existence of such danger does not justify an utter disregard or neglect of popular religiosity. Rather, the need for caution necessitates proper education of the faithful to help them engage in safe and effective practices of popular religiosity, since popular religiosity has indisputable value of its own:

But if it is well oriented, above all by a pedagogy of evangelization, it is rich in values. It manifests a thirst for God which only the simple

¹⁹ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, 110.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

and poor can know. It makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of manifesting belief. It involves an acute awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence. It engenders interior attitudes rarely observed to the same degree elsewhere: patience, the sense of the cross in daily life, detachment, openness to others, devotion. By reason of these aspects, we readily call it “popular piety”, that is, religion of the people, rather than religiosity.²²

2.5 Ecclesiality as Criterion for Discernment

The task of guiding believers to proper popular religiosity and piety carries much importance in theological, pastoral and spiritual aspects: “Well oriented popular religiosity, both in its insight into the deep mysteries of the Gospel and in its courageous witness of faith, can be seen as a manifestation and expression of the *sensus fidei*”.²³ Then what does it mean for popular religiosity and piety to be under proper guidance? “It may be said that popular religiosity is ‘well oriented’ when it is truly ‘ecclesial’”, where ‘ecclesiality’ is determined through certain criteria which “indicate conditions required for the authenticity both of popular religiosity and of the *sensus fidei* that underlies it”.²⁴

3. Principles for Discerning the Presence and Activity of the Holy Spirit in Asia

The Church has the crucial duty of discerning the activity of the Holy Spirit in Asia, which is especially revealed in the popular religiosity and piety of Asian Christians. It is important to note that not all the popular religiosity and piety in Asia bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. To discern whether popular religiosity and piety possess true *ecclesiality* and reveal the authentic activity of the Spirit, considerations should be given to some key theological principles. These principles of discernment present specific criteria that are effective in the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 111.

²⁴ Ibid., 112.

discernment and judgment of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church's mission *ad* and *intra gentes* in Asia.

3.1 The Principle of Continuity

First, there is the *principle of continuity* which states that the Spirit's activity must be in accord with the revealed truth that has been proclaimed by the Church. This is grounded in the inseparable link between the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit with the salvific activity of Christ, the apex of all revelation.²⁵ The Second Vatican Council stated in *Dei Verbum* that "the Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1Tim 6:14; Tit 2:13)" (DV 4). According to the principle of continuity, there can be no disparity or discord between the activity of the Holy Spirit and the revelation that has been culminated through the Paschal event.

This principle then becomes a critical norm when discerning the phenomena of popular religiosity and piety in the Asian context, characterized by the co-existence of other non-Christian religious traditions and cultures. It is important to note that the Holy Spirit's primary role is to guide and prepare the human person to proclaim and accept the truth that has been definitively revealed through the Christ event. "To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts" (DV 5).

3.2 The Principle of the Reign of God

The next principle of discernment is closely related to the growth of the Reign of God on earth. The activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of salvation has always conformed to "the universal salvific will of God the Father". Indeed, the Spirit "communicates" and "imparts" the "salvific grace" of Christ to all who live according to God's will. Although the definitive fulfillment of the Reign of God remains unrealized until the eschatological consummation, the

²⁵ Cf. F. LAMBIASI, *Lo Spirito Santo: Mistero e Presenza. Per una Sintesi di Pneumatologia*, EDB, Bologna 1987, 322-323.

history of salvation has already been realized through the growth of the Reign of God on earth.

The activity of the Holy Spirit is in full accord with this growth, for “the Church is ordered toward the kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument” (RM 18). The Holy Spirit sanctifies and guides the Church, communicating the salvific grace of Christ through its continuing works of renewal. This activity of the Spirit promotes the growth of the Reign of God, as “the salvific action of Jesus Christ, with and through his Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity”, as remarked by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in *Declaration Dominus Iesus* 12. It can be judged that the manifestation of certain popular religiosity, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, has deviated from the activity of the Holy Spirit, if it contains elements that are contrary to the values and the growth of the Reign of God. In the Asian context, the various forms of poverty and oppression would draw particular attention in this aspect of discernment.

3.3 The Principle of Christological Confession

The confession that Jesus is Lord constitutes another important principle for discerning the activity of the Holy Spirit within the popular religiosity and piety of the Asian Christians. As Paul proclaims, “nobody speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be accursed’. No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’, except by the Holy Spirit” (1Cor 12:3). A similar principle can be found in the First Epistle of John: “This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ has come in the flesh belongs to God, and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God” (1Jn 4:2-3).

The Holy Spirit is inseparably related to Jesus Christ, for the Spirit’s activity is always in continuity and unity with the life of the historical Jesus and the Paschal mystery of the Risen Christ. The Holy Spirit thus engages in the same eschatological work of salvation wrought by Christ. As a result, one of the fundamental principles for discerning the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit involves asking whether the popular religiosity and piety confess Jesus as Lord. This applies particularly to Asian Christians, as they are constantly invited to live in harmony with those of other religions and cultures.

3.4 Ecclesiological Principles

The ecclesiological principles for discerning *charisma* are also highly relevant in discerning the *ecclesiality* of popular religiosity and piety. In a broad sense, every unconditional grace of God can be rightfully called *charisma*. In fact, Paul uses the term *charisma* in reference to the divine grace conferred through the redemptive work of Christ (cf. Rom 1:11; 5:15; 6:23; 11:29; 2Cor 1:11). But in a narrower sense, the concept of *charisma* refers to the special gifts that the Holy Spirit imparts for the ecclesial community.

When understood as the special grace and gifts that the Spirit bestows for the Church, it becomes evident that *charisma* is not linked to the intrinsic ability of an individual. Rather, the fundamental goal of *charisma* necessarily aims for *charisma* to the ecclesial community. Ministries are based on this *charisma*, which empowers individuals to engage in those ministries. That is why ministry can never be severed from the ecclesial community or be given greater weight than the community it seeks to serve.

Ministry in the Church, especially in the young local Churches of Asia, should always aim to serve community and exist solely for the growth of the Church, which in itself is “the Body of Christ” (cf. 1Cor 12:4-26; Eph 4:11-12). Even if an individual were to possess some spiritual ability of extraordinary nature, it cannot be regarded as *charisma* if it is not used to serve the ecclesial community. Such ability does not come from the activity of the Holy Spirit. This principle of discernment can be applied to discern the various *charisma* that can be seen in the popular religiosity and piety in Asia.

3.5 Principles for Discerning the Fruits of the Holy Spirit

The New Testament also presents principles for discerning the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which can be used as important criteria to determine the authenticity and *ecclesiality* of popular religiosity and piety in Asia. In the Letter of Paul to the Galatians (5:19-23), the Apostle clearly distinguishes between the “works of the flesh” (immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies) and the “fruits of the Spirit” (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control). Jesus Himself speaks of such discernment of fruits

when he says that: “A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit” (Lk 6:43-44). Hence, it is necessary to inspect whether popular religiosity and related activities bear fruits that benefit all Christians and ecclesial communities in Asia. This will remain as an essential pneumatological principle for discernment.

3.6 The Principle of Growth

The *principle of growth* is another valid criterion to discern the legitimacy of popular religiosity and piety in Asia. The activity of the Holy Spirit always leads people to discover the will of God and grow towards union with Him, in both individual and communal dimensions. This growth can be seen as a sign of the Spirit’s activity. If popular religiosity and piety in Asia lead to this kind of growth for all Christians and the local Churches of Asia, it can serve as an indicator of its authenticity and *ecclesiality*. But, if popular religiosity and piety have an element that hampers one from growing closer to God, it cannot be deemed as the work of God’s Spirit.

3.7 Interpretation and Judgment of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae*

It needs to be emphasized that the *Magisterium Ecclesiae* holds the final judgment when it comes to discerning the activity of the Holy Spirit within the popular religiosity and piety of Asia. This is because “the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church” (DV 10). As pointed out by John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis*: “We perceive intimately that the truth revealed to us by God imposes on us an obligation. We have, in particular, a great sense of responsibility for this truth. By Christ’s institution the Church is its guardian and teacher, having been endowed with a unique assistance of the Holy Spirit in order to guard and teach it in its most exact integrity” (RH 12).

The fact that the decisive responsibility and authority to interpret revealed truths are reserved for the Church is based on the theological grounds that the Church possesses the deposit of accrued memory on the mystery of Christ, which enables her to interpret the divine mystery. The Church also interprets this mystery by virtue of Her faith and acceptance that the Holy Spirit guides the Church.

The interpretation and judgment of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae* regarding the activity of the Holy Spirit must be received with respect and obedience. John Paul II stressed the role of the Magisterium to the point of saying that “every form of the Spirit’s presence is to be welcomed with respect and gratitude, but the discernment of this presence is the responsibility of the Church, to which Christ gave his Spirit in order to guide her into all the truth (cf. Jn 16:13)” (RM 29). The Second Vatican Council also underlined the Magisterium’s unique role in discerning the “extraordinary gifts” of the Holy Spirit, of which the Council explained: “The judgment as to their genuineness and proper use belongs to those who are appointed leaders in the Church, to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (cf. 1Thes 5:12, 19-21)” (LG 12).

4. In the *Parrhesia* of the Holy Spirit, the Primary Agent of Mission

The principles of discernment we just enumerated will help us to recognize the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church’s mission *ad* and *intra gentes* in Asia. In a way, it can be stated that we need “a sense of mystery” (EG 279) for discerning the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in Asia. Indeed, there is a need to re-discover the power and potential of the Spirit-led evangelization that can be found within popular religiosity and piety in Asia. In other words, we are being called to realize that the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit are often made manifest through popular religiosity and piety in Asia. Such popular religiosity can be intimately linked to the works of inculturation that aim for evangelization in Asia, as Pope Francis clarified:

Underlying popular piety, as a fruit of the inculturated Gospel, is an active evangelizing power which we must not underestimate: to do so would be to fail to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit. Instead, we are called to promote and strengthen it, in order to deepen the never-ending process of inculturation. Expressions of popular piety have much to teach us; for those who are capable of reading them, they are a *locus theologicus* which demands our attention, especially at a time when we are looking to the new evangelization (EG 126).

We are “Spirit-filled evangelizers,” meaning that we are “evangelizers fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit” (EG 259, 261, 262). Hence, we constantly strive to fulfill our identity as evangelizers, who are led by the Holy Spirit to proclaim and live out the Gospel of Christ in Asia. The Holy Spirit is “the principal agent of mission” (RM 21, 30), *primas agens in missione*, who prompts and impels our missionary endeavors. Therefore, we must always invoke the Holy Spirit for divine help as we commit ourselves to work for the Church’s mission *ad* and *intra gentes* in Asia today.

Keeping our missionary fervor alive, calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is He who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavor (EG 280).

The reality of Asia presents a complex situation where a predominantly non-Christian religiosity intersects with poverty and oppression. To valiantly proclaim the Gospel of Christ in this context, we must consistently pray for the gift of *parrhesia*: a gift of the Holy Spirit that Pope Francis, in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, signifies as “boldness, enthusiasm, the freedom to speak out, apostolic fervor” and “an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world” (GE 129). It is indeed the Holy Spirit who “grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness (*parrhesia*) in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition” (EG 259). In a word, “*parrhesia* is a seal of the Spirit” which “testifies to the authenticity of our preaching” (GE 132) in the Church’s *missio ad* and *intra gentes* in Asia today. By boldly entrusting ourselves to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to cultivate the “seed of the Gospel” in Asia today.

Japan and the Beginning of a New Missionary Era: Revisiting the Past for the Future

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In 2016, the movie *Silence*, directed by Martin Scorsese and based on the novel of the same name by Endo Shusaku – Japan’s most representative contemporary Catholic author –, was screened to vast audiences in theatres all over the world. This was not just due to the nonpareil quality of the movie’s production, but also because the director is highly acclaimed. However, it is said that 50 years earlier, directors seeking to describe the Catholic faith in Japan by utilizing Endo’s novel had fallen victim to ruthless criticism. The fact that 29 years had to elapse from the birth of the concept of the movie to its completion may possibly have been an outcome of the persistence and tenacity of the director. Scorsese obviously sought to imbue his work with spiritual and mystical profundity, while box office records, the winning of movie awards and all other such issues appeared to be secondary. What may have been his reasons for gifting this movie to the world? Could it have been an attempt on his part to probe once again the question of “faith” as an issue linked to the world today?

The novel *Silence* by Endo Shusaku was published in 1965. The principal theme of his novel was ‘faith’¹ and with it he presented a stirring portrayal of the tensions that arose between the Jesuits and the Tokugawa government in 17th century Japan. While seeking to discover the significance behind the Christian missions in Asia, primarily in Japan, he simultaneously probed a *theodicean* issue that was fundamental to the Christian faith: does God remain as a mere silent spectator to the sufferings of human beings? This question is an issue that has grown to become the focus of debates in theologi-

¹ SH. ENDO, *Chinmoku*, Shinchosha, Tokyo 1966 (English translation by W. Johnston, Taplinger Pub.Co., New York 1969, 1980).

cal circles throughout the world. Could it be that Christians all over the world are attempting to ferret out some manner of wisdom or erudition from this light and shade, from this 'success and failure' of Christian missionary work in 16th and 17th century Japan? Where may we locate that wisdom or erudition that Endo himself deduced from the history of the Christian missions in Japan described in his work? The history of Christianity, as manifested within the nation of Japan, is pervaded with vital implications linked to the missionary methods of the world in the 21st century.

There were indeed manifold issues that should have been dealt with, both in history as interpreted by Endo and the theological discernment contained therein, for example, issues concerning ecclesiology and sacramentology. In fact, it has been pointed out that Endo's subjectivist ecclesiology and sacramentology are unduly Protestant, while there was criticism on certain related issues that do not appear to have received their due share of attention. One example is the Sacrament of Forgiveness, which was actualized in the 17th century; its substitutional proposal rules that if priests were absent, and if the person concerned was sincerely repentant, confession in their case may be deferred to a later period. In summary, there were some historical facts that had not been grasped by Endo in his novel.

The purpose of this text, however, is not to debate the theology of Endo, but to ponder over the future methodology of Christian missionary work by adhering to documented facts and taking a fresh look at the significance and technique of Christian missionary work in Asia, specifically Japan. In the movie *Silence*, the apostate Cristobão Ferreira makes the following comment: "Japan is a swamp. In this swamp, even the best seedlings will begin to wither and rot". These words express the sorrowful lament that it is a virtual impossibility for the Christian faith to develop and grow in Japan. Looking at all the issues above, can we say that Christianity was destined never to take root in Japanese culture or that the faith has been rejected in Japan? Or is there something that Christian missionaries could possibly learn from Japan's history, converting negative outcomes to positive ones?

1. Christian Mission in 16th and 17th Century

In 1549, when Francis Xavier came to Japan, the history of the work of Catholic missions in Japan commenced and continued for a peri-

od of about a hundred years. There was tremendous persecution and suppression, but to label such history a failure would be viewed as unwarranted. This 'failure' was theatrically displayed in the movie *Silence*, which sought to portray the vindictiveness of the last ten years or so of that history, while generally it has been schematized as a conflict between Christianity and Japan, or between Western civilization and Asia. In other words, it could be implied that the work of the Christian mission in Japan throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, may be regarded as a 'clash of civilizations'. Is it possible that the methods used by missionaries when they commenced their work in Japan resulted in this persecution and suppression? The mode of spreading Christianity that the missionaries adopted during that period possibly reflected some undue form of bias on their part. If that is so, then it is necessary to pinpoint its specificity and examine what exactly the original Christian missions intended to do.

In those days, the Tokugawa government initiated the oppression of Christianity with a view of proscribing it sooner or later and the upshot of this was the appearance of vast numbers of martyrs. Judging solely by the known statistics, the number of martyrs were around 3000; yet, the putative theory is that the number of martyrs in total never falls below tens of thousands.² In 1614, when the edict proscribing Christianity was promulgated over the entire nation by the Tokugawa government, the Christians who were under heavy repression, and who were eager to gain the crown of martyrdom, joyfully offered themselves up for death. Government officials who witnessed this soon realized the futility in merely repeating such killings over and over again in a slipshod and casual manner, for they saw that all it did was to nurture the 'fervour of martyrdom' among the Christian people even further. Hence, they opted to coerce them into forsaking their religion on their own by devising cold-blooded means of torture for missionaries. The Jesuits were the first to suffer, since they realized that an apostasy by a single revered Christian leader could inflict more harm to their faith than that of hundreds or thousands of the Christian faithful.

In the first half of 1630, Ferreira, the then most-senior director of the Jesuit missions in Japan, publicly apostatized after having

² Cf. J. RUIZ-DE-MEDINA SJ, *El Martirologio del Japon 1558-1873*, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, Rome 1999.

been compelled to spend several hours undergoing the gruesome agony of the pit. The fact that this apostasy served as a major setback to the entire Christian society of Japan has been vividly depicted by both Endo and Scorsese in their respective works. Following his apostatization, he became a government collaborator and was subsequently ordered to enforce the crackdown on Christians, which is also depicted in the movie.

At first glance, a general survey of the history of the Japanese missions during the 16th and 17th centuries present us with no more than a dismal failure. However, in the course of that century-long history there were some notable events; events that should be considered anything but failures. Primarily among such events is that Christianity at that time had taken root among the common people. Owing to the decree of suppression enforced by the Tokugawa government, Christians were denied the services of priests for 250 years and yet they held on loyally to their faith. In addition, it is a historical fact that such a situation persisted until the 19th century with some notable events such as the 'Discovery of the Believers' and the 'Revival of the Church'. In other words, the Christian missions of that period might in truth have been dealt what seemed like a death-blow, but yet, when viewed with the eyes of faith that is what sustained these communities for many years.

2. A 'Foreign Culture' in Japan

A well-known personality in the field of management, Peter Drucker, once remarked that people tend to debate over the westernization of Japan, but it was actually the *Japanisation* of the West that was taking place. This remark was made with reference to the culture and characteristics of Japan, which, as an Asian nation, sought to achieve modernization at an early stage, and thereby resisted the European and American influence. Around 150 years ago, Japan sought to rapidly imitate the modernization of the Western nations, and soon came to array itself as a modern state. Although Japan's society adopted the 'West', it also imposed an alteration upon it, utilized it, and succeeded in transforming it into a social organization that was functional, effective and unique.

It is said that compared to other cultures, the rapidity and quality of Japan's modernization and scale of transformation revealed the birth of an unusual situation. Whenever the Japanese are confront-

ed with an alien culture, they have a tendency not to accept it at face value, but rather to categorically transform it. The transformation of Japan has been remarkably high as witnessed by the modernization that occurred 150 years ago. Peter F. Drucker affirms that Japan was astute at accepting and imitating foreign things, but once the foreign thing had been accepted in Japan, it was transformed and merged into Japan's culture, eventually becoming a key asset to the nation.³ Whenever Japan took something from foreign cultures and created out of it something of its own, the created entity turned out to be more perfect and accurate than the original. This was a matter of pride for the Japanese, and it applies also to the era of Japan's history that is depicted in the movie.

3. Christian Doctrine and Cultural Acceptance

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Christianity had spread to the frontiers of the known world and in these places, there was little change in the faith when encountering the new context. It was this religion that sought to enter Japan and the 'tragedy' in *Silence* commences from this point. In its 1500 years of history, Christianity had in all probability attained a stage of fulfilment or completion. After all, it was a religion that started out as a minority in Palestine, but later developed in conformity with Hellenistic culture, the Roman Empire and the Germanic tribes. Its inimitable form was nurtured inseparably with the cultures of Europe, and at the stage of its completion developed contacts with America and Asia. As it grew, it was not an issue of Christianity undergoing a modification in accordance with the diverse cultures it encountered, but rather a question of those different cultures themselves being transformed as a result of being in contact with Christianity. Therefore, it was inevitable that the encounter between Christianity and Japan that arose in the 16th century – what the West often refers to as the *Age of the Great Discoveries*, while the Japanese regard as the *Age of the Great Voyages* –, came to be labelled as 'confrontational'.

³ On the developments of Japanese society and culture, see Peter F. Drucker's articles in P.F. DRUCKER, K. KATSURA et al (eds.), *Nihon Seiko no Daisho*, Daia-mondo-sha, Tokyo 1981.

4. Christian Historical Mindset and the Conflicts Depicted in *Silence*

What was the contextual mindset that bolstered the 16th century European missionaries with regard to their apostolate in Japan? What was the mindset that served as a backdrop to the conflicts set out in the movie *Silence*? First, in the 16th century, due to missionaries having based their convictions on the maxim that “outside the Church there could be no salvation” (*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*), their actions diverged drastically from what the Church had originally meant to convey. Second, the *reconquista mentality*⁴ of certain European nations, namely, Spain and Portugal, that initiated Christian missionary; after all, the term *reconquista* is in no way linked to tolerance, co-existence or co-prosperity. These two factors may have been separate, but they are no more than different sides of the same coin.

4.1 *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus?*

If this well-known dictum was re-visited from the perspectives of current theology, it would perhaps read as follows: “Turn toward the people.”⁵ These words which were initially voiced by the early Church fathers, Irenaeus and Origen, as well as the 3rd century Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, were meant as words of solace for Christians who were undergoing persecution as social minorities.

In the course of history, the Church became transformed from being a minority to being a majority body. This transition was diametrically opposed to the original environment, where Christians

⁴ S. KAWAMURA, *Sengoku Shukyo Shakai-Sisho-shi* [Christian Socio-political thoughts in the age of provincial wars in Japan], Chisenshokan, Tokyo 2011, 313-316.

⁵ “Vatican Council II makes the expression *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* its own. But in using it, the council explicitly directs itself to Catholics and limits its validity to those who know the necessity of the Church for salvation. The council holds that the affirmation is based on the necessity of faith and of baptism affirmed by Christ (*Lumen Gentium* 14). In this way, the council aligned itself in continuity with the teaching of Pius XII, but emphasized more clearly the original parenthetical character of this expression” (INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 1997, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20120308_ladaria_en.html).

had been victims of sporadic oppression due to the fact of being a minority. By the end of the 4th century, Christianity had grown to become the state religion of Rome and, at the very least by the 5th century, the territories of the Church and the Roman Empire had become one. The phrase “outside the Church” came to gain the connotation of *outside the Roman civilization*.

When referring to “outside”, this phrase quickly came to imply the *land of the pagans* and eventually to denote *Jews and people of other non-Christian faiths*. After the 5th century, this statement came to be employed in excessively negative terms with reference to people of non-Christian cultures and races. The missionaries of the 16th century construed this expression not in the context of the 3rd century, but of the 5th century – a period when Christianity had already evolved into becoming the state religion of the Roman Empire.

If we were to contextualise the missionary outlook of Francis Xavier in a few words, it would perhaps be better aligned toward the *salvation of souls*. However, in his context, what it implied was *salvation of souls outside the Church*. The letters he left behind (numbered less than 150), in almost all of them, we find that specific spirit abounding.⁶ As a young man, he came across Ignatius of Loyola at the University of Paris, and soon awoke to the notion of saving souls. His zeal to become a saviour was intensified even more within the heathen societies of India, and while in the University of Paris, he was said to have dispatched letters of reprimand to theologians, who were immersed solely in academic discourses having nothing whatever to do with salvation.

In those letters, Xavier declared: “While you are wasting time on issues such as these, you do not realize how many in India are being denied salvation”.⁷ Even after setting foot in Japan, Xavier did not abandon his conviction that “no one can be saved if does not adore

⁶ S. KAWAMURA, “¿Es posible el dialogo interreligioso? Francisco Javier y sus sucesores en Japón”, *Manresa*, vol. 78, 2006, 121-133. See also ID., “Questions Posed to St. Francis Xavier by his Japanese Contemporaries”, in *International Symposium: Between Past and Future, the Mission of the Catholic Church in Asia: The Contribution of Sophia University on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of Sophia University (March 14-15, 2014)*, Gregorian & Biblical Press, Rome 2014, 10-21.

⁷ F. XAVIER, “To His Companions Living in Rome. From Cochin, 15 January 1544”, in M.J. COSTELLOE (trans.), *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, Saint Louis, MO 1992, 67.

God and believe in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all nations”⁸ Personally, he was an individual brimming with neighbourly love; in no way tainted by any form of bias toward non-Christian people. It was as though his mind was devoid of any notion whatsoever of *religious pluralism*, as understood in a contemporary sense. The Japanese, who worshipped at Shinto shrines, appeared to him as clearly people “outside the Church”, therefore he considered them pagans.

All religious of the 16th and 17th centuries who were involved in missionary work in Japan such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, etc., accepted that there was no salvation outside the Church. These words had come to constitute the line of thought in Christianity after it had grown into becoming the state religion of the Roman Empire. However, we may even say it constituted the motivation for missionary work, and the issue the missionaries had to grapple with the most was that they had to reject all the indigenous beliefs of the people.

In 1587, experiencing a feeling of apprehension over the steadily increasing numbers of Christian believers, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who passed down into the history as Japan’s *great unifier*, ordered the eviction of the Jesuit missionaries from the country. In the expulsion decree, he harshly censured the behavior of Christians, who ravaged shrines and temples, and utilized this fact as a reason for persecuting them.⁹ The notion of co-existing with people of other religions or any ideas of adopting of a posture of tolerance toward them was unthinkable for those missionaries. One example is the missionaries from the Iberian nations, whose general stance toward non-Christian religions may be typified. They usually recognized non-Christian religion worships as Idolatry, that was the worship of the devil, and hence it had to be eliminated totally.¹⁰

In situations like the above, the growth of Christianity within a society, characterized by a thousand-year tradition, is obviously re-

⁸ Ibid., 332.

⁹ S. KAWAMURA, “An Evaluation of Valignano’s Decision-Making from the Viewpoint of Japanese Society”, in S. KAWAMURA – C. VELIATH (eds.), *Beyond Borders: A Global Perspective of Jesuit Mission History*, Sophia University Press, Tokyo 2009, 187-198. See also manuscript documents: Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus (ARSI) Jap.Sin., 8-I, 237v; ARSI, Jap.Sin., 8-I, 244v; ARSI, Jap.Sin., 9-I, 158v; ARSI, Jap.Sin., 45-I, 67v.

¹⁰ *The Letter and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, 69-70.

mote. Statements such as “the Japanese can perceive God only in nature” or that “the Japanese are incapable of comprehending a God concept such as what we have” – that is, a European God concept – appear in the concluding portions of the movie *Silence*. These statements reveal a mood of resentment against the means adopted by the missionaries, who were convinced that they alone possessed the truth and tended to manifest an attitude of disrespect toward adherents of other religions.

To affirm that salvation lies within the Church alone would indeed be true, only if those words were uttered within an applicable context. Yet, even assuming the context to be wrong, do we Christians still have the right or justification to deny the option of salvation to those outside the Church? As long as our grasp of other religious beliefs remains inadequate, any censure of them would amount to no more than conjecture, something devoid of any basis whatsoever. In our world of religious diversity, even if we are unable to accept other religious beliefs, we would still need to pursue efforts toward mutual religious accord on the fact that a minimal respect for one another is an utmost necessity.

Unfortunately, it was by no means the attitude adopted by the Christian missionaries of the 16th century. They were warriors bent on conquering souls, by battling with pagans (idol worshippers). One of the issues they had to face, as presented in the movie, may perhaps have been the fact that they were not the least interested in any mode of interaction with the locals since they believed that “outside the Church there is no salvation” and therefore, they saw no reason to question it, which then led to a tragic end.

4.2 Beyond the *Reconquista Mentality*

The *reconquista mentality* as mentioned earlier, was the belief that there was no salvation outside the Church: a belief that was not only adopted, but also launched in a forceful manner. In those days, the people of Spain and Portugal shared to a greater or lesser extent a common awareness that they were duty-bound to recover lost lands and rebuild the *Christian Kingdom*. This unique historical and emotional state that typified people of the Iberian Peninsula together with the growth of marine navigation technology, resulted in *conquests* reaching the very eastern tip of the Eurasian continent, and the conversion of all peoples to Christianity became a clearly defined goal.

Both the concepts of “outside the Church” and the *reconquista mentality*, in time eventually came to be tinged with an awareness of proselytism. The focus on *conquering souls* aligned to missionary work was solely for the purpose of raising the numbers of Christian converts, even if it is only one convert at a time. Missionary efforts began to be evaluated by the number of people converted, and plans were made to carry out such programs on a large scale and at a rapid pace. Judging by the missionaries’ logic, a program such as this when pursued in a unilateral manner may seem ideal, and yet, when viewed *from the side of the converted people*, chances are that it would stir up confusion within their society and evoke feelings of enmity within their hearts. Christian missionaries seeking to fulfil their responsibilities by unfurling the flag of exclusivity were not welcome, especially in many areas of East Asia where the cultural domain included traditional societies. This was the state of affairs in 17th century Japan, as well as in 18th century China and the Korean Peninsula.

4.3 Top-down and Bottom-up Processes

How did Christianity acquire its believers and transmit its doctrines in mission lands? In some religions, the Christian religion was promoted by certain political leaders, or at least someone influential in society. As for the Japanese mission, was it a top-down process driven by political leaders, or a bottom-up process consisting of empowering the social underclasses?¹¹ At the height of its prosperity, the Japanese mission was said to have consisted of around 400,000 converts. In fact, history states that during the first 20 years, the bottom-up method was employed, and once regional communities had taken root, drastic changes were made, and then the top-down process took over.

A Jesuit who was famous for the top-down process was Francisco Cabral, who in 1570 functioned as mission superior in Japan. When the Daimyo Ōmura Sumitada on his own initiative converted to Christianity, Cabral on two occasions led the people under his rule into mass conversion, and eventually almost 40,000 people converted to Christianity. In 1578, not far from the capital and within the

¹¹ Cf. J. WATTS et al., “Christianity spread faster in small, politically structured societies”, *Nature Human Behaviour*, vol. 2, n. 8, August 2018.

territory of the Lord of Takatsuki (Takayama Ukon), almost all the residents there became Christians, and Japan witnessed the advent of a Christian domain comprising of approximately 18,000 citizens. Takayama was aided by another Jesuit, Organtino Gneccchi-Soldo.

This top-down process of missionary propagation is also referred to as a “Vertical Propagation Process”.¹² Judging by the fact that within the space of a mere 90 years the number of Christians in Japan had risen to 400,000, it could be concluded that this fact constituted a crucial factor in the propagation of Christianity. For leaders like Toyotomi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, who envisaged a new form of governance and labored to unify the entire nation, this phenomenon served as an expedient opportunity, especially when the State viewed Christianity as an evil.

It is obvious, however, that in the spread of Christianity in Japan, the more crucial role was played by the bottom-up process. This was because in perusing the torments and bans that were later enforced, Christian communities that had been formed by the employment of the bottom-up process were the ones that exhibited an attitude of tenacity and endurance. This process could also be labelled the “Horizontal Propagation Process” which was the key factor behind the Christian faith having become so deeply rooted.

In the 16th century, most of the Japanese who allied with the Jesuit missionaries hailed from certain sections of the nobility in the capital as well as from among the peasants and fisher folk of Kyushu. A major hurdle that faced the Jesuits was the means for them to form societies to have the Christian faith among them. In time, however, they created groups or communities wherein members were closely united by the consciousness of strong bonds among them. In the region of Nagasaki (a small fishing village in the territory of Ōmura Sumitada), the *hidden Christians*, notwithstanding the lapse of 250 years, succeeded in retaining the consciousness of the unyielding bonds that held them together.

Within the Christian community of Japan, the first fruit of this bottom-up approach was the birth of a society of believers in the city of Yamaguchi, a project that Xavier was involved in. Xavier, along

¹² A prominent Japanese scholar who explained the Christian mission method in the 16th and 17th centuries as “vertical” and “horizontal” was Shimizu Koich in his book *Kirishitan Kinsei-shi* [History of Christian Prohibition in Japan], Kyoiku-sha, Tokyo 1981.

with two other Jesuits mobilized the people into a single society, baptized them, and later as part of their devout pursuits, initiated among them various undertakings for the benefit of the poor and destitute. Just after he left the city in 1551, conflicts surfaced in Yamaguchi, and the missionaries who stayed behind, along with Fr. Balthazar Gago – another Jesuit who had joined them later –, shifted to the city of Bungo Funai, in Kyushu.

It was fortunate that on gaining the backing of the local Daimyo Ōtomo Sōrin, the missionaries erected the first western-style hospital in Japan. At that time, the Jesuit Fr. Cose de Torres, who was assigned the task of gathering believers to work at the hospital, offered the Japanese Christians the *compromisso* or rules and regulations of the Misericordiae, a society of Christian believers that was highly active within the cities of Lisbon in Portugal and Goa in India. While at the hospital, Fr. de Torres formed an organization of believers, based on the pattern of the *Confraria* or Sodality.

In fact, the concept of the Sodality, which already existed in Europe, was then initiated in Japan and that brought about the creation of a basic community of believers. The guidance by some lay leaders of such communities, not just in the city where the hospital was located, but also several villages in other areas began to prosper and flourish. In fact, villagers who witnessed the miraculous cures and the recovery of the sick (from common ailments) were enthused by the accounts of Christians concerning issues such as funerals and burials, and this in turn led to an increase in those who converted.

Eventually, new leaders were formed within these Christian communities, and this then led to these villages establishing themselves as Christian. Whenever a Christian community was founded, they soon developed and became widespread.¹³ The missionaries desired to convert more Japanese to Christianity (not by the top-down but rather the bottom-up process) and thus more communities of believers were born. However, they were limited to regional groups and family units. Nevertheless, these missionaries were successful in enhancing the bond among the individual members together – not just during the 16th and 17th centuries, but even in the periods prior

¹³ Cf. S. KAWAMURA, *Making Christian Lay Community during the “Christian Century” in Japan*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgetown University, Washington DC 1999.

to the persecution. By the 19th century, missionaries were once more immersed in the spreading of Christianity.

In the bottom-up process, the nucleus and body of these communities were not composed merely of people affiliated to the lower echelons of Japanese society. Those who promoted the bottom-up process were members of the middle and upper classes, and they did so with an attitude of ceaseless solicitude, concern for, and interest in the people belonging to the lower rungs of society. Religious sociologist Rodney Stark, in his work entitled *The Rise of Christianity*,¹⁴ speaks of the same sentiments regarding the development of Christianity during the early days of the Roman Empire.

In conclusion, the top-down method ensured the quantitative benefit of missionary work, while the bottom-up process served to enrich the calibre and stability of the communities as well as to fortify the bonds that united them. The failure of 16th century missionary work can be attributed to its inability to acquire a comprehension of the society outside the Church, and especially in the excessive intensity with which it pursued the top-down process. In fact, it was the bottom-up process that ultimately gave rise to the phenomenon of the *hidden Christians*.

5. Gaining Converts

In the 1550s, the Jesuit Melchior Nunes Barreto toured around inspecting various mission centers of Japan, while mainly engaging in hospital work (that included caring for victims of Hansen's disease). While assessing the charitable undertakings (funerals and burials) conducted by the *Confraria da Misericordia* and fulfilling the tasks of patrolling the villages in the suburbs, he revealed in his writings the view that Christianity had gained to to an important extent the character of being a religion of the poor and the sick. In fact, not only would it be incapable of ridding itself of such a consideration but seeking to expand its numerical and qualitative influence over the whole of Japan's society had by now become virtually impossible.

Cabral who had endorsed the top-down process, had the same view as Barreto. Alessandro Valignano arrived in Japan in 1579 in-

¹⁴ Cf. R. STARK, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, Princeton University Press/Harper, San Francisco, CA 1997.

tending view to inspect the Japanese mission, and in many ways, endeavoured to rectify the policy adopted by Cabral. However, he too conceded to the top-down process. In other words, the general conviction was that unless this top-down process was adopted, there was no way of increasing the number of converts to Christianity, and the inevitable outcome would be that the common people would cease to find any appeal in Christian society.

In the 1580s, Christian *daimyos* (Christian Dukes or Lords) like Takayama increased in numbers, and even among the vassals of Toyotomi, who had come to grab power over the entire nation, the Christian population witnessed a marked increase resulting in feelings of suspicion and anxiety among officials and statesmen. As a result, in 1587, Christians were temporarily exiled because the national administration as envisioned by Toyotomi and the ideal of a *Christian Kingdom* that the Christian *daimyos* and others contemplated on creating, were deemed mutually incompatible. However, under the reign of Toyotomi, since the ban on Christianity was not thoroughly enforced, the Christian communities managed to survive although they had lost any public standing. The long and dismal era of religious suppression as portrayed in the movie *Silence* commenced soon after these events. Despite the persecution, the Christian faith persisted in enduring with no depletion because of the bottom-up process of propagation, which continued to steadily accumulate converts among the people over many years.

Within the Japanese mission, the attitude of caring for the faith of a specific person, as though it were the faith of the entire community, continued and this became of vital importance among families and regional groups, but before the effects of such a steady and easy-going approach were fully visible to all, the injunction to use the top-down process had begun. Sadly, during the Japanese mission of the 19th and 20th centuries, the road to change was impeded.

Though obstacles kept appearing, preserving the faith of the individual then became the concern. The Church, prior to the Second Vatican Council, had a tendency to focus on the *institutional* organisation. However, in the 16th and 20th centuries, the dissemination of the Gospel of Christ among the Japanese people, was conducted by families and regional communities. Thus, increasing and preserving the faith of the individual was crucial. This may not have yielded much by way of numbers, but it was effective by way of sustaining the faith of these converts.

6. A New Missionary Era for Japanese Christians

Pope Francis, when addressing a group of catechists assembled from all over the world spoke about the directions for a new missionary era:

Remember what Benedict XVI said: “The Church does not grow by proselytizing; she grows by attracting others”. And what attracts is our witness. Being a catechist means witnessing to the faith, being consistent in our personal life. This is not easy! We help, we lead others to Jesus with our words and our lives, with our witness. I like to recall what Saint Francis of Assisi used to say to his friars: “Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary, use words”. Words come... but witness comes first: people should see the Gospel, read the Gospel, in our lives. To “be” a catechist requires love, an ever stronger love for Christ, a love for his holy people.¹⁵

As the Holy Father suggested, the Church needs to settle this issue of missionary work so as to make it something relevant to this new era. We should not merely focus on increasing the number of converts for that would constitute no less than an anachronism. If we adopt the stance that ‘all residents of a particular nation or cultural sphere need to switch over to Christianity’, or make similar avowals, we would be reverting to the era of the Roman Empire. Today, there is no necessity to retransform our Christian missions into the *romanesque* type.

Mission work for the future should be carried out in a way that draws others by the virtue of its allure, and that allure or charm needs to be linked to the conduct of each and every person, within his family or society. That conduct, as Pope Francis affirmed, should be to manifest the love of Christ in our everyday living and, above all, to lead a life that is blessed, a life exuding love. A Church with a goal of merely increasing the number of its members can scarcely be expected to survive. On the contrary, its continued existence can be attained by enabling people to know her, and helping them to real-

¹⁵ POPE FRANCIS, *Address to Participants in the Pilgrimage of Catechists on the Occasion of the Year of Faith and of the International Congress on Catechesis*, 27 September 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130927_pellegrinaggio-catechisti.html.

ize that belonging to her can indeed provide them with a life of happiness and joy.

Religion consists in providing happiness to mankind and hence in the preaching of a religion there should be no place either for anxiety or fear. This is a conviction we need to instil within our hearts and in the hearts of others. The peace of the Lord is revealed only by those who are continually at peace with themselves, and hence it is desirable that we have a structure among the local communities wherein the faith of an individual that has been nurtured may also be protected. Missionary activity must foremost aim to be to fortify the *quality of our people* into becoming the “light of the world” (Mt 5:14) and “salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13).

Therefore, the bottom-up process may not have been effective in increasing the number of converts, but that process enabled Christianity to acquire deep roots within the Japanese soil. The history of the *hidden Christians* demonstrates that despite the absence of priests and the lack of contact with the Roman Catholic Church over a period of 250 years, believers succeeded in sustaining and persevering their Christian faith. This part of our Japanese history, which is referred to as the “Discovery of Christian Believers” (1865)¹⁶ further illuminates the passion, strength, tenacity and perseverance of Christian believers in Japan.

¹⁶ On January 8, 1867, His Holiness Pope Pius IX dispatched a special message to Fr. Bernard Petitjean of the Paris Foreign Mission Society, who at the time was involved in missionary work in the city of Nagasaki. The purpose of His Holiness was to personally bless an event, which he exuberantly described as a “Miracle of the Orient”. Three years before this message was dispatched, that is, on March 17, 1865, an incident had occurred within one of Japan’s oldest churches, namely the “Oura Tenshudo of Nagasaki”, which is also known as the Basilica of the Twenty-Six Holy Martyrs of Japan. This was the discovery of the so-called Hidden Christians, and to Catholics all over the world, this incident was indeed a miracle. That is to say, a community of Christians whose ancestors could be traced back to the seventeenth century, and who had experienced excessive persecution due to the ban on Christianity imposed on them in Japan, had yet managed to survive for a period transcending 250 years, even though they had no priests who could minister to them. These Hidden Christians did not consist solely of those who had been discovered. The Christians whom people like Fr. Petitjean had encountered, were of the same faith as the Christians who had populated the nation of Japan four hundred years earlier. Accordingly, they are people who after being discovered, returned to the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, this incident was a twofold miracle, namely a miracle of discovery, and a miracle of resurrection.

Mission as Dialogue In and For Truth: An Integrated Approach to Mission *Ad, Inter and Per Gentes*

❖ ANTOINE REN, SJ

“Evanglizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize” (EG 14). The content of this permanent mission of evangelization is always the same, that is the Gospel, but its form or the method of doing mission is always changing over time, just as David Bosch’s study shows.¹ The Church had different ‘paradigms’ of doing mission in different historical, social and cultural contexts. In the new era, since Paul VI, recent popes have pushed forward the *new evangelization*. It is not one ‘standard model’ for all places, but rather a call for every local Church to have her own way of evangelizing in accordance with her own context. That is why, in order to promote the *new evangelization* in five continents, from 1999 to 2003, Pope John Paul II wrote five different post-synodal apostolic exhortations to each of them.

What would be the proper way of doing mission in Asia where the cultural, religious, linguistic, social and economic backgrounds of each country and region are so diverse? According to Malaysian theologian Jonathan Tan’s study on the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), we should shift the paradigm of mission from *ad gentes* to *inter gentes*.² Tan explains that “the divergences between the FABC’s *missio inter gentes* approach and the traditional *missio ad gentes* approach hinge upon

¹ D. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 1991.

² Cf. J.Y. TAN, *Mission Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences*, FABC Papers, n. 109, 2004, 1-38, www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_109.pdf/.

their differing approaches to the issue of religious pluralism [...]. Generally speaking, the *missio ad gentes* approach is uncomfortable with religious pluralism”³

Before saying that one approach should substitute for another, or one is more adequate in Asia than another, we have to primarily consider the fact that different perspectives of missiology come from different understandings of the relationship between faith and culture. According to Pope Francis, culture in a general sense is what “embraces the totality of a people’s life” (EG 115), and it includes religions. To put emphasis only on faith or on culture might cause different results. Fundamentally, we must first ask what kind of relationship faith should have with culture. How do the two realities ‘encounter’ each other? It is upon the proper answers to the above questions that we may figure out how we should implement Christian mission. This article attempts to show that a fruitful encounter of faith and culture can take place only by dialogue, in and for truth. This dialogue does not oppose *ad gentes* over *inter gentes*, but rather it shows the necessity of integrating them, with *per gentes*.

1. The Problem of Paradigms in Missiology

David Bosch in his study, provides a survey of the history of Christian mission, and classifies six paradigms according to different periods.⁴ The paradigms of mission are different models that the Church uses to do mission in different historical and social contexts – the way of doing mission. When comparing the paradigms that Bosch describes, the two paradigms (*ad gentes* and *inter gentes*) that Tan distinguishes, are not just ways of doing mission, but they implicate the essence of mission itself. Paradoxically, Tan believes that mission *inter gentes* is a result of focusing on “the how of mission or the questions of methodology and approaches”.⁵ Here, we are deal-

³ Ibid., 32-33.

⁴ The six paradigms are: the apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity; the Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period; the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm; the Protestant (Reformation) paradigm; the modern enlightenment paradigm; the emerging ecumenical paradigm.

⁵ J.Y. TAN, *Mission Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences*, 32.

ing with a fundamental question: is there still Christian mission if there is no more mission *ad gentes*?

Tan proposes three reasons as to why he thinks that mission *inter gentes* should substitute for mission *ad gentes* in Asia? First, culturally, the “traditional” mission *ad gentes* approach is rooted in a perspective that Europe (or Rome) is the center of Truth. Mission *ad gentes* is thus understood as a mission of civilizing the other ‘uncivilized’ peoples. This approach somehow disregards other peoples and their culture where the Holy Spirit is working and the “seeds of the Word” (AG 2) are present.

Second, theologically, the “mission *ad gentes* paradigm is articulated from the perspective of the missionaries reaching out to the unbaptized.”⁶ He notes that this perspective which emphasizes Christ’s unique and universal salvation does not consider religious pluralism or diversity of culture as part of God’s creative genius, and has as its goal, the explicit acceptance of the Christian Gospel by non-Christians.

Third, methodologically, “the traditional *missio ad gentes* paradigm focuses on the why, what and who of mission, trying to justify the need for mission and what the content ought to be.”⁷ Thus, it gives primacy to verbal and explicit proclamation of the oneness and uniqueness of Christ for human salvation, and puts interreligious dialogue in second place. For Tan, “such an approach is essentially deductive, drawn from abstract, universal principles, and having no direct engagement with the diverse and pluralistic realities of Asia.”⁸

In brief, Tan does not consider that the “traditional” *missio ad gentes* paradigm fits the Asian context of religious diversity and pluralism. On the contrary, for him, doing mission *inter gentes* is more appropriate for Asia. About this new “paradigm”, Tan states that “the FABC approach to mission focuses on the immersion of the Christian Gospel and local Churches in the Asian realities with its commitment and service to life in solidarity with the Asian peoples, one could speak of a *missio inter gentes*, viz., mission among the Asian peoples.”⁹ Tan developed the paradigm of mission *inter gentes* based on the following four theological propositions:

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 33-34.

⁹ Ibid., 34.

1. The model of mission among the peoples moves away from a sending-receiving Church model toward a world Christianity model, where there is mutual engagement and collaborative global partnership for Christian mission beyond the North-South or Majority-Minority divide.
2. The *orthodoxy* of the model of mission among the peoples is rooted in the *missio Dei* that seeks to usher in the universality of God's reign in pluralistic Asia, and Christians are called to imitate Jesus, the missional exemplar par excellence of the *missio Dei*.
3. Mission among the peoples is inspired by an *orthopathos* that illumines divine empathy and solidarity with the pathos of the suffering and brokenness in the daily life experiences of the Asian peoples.
4. Mission among the peoples is empowered by an orthopraxis that enables the Gospel to engage with the religious pluralism of Asia in a spirit of interreligious hospitality.¹⁰

Evidently, these propositions are theocentric; there is a preference for *missio Dei* and the Kingdom of God, collaboration and dialogue with other religious, as well as empathy for and solidarity with the poor. In his studies of the FABC's documents, Tan asserts clearly that "the FABC's preferred mode of mission as a threefold dialogue with Asian peoples in the fullness of their myriad cultures, religions and extreme poverty, as well as the promotion of the Kingdom of God as the principal goal of mission points to a mission strategy that is geared, not to (ad) the Asian peoples, but rather, among (inter) the Asian peoples: in essence, a *missio inter gentes*".¹¹

Although the above propositions are plausible, I have the opinion that one might tend to prefer the theocentric perspective over the Christocentric perspective, and dialogue over proclamation of the Gospel. In Tan's view, the reason behind this is that the *missio ad gentes* approach which is based on a Christocentric perspective and puts the accent on explicit proclamation of the Gospel, is "uncom-

¹⁰ J.Y. TAN, *Christian Mission among the Peoples of Asia*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 2014, 131.

¹¹ ID., *Mission Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, 34.

fortable with religious pluralism”.¹² Why is it uncomfortable? From the point of view of religious pluralism, it seems that on the one hand, if we insist on unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and Christian tradition, we will undervalue other religious and cultural traditions; on the other hand, if we prioritize the proclamation of the Gospel, we will confront or even get into conflict with other religious and cultural traditions.

While we have to respect other religious and cultural traditions, it is not necessary to oppose a theocentric perspective against a Christocentric perspective, or the proclamation of the Gospel against inter-religious dialogue in order to put other religious and cultural traditions in the ‘right’ place, because the real mission *ad gentes* presupposes dialogue and respect of other religious and cultural traditions for what they are. Ultimately, if our view on the relationship between faith and culture is correct, there will *not* be the feeling that mission *ad gentes* is uncomfortable with religious pluralism.

2. Faith, Culture and Mission

Gaudium et Spes defines culture as “everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities” (GS 53). In other words, culture is concerned with all that man is (body, spirit, personality, capacities) and has (relationships, society, knowledge, property); it determines somehow man’s existential condition, value, attitude and way of living. Religion is certainly one of the most important constituents of culture.

Regarding culture, especially religions, the Second Vatican Council had an open and respectful attitude; it acknowledged that there are positive values in culture and other religious traditions (cf. NA 2), but “attributed these values to the active presence of God through his Word, pointing also to the universal action of the Spirit. *Ad Gentes* affirms, ‘the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified’ (n. 4).¹³ Though the Church acknowledges

¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 19 May 1991, n. 17, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interrelg/documents/rc_pc_interrelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html/.

the positive values of other cultures and the presence of the Word and Holy Spirit in them, she is nevertheless very firm that they are not ways of salvation like Jesus Christ is; in other words, Jesus Christ is the unique and universal Saviour for all peoples, including non-Christians, even if they do not know him.¹⁴

The possibilities of non-Christians' salvation¹⁵ does not mean that the Christian mission of evangelization is not necessary:

God “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1Tim 2:4); that is, God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth. Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary.¹⁶

To ‘bring’ the revealed truth to other peoples does not mean that other peoples are like a blank sheet of paper totally lacking of truth, and that they just have to receive it from the Church; in fact, when we acknowledge their positive values, we acknowledge that there are elements of truth in their culture. Therefore, it is thus not so much about giving-receiving the truth as about the encounter of two cultures in truth, because the Christian faith, as Joseph Ratzinger pointed out, is also a “culture” of God's people.¹⁷

Two things must be clarified here: first, the mission of evangelization, as Pope Francis stated in *Evangelii Gaudium*, should be understood as inculturation (cf. EG 122); second, the Christian faith,

¹⁴ On this question see CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Declaration “Dominus Iesus” on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, 11-12, 6 August 2000, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ecfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html/.

¹⁵ The Second Vatican Council declared several times that non-Christians can be saved by ways that God only knows (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 16; *Gaudium et Spes* 22; *Ad Gentes* 7).

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 851.

¹⁷ J. RATZINGER, “Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures”, *Origins* 24, 30 March 1993, 679-686. Also available at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/incontri/rc_con_cfaith_19930303_hong-kong-ratzinger_en.html/.

as a living tradition, is also a 'culture'. In *Slavorum Apostoli*, Pope John Paul II compared the inculturation to incarnation (cf. SA 21). Through incarnation, Christ, who is the Gospel itself, unites with the whole of human and worldly realities, especially culture; it is culturation of the Gospel (penetration of the Gospel in a given socio-cultural milieu), and evangelization of culture (the culture is called to grow according to the Gospel).

According to Pedro Arrupe, if the culturation of the Gospel is "incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience [...] finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question", then the evangelization of culture is that this experience becomes "a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation'".¹⁸ If the Christian mission is about creating this "new creation" through evangelization for all peoples, whose existence, mentality, way of living and relating to others are always determined by their culture, then, the Christian mission consists of promoting inculturation.

It is worthy of note that inculturation is often partially understood as culturation of the Gospel or faith. This understanding, on the one hand, presupposes that faith does not have its particular culture or cultural form, but wears different cultural clothes; but on the other hand, neglects the other aspect of inculturation which is the evangelization of culture.

Ratzinger points out that "faith itself is culture [...]. There is no such thing as naked faith or mere religion".¹⁹ The Christian faith is a living tradition, and through a long history has formed a special structure and style of life of God's people. Thus, for Ratzinger, the people of God are a cultural community that has a special cultural character; although this 'culture' "differs from the classical cultures which are defined by tribe, people or the boundaries of a common religion".²⁰ There are no boundaries in the culture of God's people as it is a system of values and structure of life open to all peoples. Since the Christian faith is also a 'culture', Ratzinger explains that "we should

¹⁸ P. ARRUPÉ, *Letter to the whole Society on Inculturation*, Acta Romana Societatis Iesu 17, 1978, 230.

¹⁹ J. RATZINGER, "Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures", 682.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

no longer speak of inculturation but of the meeting of cultures or ‘inter-culturality’, to coin a new phrase. For inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture whereby two subjects, formerly unknown to each other, meet and fuse. But such a notion is first of all artificial and unrealistic, for with the exception of modern technological civilization, there is no such thing as faith devoid of culture or culture devoid of faith.”²¹

The danger of considering faith as something stripped of cultures is that the particularity, distinctiveness or newness of faith is denied. If the Christian faith was not distinctive compared to other cultures, it would be melted into cultures when it meets them. This is the case of so called in-culturation or culturation of the Gospel. But if the Christian faith does not bring anything new to other cultures, and is just assimilated into them, the mission of evangelization will make no sense because, in this case, the non-Christians cannot see any reason to accept the Christian faith.

That is why Ratzinger says that there should be “fruitful tension” between the Christian faith and cultures. This tension comes from a cultural difference:

[...] when the faith and its culture meet another culture hitherto foreign to it, it cannot be a question of dissolving the duality of the cultures to the advantage of the one or the other [...]. Gaining a Christianity deprived of its concrete human complexion at the cost of losing one’s own cultural heritage would be as mistaken as surrendering faith’s own cultural physiognomy. Indeed, the tension is fruitful; it renews faith and heals culture.²²

In other words, if this tension is fruitful, it is because, on the one hand, it recognizes and conserves the identity of faith and of culture as they are and on the other hand, it “renews faith and heals culture”.

From the earlier statement, we could conclude that the Christian mission is necessarily *ad* and *inter gentes*. *Ad gentes*, because when faith meets cultures, it meets them as a distinctive and new cultural subject; likewise, these cultures are also distinctive subjects which show their newness to faith and to which faith brings something

²¹ Ibid., 681.

²² Ibid., 682.

new. It is clear that in the history of “inter-culturality”, although faith – whether Israel or Christian faith – is influenced by cultures, it begins with a break with those cultures because of its newness.

From a Biblical perspective, the calling of Abraham can be viewed as a cultural break: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house” (Gn12:1). Such a break continued along the history of Israel; in the course of her struggle with God and prophets, Israel painfully adopted and transformed Egyptian, Hittite, Sumerian, Babylonian, Persian and Greek cultures, “in order to make ready an ever purer vessel for the newness of the revelation of the one God [...]. These other cultures came thereby to their own lasting fulfillment”.²³

In the New Testament, Christ makes a similar break regarding the Jewish culture. He was a Jew, immersed into the whole Jewish history and culture, and lived not only among his own people, but also among gentiles (the Romans); there is no doubt that he carried out his mission *inter gentes*. However, he kept a certain distance from some Jewish traditions and criticized their Pharisaism. He taught and brought something new (Mk 1:27) to his compatriots and all peoples. His mission is thus also *ad gentes*. In other words, though the Gospel is the continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament, it breaks at the same time with the latter, just as Paul emphasized with regard to Mosaic Law:²⁴ “In its twofold relationship with Jewish law, fulfillment and rupture, the Gospel marks, from the beginning, its relation to every possible culture”.²⁵ This is the reality that all inter-culturalities between the Gospel and cultures have shown.

Even for individuals, one can have the same experience. When one joins the Church, though he/she remains Chinese, German or American, he/she will realize that he/she enters a different cultural situation which demands a certain break from his/her previous life; though he/she lives among non-Christians within the same culture, his/her life style is different from theirs, and his/her relationship with these non-Christians is always a kind of inter-culturality between faith and culture. The Christians have, thus, double member-

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cf. C. GEFFRÉ, “Mission et Inculturation”, *Spiritus*, vol. XXVIII, n. 109, 1987, 413-414.

²⁵ P. BEAUCHAMP, “Récit biblique et rencontre interculturelle”, *Lumière et Vie*, n. 168, 1984, 244.

ship: culturally, they identify themselves with the same social group as their non-Christian compatriots and live as part of them; religiously, they belong to a different community than their non-Christian compatriots.

It is only by living among the non-Christians that the Christians as evangelizers can lead the culture that they share with the non-Christians to its fulfillment; at the same time, it is only by breaking with some parts of this culture which are not compatible with the Gospel that the Christians can bring the Gospel as something new to the non-Christians. Mission *ad* and *inter gentes* must go together.

Nevertheless, we may ask how faith and culture, as different cultural subjects and foreign to each other, can meet and how culturalization of the Gospel and evangelization of culture which is somewhat a mutual transformation into a 'new creation' could take place? Ratzinger points out that this meeting and transformation is possible, only if faith and culture are open to the truth. In fact, "the sign of a high culture is its openness, its capacity to give and receive, its power to develop, to allow itself to be purified and become more conformed to truth and to man".²⁶

[...] because man, despite all the differences of his history and social constructs, remains one and the same being. This one being man, however, is himself touched in the depth of his existence by truth. The fundamental openness of each person to the other can only be explained by the hidden fact that our souls have been touched by truth; and this explains the essential agreement which exists even between cultures most removed from each other.²⁷

Since man, whose existence is always determined by culture, is fundamentally open to truth which could be recognized as universal values common to all, faith and culture which is in search for truth about man, can meet and unite with each other. But this possible meeting between faith and culture is more of their meeting in their seeking for truth than the meeting of themselves. It is worthy of note that the truth about man is inseparable from the truth about God and the world.

²⁶ J. RATZINGER, "Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures", 680.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 681.

If both Christians and non-Christians in the same cultural background seek for this integrated triple-faceted truth, they cannot just live ‘peacefully’ in ‘harmony’ without interfering with each other; this truth which is manifested in different ways in them, will necessarily call them to interact, share and exchange with each other. Their meeting becomes then an opportunity for complementarity and mutual transformation and not so much about transformation into each other as into the truth.

Their interaction and mutual exchange necessitate dialogue, for on the one hand, dialogue is the concrete ‘form’ of these interaction and exchange; on the other hand, it is through dialogue that the truth can be manifested and clarified. If Christian mission consists of showing the evangelical truth to non-Christians and deepening the Christian faith through the truth manifested in a culture which is common to both Christians and non-Christians, then the Christian mission is dialogue in and for truth.

3. Dialogue In and For Truth

3.1 Theological Foundation of Dialogue

Based on the words of Paul (1Tim 2:4), several magisterial documents confirm that “God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth”.²⁸ If we recognize that God himself is the truth, then dialogue is not just a way leading to truth, but also something through which we can participate in truth, because God is a dialogical Being, his truth discloses itself in the Trinitarian dialogue. Ratzinger explains “person” in God in the following words:

In God, person means relation. Relation, relatedness, is not something added on the Person begets, [...] but rather he is the Person himself; here the Person exists by his very nature only *as* relation. [...]. “Person” in God is the pure relativity of being turned each

²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 851; CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Declaration Dominus Iesus*, 22; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue in Truth and Charity. Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue*, n. 15, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2014, available at www.pcinterreligious.org.

other; it is situated, not on the level of substance [...] but rather on the level of dialogue, of being related to one another.²⁹

God is not self-enclosed and as a dialogical Being, he opens himself to the creation and extends his Trinitarian dialogue to man. But this dialogue was interrupted by Adam's sin and because of his love and kindness, God restores this dialogue in the history of salvation: "The whole history of man's salvation is one long, varied dialogue, which marvelously begins with God and which He prolongs with men in so many different ways".³⁰ This dialogue is concretely realized by revelation, which at the same time is the manifestation of the threefold truth about God, man, and the world.

In his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, Pope Paul VI reminded the Church that she is called to dialogue with the world in a way that God initiated dialogue with it (cf. ES 70). Therefore, dialogue and truth have, side by side three levels: the first level is where God, as the Truth itself, is expressed by the Trinitarian dialogue; the second level explains how the truth about God, man, and the world is revealed by God's dialogue with man; and the third level whereby the Church should lead non-Christians into this dialogue between God and man in which the threefold truth is revealed, and she has to carry out this mission through dialogue which is nothing other than an effort of seeking the truth.

We can briefly summarize the way God dialogues with man from four aspects; first, it was God who initiated dialogue with man, because he wills man's salvation; second, when God dialogues with man, he does not have any prejudice against his partners; third, God dialogues indiscriminately with everyone; and finally, God dialogues with man in an understandable way by taking account of man's situation.

Apart from the divine ways of dialogue mentioned earlier that we Christians should imitate, there are four other aspects we must be mindful of when we initiate dialogue with others: sense of equal-

²⁹ J. RATZINGER, *Dogma and Preaching. Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA 2011 (from the fourth edition of the German original: *Dogma und Verkündigung*, 2005), 186.

³⁰ POPE PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 6 August 1964, 70, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html/.

ity, recognition of difference, openness to argument and possibility of conversion. Through these aspects, we can see more clearly why mission *ad, inter* and *per gentes* are an integrated mission, and why dialogue and proclamation must go together.

3.2 Sense of Equality and Mission *Per Gentes*

Although we recognize that all revealed truth has been entrusted to the Catholic Church, she should not have a sense of superiority. The sense of superiority is a stumbling block that hinders the search for and questioning of the truth, since superiority is an attitude that seems to possess the truth more than others. Moreover, this attitude of superiority may make our interlocutors resentful, which may interrupt dialogue; on the other hand, it will make one feel that he/she does not need to go deeper into the truth, especially the truth which can be manifested through others. Therefore, the attitude that everyone is equal is a basic requirement of dialogue whose purpose is seeking the truth. In fact, even though Christians have the revealed truth and have come to understand some of the truths, the truth is not something that man as a finite being, can totally grasp because it is transcendent (if we admit that only God is the fullness of Truth).

The reason why dialogue requires equality is not only because to dialogue is to question truth, but also because the intention of this questioning should be our openness to the possibility of the manifestation of more truths. The truth can manifest itself anywhere, in anyone and in any culture. If we cannot find truth in others, it may not be because others have less truth, but because we do not recognize it more in others:

Truth manifests itself, and we recognize its rightness. More technically stated, truth is here understood, on the side of the object, as the power of disclosure and concealment in the object itself; and that disclosure is related to truth as an experience of recognition on the side of the subject. There is, in every true manifestation, an intrinsic, that is dialogical, interaction between the objects' disclosure and concealment and the subjects' recognition. That interaction is conversation (or dialogue).³¹

³¹ D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1987, 28.

Therefore, if we respect the fact that the truth is free to manifest itself anywhere, in anyone and in any culture, and consider others as objects of possible manifestation of truth, then we will let the dialogue lead us to the possible manifestation of truth. In this case, we have neither prejudice projected on to our interlocutors, nor pre-set goals for our own benefit, but will merely allow the questioning to lead us freely to the truth, in the way Socrates did by letting the truth disclose itself through dialogical questioning.

In fact, by affirming that we should try to discover the truth from others, we are not saying that the truth in the Catholic Church is incomplete and that it has to be supplemented by the truths manifested in others, but that Christians can understand and live out the truth of their faith with a renewed and deeper way through their discovery of truth in others. Likewise, having a sense of equality does not mean relativizing the truth; it is a humble attitude facing the possible manifestation of truth in others:

While entering with an open mind into dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions [...]. Christians must allow themselves to be questioned. Notwithstanding the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the way Christians sometimes understand their religion and practice it may be in need of purification.³²

Again, this need for purification is due to the fact that “truth is not a thing we possess, but a person by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed, and that this is an unending process.”³³

Through dialogue, the discovery of positive values or elements of truth in other cultural traditions may allow Christians to purify the way they understand and practice their faith, just as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue pointed out: “Far from weakening their own (Christian) faith, true dialogue will deepen it [...]. Their faith will gain new dimensions as they discover the active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ beyond the visible bound-

³² PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, n. 32.

³³ *Ibid.*, n. 49.

aries of the Church and of the Christian fold”.³⁴ For example, because of contact and dialogue with Buddhism, especially the concept of Zen, some spiritual masters like Thomas Merton are able to deepen and enlarge their Christian spiritual view and practice.

Hence, Christians can deepen and renew the way they understand and practice their faith through dialogue with non-Christians. Apart from fulfilling their mission of evangelization, they might also be ‘evangelized’ at the same time by the truth manifested in non-Christians. In this sense, Christian mission is not only about bringing the Gospel to others, but also about being evangelized *per gentes*. In fact, all inculturations of the Gospel are done through this process of being evangelized *per gentes* while evangelizing non-Christians.

3.3 Recognition of Difference and Mission *Ad Gentes*

If it is when we evangelize others that we are evangelized, then mission *ad gentes* and mission *per gentes* are inseparable. We have mentioned that faith and culture are two different cultural subjects, and that faith meets culture, always as something distinctive or new. However, even though Christians live among non-Christians and within the same cultural background, their values and style of life are culturally different from non-Christians. If we recognize this difference between two cultural realities, then Christian mission, which should be done through dialogue, is always necessarily *ad gentes*.

To dialogue with others is not to look for similarities as inculturation does not mean to express Christian faith by ‘similar’ non-Christian notions, because there will always be differences even in the similarities between the two cultures. Therefore, it is important to recognize and be mindful of differences when we dialogue with others.

Conversation (or dialogue) in its primary form is an exploration of possibilities in the search for truth. In following the track of any question, we must allow for difference and otherness. At the same time, as the question takes over, we notice that to attend to the other as other, the different as different, is also to understand the different as possible.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid., n. 50.

³⁵ D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, 20.

If we recognize and respect the differences, then we will allow our dialogue with others to be guided by our questioning about what is true in others and in ourselves as well. In so doing, we open the possibility to the manifestation of truth. Dialogue is neither a confrontation, nor a debate, but rather a questioning; “it is willingness to follow the question wherever it may go. It is dialogue”.³⁶

If recognition of the differences can open up the possibility of manifestation of truth, then we need to truly express what we are and listen carefully to what others say about themselves, because truth can be disclosed in this sincere expression of the true self. We are what we are, and we do not even have to avoid expressing our beliefs, thought seemingly ‘unacceptable’ in other peoples’ eyes. Such self-expression does not prevent us from listening to others modestly; that is to say; on the one hand, we have to let others truthfully express themselves, on the other hand, we should listen and distinguish the truth from the self-expression and statements of others.

Dialogue can be primarily considered, as an exchange of two or more self-expressions. But dialogue does not end with self-expressions; it is exploration of truth through self-expression. If dialogue presupposes self-expression, then it necessitates proclamation of the Gospel from the side of Christians. For Christians, self-expression is nothing other than proclamation of the Gospel, since they are formed by the Gospel. Thus, dialogue and proclamation do not oppose each other, but are of the same thing. Therefore, as proclamation of the Gospel is the self-expression to non-Christians, Christian mission must be *ad gentes*.

3.4 Openness to Argument and Harmony in Truth

Since man’s way of existing is determined or forged by his language, culture, religion and society, the exchange of two self-expressions is also that of two different cultural traditions or value systems. In the course of this exchange or dialogue, the argument cannot be avoided because facing the same problem or fact, one viewpoint or interpretation often poses a challenge to another different viewpoint or interpretation.

³⁶ Ibid., 18.

“When challenged on an interpretation, do I have any evidence that my conversation partner could accept?”³⁷ It is because of the desire to present further evidence to our dialogue partners, we sometimes end on the path of argument – a process of questioning and proving evidence, and it is a necessary way of seeking the truth. If two coexisting cultural subjects do not stand in truth, it will not make sense for them to be in “harmony”.

To give an interpretation is to make a claim. To make a claim is to be willing to defend that claim if challenged by others or by the further process of questioning itself. When there are no further relevant questions either from the text or from myself or from the interaction that is questioning, then I find relative adequacy. I then present my interpretation to the community of inquiry to see if they have further relevant questions.³⁸

In short, the purpose of argument is not to merely adhere to our own opinion, but to let it be more evident and sufficiently proven; it is thus an effort to pursue the truth. Argument is the opposite of the sophistry, making one’s own opinion seem ‘reasonable’ and the opinion of others as wrong.

3.5 Possibility of Conversion and True *Inter Gentes*

Since dialogue is openness to and searching for the possibilities of truth, then when truth is manifested in the self-expression and argument of our dialogue partner, we should accept it, and this often means self-transformation, even conversion: “Interreligious dialogue, in itself, does not aim at conversion. Nevertheless, it does not exclude that it might be an occasion of conversion. All believers are ‘pilgrims of truth and peace’.”³⁹

Self-transformation and conversion are two levels of change which could be the results of a meeting between two cultural realities. Self-transformation may occur when one is inspired by the truth manifested in others. It consists of deepening and renewing the way

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue in Truth and Charity. Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue*, n. 3.

one believes and lives (including the way one believes and lives his/her faith) through the inspiration that he/she gets from the truth disclosed by his/her dialogue with others.

Conversion, in the context of this article, means to leave one's previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself towards another one. There are many people, including some 'experts' of interreligious dialogue, who are allergic to this term, thinking that conversion is an obstacle to harmony and peace between religions. In fact, when one is really seeking for truth and is totally convinced by the belief or the truth manifested in another religion, the individual will naturally convert to accept that religion; it is more about conversion to the truth than to another religion. In other words, conversion does not mean the loss of self, but a means to become a better self; this is not a compromise with another religion, but instead, it is an obedience to the truth:

Sincere dialogue implies, on the one hand, mutual acceptance of differences, or even of contradictions, and on the other, respect for the free decision of persons taken according to the dictates of their conscience. The teaching of the Council must nevertheless be borne in mind: "All men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and to hold on to it as they come to know it" (DH,1).⁴⁰

I must emphasize again that it is through dialogue that this embracing of truth is possible, because dialogue is a place where the truth can be displayed and disclosed. When Christians dialogue with others, they are not just as different cultural subjects, for example, religiously, but also as those who share the same social background with others and live amongst them. However, for Christians, *inter gentes* should not just be about co-existing in apparent 'peace' and 'harmony' without deep interaction, but to live with others, seeking for truth together, and to allow the truth to be disclosed by the real dialogue to transform each other. This transformation, for the part of non-Christians, might be conversion.

⁴⁰ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, n. 41.

4. Dialogue, Truth and the Proclamation of the Gospel

In view of this possibility of a conversion to the truth, it may be unjust to think that it may be possible for Christians to pretend to 'dialogue' without proclaiming the Gospel to others, to keep peace and harmony without seeking for truth, to live among others and like others without expressing their fundamental differences and *otherness*. In fact, when they do decide to 'dialogue', they cannot engage in real dialogue, for dialogue can take place only on the premise of self-expression, which, for Christians, is nothing other than proclamation of the Gospel; when they prefer "harmonious co-existence" to conversion, they yield to an unrealistic ideology rather than submit themselves to the truth, which demands total transformation.

Love (charity) without truth is hypocrisy, truth without love is illusory; the two are closely related to each other, just as Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (cf. 1-9). That is why the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue reminds us that "the broader purpose of dialogue is adhesion to the truth, motivated by charity".⁴¹ We know that this charitable motivation is initiated by God himself; we just share his motivation of love or his desire for the salvation of all peoples.

In fact, when we are pushed by God's desire and the revealed truth that we have received to proclaim the Gospel to non-Christians, we are not only doing *missio ad gentes*, but also being evangelized *per gentes*, that is by the truth manifested in non-Christians. Being evangelized *per gentes* is to deepen, enlarge and renew the way we believe and live our faith through dialogue with non-Christians, which necessitates proclamation of the Gospel as our Christian self-expression. For Asians, who live in such a diverse cultural tradition context and among non-Christians, this provides the *locus* for dialoguing and seeking for truth with others. It is because of their openness to truth that we do not hesitate to proclaim the Gospel – *ad, inter, and per gentes*.

⁴¹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue in Truth and Charity. Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue*, n. 35.

Biblical and Patristic Reflections on Evangelization and Interreligious Interactions

❖ THOMAS MANJALY

The Catholic Church is gearing itself up to celebrate the centenary of the publication of the Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XV *Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919) on the “Propagation of the Faith throughout the World”. This missionary document sought to give a new impetus to the missionary task of the Church as entrusted to it by the Lord: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation” (Mk 16:15). In India, this missionary imperative is to be viewed in the context of the plurality of religions. Hence, this work looks at evangelization and interreligious interactions as two closely related themes.

I. EVANGELIZATION

1. The Evangelizing Mission of the Church

Faith in Jesus and living according to God’s word constitute the community of Jesus’ disciples (cf. Lk 8:21; 11:28). Paul links believing, hearing and proclaiming, which together form a unifying action (cf. Rom 8:14,17). Therefore, what makes the Church is its evangelizing mission. Commitment to Christ (the Word), becomes a commitment to proclaiming the Word, and the book of the *Acts of the Apostles* presents the growth of the Church as essentially related to the proclamation of the Word (evangelization).¹

¹ Here is why the book of the *Acts of the Apostles* features expressions such as “the Word increased” (6:7; 9:29; 12:24), “the Word multiplied” (12:24), “the Word gained strength” (19, 20) or “the Church multiplied” (6:1,7; 9:31), “grew stronger” (16:5).

One of the salient features of Benedict XVI's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, is its *strong missionary orientation and emphasis on evangelization as sharing the lived experience of the Word of God* (cf. VD 90-98).² An authentic experience of the Word culminates, or rather should culminate, in its explicit proclamation (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4). The Church's evangelizing mission cannot be considered an "optional or supplementary element in her life" (VD 93), because "she exists in order to evangelize", as already stated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14 by Pope Paul VI.³ "Since the entire People of God is a people which have been 'sent' [...] 'the mission of proclaiming the word of God is the task of all of the disciples of Jesus Christ based on their Baptism'" (VD 94; cf. 92), while "missionary outreach is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community" (VD 95). Similarly, Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, drawing from *Redemptoris Missio* of Pope John Paul II, reaffirmed that "the missionary task must remain foremost" and that "missionary outreach is *paradigmatic of all Church's activity*" (EG 15). This is the task of the *entire people of God* (cf. EG 111) and it is the duty of the Church to encourage the people to embark upon the mission of evangelization marked with the joy of the Gospel (cf. EG 1) because the Church is *to be mission* (cf. EG 273).

2. The People of God Generated by the Word of God

The Bible is a book of faith and of faith-sharing. What we find in it is the diversity of ways in which this experience of faith and faith-sharing took place. In addition, the creation of the first humans is at the same time a call to mission; as His image and likeness, they are called to be God's representative and his living presence to the rest of creation.

² Cf. TH. MANJALY, "The Word of God and New Evangelization", in I. PADINJAREKUTTU et al. (eds.), *Becoming Witnesses to the Gospel. The Call to New Evangelization*, Oriens Publications, Shillong 2013, 229-231.

³ Cf. *Decree Ad Gentes* 2: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father".

2.1 The Old Testament

The Hebrew word close to the idea of 'evangelization' is *bsr*, meaning 'proclaiming the good news' (cf. 1 Kg 1:42). The addition of *thoba* only strengthens the meaning that it already has. Later the word is used in a religious sense (cf. 1 Sam 31:9; Ps 40:10), referring to the acts of Yahweh, and in Deutero-Isaiah it receives a messianic tone referring to the victory or kingly rule of Yahweh (cf. Isa 40:9; 52:7).⁴

a) The Call of Abraham

Abraham was told, "Go from your own country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you" (Gen 12:1-3; cf. 22:18).⁵ First of all, this is a call of God. Second, it expresses God's intention to *offer salvation to the nations* through Abraham and the new community that he founds. This promise is further expanded in Isaiah so as to refer to the eschatological action of Yahweh (cf. Isa 2:1-4; 18:7; 45:18-25).⁶

b) The Call and Sending of Moses and Prophets

Certain persons were called and sent, like Moses and the prophets. Moses receives an invitation from God (cf. Ex 3:6-8,10). By calling Moses, God *reveals* himself to a people in relation to the past, and opening up a perspective *to the future*. The mission of Moses is to form a people who will worship the one true God.

The 'I send you' formula is the core of the call and mission of the prophets (cf. Jer 1:7; Ezek 2:3-4). The consciousness of their call was an integral feature of their mission, which distinguished them from the false prophets (cf. Jer 14:14-15; 23:21).⁷ This sending reveals the missionary dimension of the existence of Israel and of the sending of the prophets.

⁴ Cf. M. VELLANICKAL, "The Biblical Theology of Evangelization", in J. PATHRAPANKAL (ed.), *Service and Salvation*, TPI, Bangalore 1973, 55.

⁵ Cf. TH. MANJALY, "The Word of God and New Evangelization", 231-236.

⁶ Cf. M. VELLANICKAL, "The Biblical Theology of Evangelization", 56.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

c) Election and Universalism

The Exile was Israel's first real contact with the nations. Instead of being engulfed by the surrounding cultures or becoming a ghetto, Israel becomes more clearly aware of its *universal* vocation. This is fundamental to the concept of evangelization. Yahweh is superior to all the deities of the nations (cf. Deut 32:8-9; Isa 24:21).

The missionary perspective of the Old Testament is to be placed *in relation to the concept of election and universalism*. Election is the *initiative* of God and his gratuitous gift. It is God's grace (cf. RM 3). The purpose of election is to gather a people bound together in covenantal *relationship with him*. This people would be *his people* who have to bear witness to him before the nations, becoming 'the light to the nations' (cf. Isa 49:6) which would acknowledge Yahweh as the one God (cf. Isa 42:6) and reflect his life (cf. Lev 11:44-45).

While *election* is focused on God's chosen people, *universalism* emphasizes its openness to the nations. As the Old Testament extends God's saving plan to creation, so the mission should extend to the whole creation and humanity (*cosmos*), to *restore humanity to God's image*. This is *decentralized* universalism (cf. Isa 19:19-22, 23; Mal 1:11), which is expressed in various currents of thought and themes.⁸ The Old Testament also contains elements of *centralized* universalism. There is not much about outgoing universalism (cf. Isa 19:25) or explicit divine commission to evangelize the Gentiles.⁹ Yet, there are some basic features of evangelization which find their fulfillment in the New Testament.¹⁰

2.2 The New Testament

The New Testament employs a series of terms to express the idea of evangelization.¹¹ Evangelization takes us back to Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, to the person in whom God and humanity encoun-

⁸ Cf. L. LEGRAND, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, Orbis Books, New York – Maryknoll 1990, 22-26.

⁹ The only missionary going to a foreign land was probably Jonah, who stands opposed to the reactionary spirit of Ezra-Nehemiah. Cf. *Ibid.*, 24. Initially, he too was tempted to go to his own interested territory of Tarshish, instead of God's chosen destination of Niniveh.

¹⁰ Cf. M. VELLANICKAL, "The Biblical Theology of Evangelization", 57.

¹¹ *Euangelizein, kerusssein, (dia) marturein, matheteuein*, etc., are some of them.

tered each other in an authentic way. The clear witnesses of this process are the Gospels. Because of the encounter between the word of God and humanity in the person of Jesus, he became the embodiment of the Good News (cf. Mk 1:1). Jesus is the Good News of God to humanity. Mark 1:15 focuses on the process of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, a kind of a summary of the ministry of Jesus,¹² involving three aspects: *revelation, revolution and resolution.*

a) Revelation: “The Time is Fulfilled, and the Reign of God is at Hand” (Mk 1:15ab; cf. Lk 4:21)

The message of Jesus is that the rule of God has been brought to the present: “The time is fulfilled; the Reign of God is at hand”. This revelation of the Gospel is God’s gift which requires an immediate response. The expression Reign of God¹³ stands for God’s sovereign activity over the whole cosmos. It means a quality of existence and a state of being in which God exercises his providential care for all. More than a concept, it is a story of God’s benevolent dealings in history.¹⁴ Jesus made the symbol of God’s rule the central part of his message, his words and his actions.¹⁵ The purpose was to show that he came to usher in a new redeemed humanity, which lives by the Kingdom’s values here and now, and awaits its eschatological fulfillment.¹⁶

b) Revolution: “Repent” (Mk 1:15c)

The words and actions of Jesus – particularly healing and forgiving, which indicate liberation from enslaving powers – lead to a conver-

¹² Cf. L. LEGRAND, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, 44.

¹³ Reign indicates more concisely the dynamic providence of God extended to humankind and the cosmic order, than the apparently static and geographically oriented term ‘Kingdom’.

¹⁴ Cf. J. PATHRAPANKAL, *Time and History: Biblical and Theological Studies*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2000, 240-242.

¹⁵ Mt 19:29 with Mk 10:29 and Lk 18:29 put Christ and the Kingdom as parallels. See also Mk 11:10 and Lk 19:38 as well as Jn 3:3,5 and 18:36-37. Compare also “seeing the Kingdom” (Mk 9:1, Lk 9:27) with “seeing the Son of Man” (Mt 16:28). Cf. M. VELLANICKAL, “The Biblical Theology of Evangelization”, 59.

¹⁶ Cf. G. SOARES-PRABHU, “The Kingdom of God: Jesus’ Vision of a New Society”, in D.S. AMALORPAVADASS (ed.), *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1981, 579-607.

sion experience. God's Kingdom comes in an unpredictable way, upsetting all human thinking, planning and expectation. If one is to receive it, he must adjust to the ways of God: *metanoia* – change of not just some scattered actions, but especially of *the mind-set, way of life, priorities, scale of values and social standards*. It is not system centered, but person-centered. The first are last, the poor and the weak are favored, the mighty are thrown down, wisdom is foolishness, might is weakness and death is life. This is a message of total upheaval. It is a *radical exodus* – a 'going out' of one's deepest self to follow God's *unpredictable ways*.

c) Resolution: “Believe the Gospel” (Mk 1:15d)

The community gathered by the Good News commits itself in faith to the Word revealed in and by Jesus. It is not built on the basis of human elements – ethnic, cultural or sociological, but only on faith in Jesus Christ.

The mission of Jesus was an expression, an overflow of his inner life in the Trinity. Being the Son, he reveals the Father (cf. Jn 1:18) through his filial love and fellowship with the Father. In Jesus, both the message of the Kingdom of love and the mission of establishing it merge into a dynamic unity.¹⁷ He then invited others to share in that life through faith in him (cf. Jn 20:31). Therefore, as this life of love can be realized only in a community, he formed the disciples into a community, before sending them out (cf. Mk 3:14). In the Farewell Discourse and the concluding prayer, he emphasized the unity that should characterize his community modeling it on his relationship with the Father (cf. Jn 13-17). Forming such a community was the missionary task of Jesus. The early Church, by living a life of fellowship (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*), gave witness to Jesus (*marturia* – Ac 2:44-46; 4:32).¹⁸ In this way, the Kingdom of God would be established, and the mission of Jesus would be continued.

¹⁷ Cf. M. VELLANICKAL, “The Biblical Theology of Evangelization”, 61.

¹⁸ Cf. TH. MANJALY, “Jn 10:10: A Reflection in the Context of Ecclesia in Asia”, *Mission Today*, n. 2, 2000, 230-233.

3. Some New Testament's Examples for Evangelization

The Bible in its entirety is a 'missionary' book. Here, only a few specific New Testament's examples are illustrated so as to help our understanding of certain trends in evangelization, while their variety points to the possibility of different approaches and methods.¹⁹

3.1 The Gospels

a) Evangelization as Sharing the Experience of the Incarnate Word (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4)

The Johannine community preserved their pluriform, multiple and comprehensive experience of Jesus in its visual, auditory and contemplative shape: the Word. This was something so unique and profound that they wanted to share it with others. Just as Jesus shared with others his intimate relationship with the Father (cf. Jn 1:18; 10:30; 15:9-10), so through the proclamation of the Word of Life, a new community was established and communion between the tradition-bearers and their listeners began to take roots. This experience of communion relates the believers to the Father and Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the Spirit, as the joyful Good News. What they communicate is their lived experience of the totality of the Jesus-event. Andrew brought Simon Peter to Jesus (cf. 1:40-42), Philip brought Nathanael (cf. Jn 1:45-51) and the Samaritan woman brought fellow Samaritans (cf. Jn 4:28-30, 39-42).

In the *Emmaus* episode, Jesus *opened* the minds and hearts of the disciples and gradually *unfolded* the treasures of the Scriptures which gave meaning to their lives. His interpretation removed their frustration and hence made of them his heralds. The cry of the Ethiopian too points to this reality when he said, "How can I understand unless someone interprets?" (Ac 8:31). Not only the Eucharist, but also the Scriptures keep the memory of Jesus alive and make him present in the diverse vicissitudes of life (cf. DV 21).

¹⁹ Cf. ID., "The Word of God and New Evangelization", 236-245.

b) Authentic Witnesses

Evangelization is usually associated with *proclaiming* (*kerussein*).²⁰ Luke uses both *proclaiming* and *witnessing* (cf. Lk 24:48-49; Ac 1:8). Matthew refers to making disciples (*matheteuein*), which is a further stage of evangelization. John makes use of *marturein* and *marturia* to emphasize the personal aspect of mission. To be a Christian is to experience fellowship with God – with the Father and with the Son in the Spirit (1 Jn 1:3,6) –, which finds its expression in fellowship among the believers (cf. 1 Jn 1:3; cf. Ac 2:42; Rom 15:16-27). The proclamation (*kerygma*) has to be substantiated by a life of witness to fellowship (*marturia, koinonia*) – *evangelization in word and deed*.

Mt 5:13-16 complements the Matthean mission command – the *outward* aspect (cf. Mt 28:18-20) – and emphasizes the *inward* dimension. These two elements when taken in their inter-relationship constitute an integral mission. Matthew places the Sermon on the Mount in relation to discipleship-mission. Mt 5:16 in the form of an appeal concludes this process of *being the salt of the earth and the light of the world*: “In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”. Through these images, Matthew, while stressing the need for proclamation (cf. Mt 28:19), emphasizes the necessity of being a *transforming presence in the world*. In relation to the ninth beatitude, which speaks of persecution (cf. Mt 5:11-12), the persecuted, the slandered and the reviled disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (of and to the persecutors). Authentic discipleship is a very effective approach to evangelization.

c) Discipling through Love and Option for the Poor

The whole mission of Jesus can be summed up in Jn 3:16 – God’s maximum love for the world is best expressed in offering his Son as sacrifice (cf. Jn 13:34; 15:12-13; 1 Jn 3:16; 4:10-11). The world will know who the true disciple is by the practice of love (cf. Jn 13:34-35). The foot-washing (cf. Jn 13:1-11) is an act of *service through total self-giving* (love unto death). Sharing and fellowship characterized the early Church (cf. Ac 2:42,46; 4:32-34). *Service out of love is*

²⁰ Cf. M. VELLANICKAL, “The Biblical Theology of Evangelization”, 65-68.

the hallmark of a Christian (cf. Jn 15:12; 1 Jn 3:16; 4:11-12,20), and *the most convincing expression of the Gospel*.²¹

Luke 4:18-21 emphasizes the relationship between evangelization and social commitment as the latter interprets concretely the saving love of God and Jesus. This is *integral evangelization*. Jesus entered into solidarity with the struggles of the people. He called people to true inner freedom which included liberation from all forces of bondage as a *reality that is being realized here and now*. What is important is not only what we do for the poor, but also *what we are for and learn from the poor*. Evangelization *promotes a well-integrated life* (a new quality of life) and the *Church's activities* translate the Word into deeds.

d) Transformative and Empowering Encounters

In her *search for the meaning of life and for God*, the woman of Samaria was enabled by Jesus to *discover herself, discover Him and finally God* as the ultimate in her life (cf. Jn 4:7-26). Jesus' words elicited and activated in her the deep desire of salvation (cf. Jn 4:10,15). Jesus invited the two disciples of John the Baptist who were in search of deeper realities, to come to him and find fulfillment (cf. Jn 1:35-42). Jesus on the road to *Emmaus is a perfect model of this accompanying* (cf. Lk 24:13-35). The way Jesus dealt with different people is an inspiring model of evangelization, showing that mission is *a process of transforming and enabling* (Zacchaeus, the outsider centurion, Nicodemus, Nathanael), as well as a *person-to-person encounter* (cf. EN 46). Jesus *transformed and empowered* the Samaritan woman to become a model evangelizer.

3.2 The Early Church: *Acts of the Apostles* and *Paul's Letters*

During his lifetime, Jesus asked his disciples to continue his mission (cf. Mk 6:7-11; Lk 9:1-5; Mt 9:37-10:16). Later, this is presented in the form of a 'mission command' by the risen Lord (cf. Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:46-49 and Jn 20:21-23). Jesus shared with

²¹ Cf. RM 23: "We are missionaries above all because of *what we are* as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries *in word and deed*".

them the full authority by which he himself works, considering them as his fellow workers.²² The basis of the sending seems to be a personal encounter with the risen Lord and a commissioning by him with authority and power.²³

a) Evangelization of the Evangelizer: *Reverse Evangelization*

Peter recognized the priority of Israel, but also had to be open to non-Jews (Ac 10:1-11:48). The conversion story of Cornelius and his family is presented as *an illustration of the necessity for this new openness.* Peter, the leader, needed *his own re-evangelization before he could evangelize Cornelius.* Peter is *not only authorized, but also compelled by God* to accept the Gentile Cornelius into the community of the believers. Through a painful process, the apostolic Church recognized the fundamental truth of admitting *the Gentiles into the Church* as part of God's plan (cf. 11:1,18), which is also illustrated by Peter's stand in the Jerusalem Council (cf. Gal 2:1-10; Ac 15:1-21). This illustrates Peter's *new openness* toward the *other.* He acknowledges that God shows no partiality; instead, he wants to offer salvation to all (cf. 10:34-35; 1 Tim 3:3-4). *He had to assume a new mind-set.* This is a story of *reverse evangelization.*

b) Crossing Borders: Dialogue between Religions and Cultures

In a multi-religious and social context, Jesus' mission shows he was open to all people. The Gospels refer to Jesus' attitude of openness toward the Samaritans, the Roman centurion, etc., and show how he appreciates their faith, at times even superior to that of the Jews.

The *progressive* expansion envisaged by Ac 1:8 – “you will be my witnesses [...] to the ends of the earth” – brought the apostles and disciples into contact with diverse groups. The *Areopagus* speech (Ac 17:22-34) is an attempt toward understanding mission as dialogue, but not the only one (cf. Ac 14:13-17). Paul showed genuine

²² Cf. F. HAHN, *Mission in the New Testament*, SCM Press, London 1965, 54-59. He considers that the limitation as expressed in Mt 10:5b,6,23, probably comes not from Jesus, but from later sectarian tendencies.

²³ Paul too had encountered the risen Lord who sent him with a mission (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; Gal 1:1,12; Ac 9).

appreciation for their longing for God, but challenged the cult of pagan gods. He took a positive stand toward the Greek religion and its search for the transcendent, when he quoted the Greek poets, “in him we live and move and have our being [...] for we are indeed his offspring” (Ac 17:28). He was emphasizing the need for complementing the different perspectives of reality and thus for laying the foundations of a theology of continuity, engagement and dialogue. He could express the message of the Gospel in different cultural categories (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23). Interface with the *other* calls for real self-emptying and finding treasures in other cultures. It is a two-way movement – the transformation of culture by the Gospel and the re-expression of the Gospel in terms of that culture, leading to an *embodied manifestation* of the Gospel.

c) The House Church Model and the Lay Evangelizers

The Church was seen as God’s family (cf. Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19) in which God is the head (1 Thess 1:1; 3:11). The frequent use of ‘family terms’ such as brothers and sisters (cf. 1 Cor 11:16) points to the intimacy of relationship within the community. Paul compares himself to a mother (cf. Gal 4:19; 1 Thess 2:7) and to a father (cf. 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22). The Christians met in private homes for the breaking of the bread and reading of Scriptures and the household was considered as the local Church (cf. 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5, 12-13). This type of gathering created an atmosphere of family relationship. *Lay leaders including women* emerged from house Church set-up. They – for example, Phoebe, Prisca and Aquila – undertook a variety of tasks, from teaching, offering hospitality to itinerant missionaries, to supporting the poor.²⁴

3.3 Some Implications for Evangelization

a) Evangelization as God’s Work

Missionary is the *sent one*: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21; cf. 17:18). Jesus is the *missionary* of the Father, and

²⁴ The “greeting section” in Rom 16 list a number of lay evangelists who have been specifically qualified in terms of their contribution to the proclamation of the Gospel.

the disciple is the missionary of Jesus. The evangelizer *embodies the mission of Jesus*, which is to reveal the Father as Jesus did (Jn 1:18; 14:9). Paul states very clearly that it is God who gives the growth and produces the fruit and that the ministers are only 'servants and co-workers of God' in ministry (cf. 1 Cor 3:6-9). The Spirit is the primary evangelizer (Jn 15:26). The Spirit leads the disciples into an understanding of the whole truth that has been revealed by Christ (cf. Jn 14:16; 16:13). The conversion too is the work of the Spirit (cf. Jn 16:8-11). The disciples are sent out in the power of the Spirit (cf. Ac 1:8; Lk 24: 49; Jn 20:21-23).

b) The Word-Centred Evangelization

Evangelii Gaudium confirms this Word-centredness when it states: "All evangelization is based on that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to" (EG 174). Being an evangelizer means to live authentically this new life, to celebrate it meaningfully in liturgy and to share it boldly with others (cf. EG 174-175). The cry of the Ethiopian seeking an interpretation of the Word is felt even today (cf. Ac 8:31; Mal 2:8-9).

c) Shared Vision and Inclusive Collaboration

The risen Lord left behind a vision for his Church (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20). Ac 1:8 presents a *global vision* for the evangelizing mission of the Church. Paul too developed a missionary vision: "From Jerusalem and as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ" (Rom 15:19).

A vision that is not shared with others will turn out to be worthless. Jesus shared the missionary vision with his disciples, and Paul shared it with his collaborators. Rom 16:1-16 lists lay men and women who were active evangelizers. The early Church recognized their contribution in founding and sustaining communities, and understood the power of the feminine genius (cf. Rom 16; 1 Cor 16:16-18). A small Christian Community is a new way of seeing the Church today is an effective way of *involving the laity in evangelization*.

d) Witness of Life

Witness of life has the power of enhancing the credibility of evangelizing efforts and of transforming the world, as Pope Paul VI so

clearly stated: “For the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life. [...] “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses” (EN 41). The verbal communication becomes credible only if the message is lived out. People must see the ‘living Gospel’ in the evangelizers rather than just ‘hear the word of God’.

e) Evangelization: A Task or Grace?

Paul seems to think of his mission more as a privilege or *grace with joy and gratitude* (cf. Rom 12:3; 15:5; 1 Cor 3:10; 2 Cor 4:1; Gal 2:9; Phil 1:7; Eph 3:2), than as an externally imposed command or a burdensome task and responsibility to obey the command. Mission begins as a gift, God’s gift in sending his Son out of love (cf. Jn 3:16; 20:21; 1 Jn 3:16). The sending and communicating of the Spirit is also God’s gift (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:8,13-15; 20:21-22; Ac 1:8). Mission begins in the heart of God (cf. Jn 20:21-22); hence, more than being a task, the call to evangelization is a gift, a grace.²⁵

II. INTERRELIGIOUS INTERACTIONS

Religious pluralism is a challenge within which we have to place the evangelizing mission of the Church. This was also a challenge that Israel faced while trying to understand their relationship with Yahweh and their mission in the world. This was also confronted by Jesus and the early Church in their context. Therefore, it is important to enter into relationship with other religions and to make efforts to usher in a new humanity centered on the Reign of God.

As regards other religions, we can perceive two tendencies in the Bible: a very positive one, for example Noah, Ruth, Jonah, Job, Melchisedek, Lot, and a very negative one, such as the killing of the priests of Baal at the instigation of Elijah (cf. 1 Kg 18:40) or the call to destroy the pagan nations (cf. Deut 7:1-5; Josh 6:17-21).²⁶ Ac

²⁵ L. LEGRAND, “Parish as an Evangelizing Community”, in A.A. XAVIER – P.J. TITUS (eds.), *The Word is Near You*, vol. 3, St. Peter’s Pontifical Institute, Bangalore 2004, 345-346;

²⁶ So too is the violent campaign against idols (Judg 6:25-32; 8:11-21; 2 Kg

4:12 is at times cited as a case of a narrow understanding of salvation – salvation only in the name of Jesus (cf. Jn 14:6: “I am the way”; 1 Tim 2:5: “one mediator”). But, the same book of Acts also indicates a positive attitude toward other religions (cf. Ac 17:22, 28).²⁷ It is too simplistic to say that the Old Testament presents a very narrow-minded attitude, which is then transcended by the universalism of the New Testament. Similarly, it is incorrect to say that the God of the New Testament is one of compassionate love, and that the God of the Old Testament is one of violence and destruction. And it is incorrect to associate the words *pagan* or *other* with evil. Here, we shall look at some of the positive approaches mentioned in the Bible.

1. The Old Testament

Israel lived in the midst of other peoples, and was influenced by them.²⁸ The Pentateuchal laws that co-existed with other Semitic laws is an example, and there are allusions to mythological concepts prevalent among other religions and literary forms from the Mesopotamians. The literature of the Old Testament is greatly indebted to Mesopotamian and Egyptian writings, just as the New Testament books draw extensively from the cultural heritage of the Hellenistic world. The book of Numbers (ch. 24) shows “how prophecy is not the exclusive prerogative of the people of God.”²⁹ From the Canaanites, Israel borrowed names for God such as *el Elyon* and *Baal Berit*, and by accepting such titles, Israel was sharing the fundamental religious experience of the Semitic world.³⁰ Rather than rejection,

9-10) or the declaration on the nothingness of the idols (Isa 44:9-20). In the post-exilic period, especially Ezra and Nehemiah showed intolerance toward other religions by prohibiting interreligious marriage (cf. Deut 7:1-6; Neh 13:23-27).

²⁷ L. LEGRAND, “The Bible and the Religions of the Nations”, in A.A. XAVIER – P.J. TITUS (eds.), *The Word is Near You*, 245-247; ID., “The Other Religions: A Biblical Perspective”, in A.A. XAVIER – P.J. TITUS (eds.), *The Word is Near You*, 260-261. A very useful detailed study is that by I. GLASSER, *The Bible and Other Faiths: What does the Lord require of us?*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 2005.

²⁸ Cf. R. DE MENEZES, “Religious Pluralism in the Old Testament”, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, vol. 64, n. 11, November 2000, 834-844.

²⁹ PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, n. 148, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 2014.

³⁰ The biblical name for God *El* or *Elohim* is found often in the Semitic world with variants. Cf. L. LEGRAND, “The Bible and the Religions of the Nations”, 249.

we find a kind of re-conception and reformulation of these literary forms. Israel's well known feasts of the Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and Tabernacles (cf. Ex 23:14-17) were borrowed from the Canaanites.³¹ Even the plan and the structure of the Jerusalem Temple were influenced by the Phoenician architecture, with the technical know-how of architects and builders from Tyre (cf. 1 Kg 5:15-32; 7:23-25).³²

In addition, bold steps were taken by the critical leaders such as authors of Ruth and Jonah. The story of Ruth, the ancestress of King David and Jesus himself, is a demonstration of how a Gentile woman can be inserted into salvation history. The book of Jonah gives a prophetic message that Yahweh's mercy is not circumscribed by the boundaries of Israel. Yahweh shows his mercy to whom he wills (cf. Ex 33:19). Prophets reject *ba'alim*, but identify the ancestral *'El* with the *Yahweh* of their faith.³³

Isaiah 23:14-24:1 is a significant text. Instead of condemning the *pagan* Tyre to "play the harlot with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the ground", it presents Tyre as playing a positive role in the coming redemption. The condemnation of Tyre for its historic association with the Canaanite fertility cult so pronounced in Hebrew is absent in the *Septuagint* text. It reverses the condemnation in the *Hebrew* text and recognizes Tyre as the gateway through which the eschatological offerings will flow to Jerusalem: "The God of Tyre shall make a visitation and she will turn again to the old ways and shall be a port of merchandise for all the kingdoms of the world and her merchandise and her hire shall be holy unto the Lord". Here, the foreigner condemned to a future of shameful and humiliating prostitution, makes a holy offering to God and, as such, opened up a pluralistic vision of the world. So, even while the *Septuagint* vigorously reaffirmed, the centrality of the Jewish tradition leaves open the possibility of a fruitful encounter with Gentile neighbors.

³¹ Cf. J. PATHRAPANKAL, *Time and History: Biblical and Theological Studies*, 233.

³² Cf. L. LEGRAND, "The Bible and the Religions of the Nations", 249.

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 250-251.

2. The New Testament

Jesus is presented more as the prophet of the New Israel, established by the New Covenant (cf. Jer 31:31) and sealed in his blood (cf. Lk 22:20), and less as a founder of a religion in the modern sense. He proclaimed a new vision resulting from his unique experience of the Father and of his plan of salvation (Revelation). He wanted to share this experience with others and called them to respond to this invitation (faith). Rather than being a religious propagandist, he was the messenger of the Good News of God's grace.

In his life and ministry Jesus continued the prophetic critique of the narrow mindedness of the Jews. He was born in line with Ruth (cf. Mt 1:15), and was someone greater than Jonah (cf. Lk 11:32). He was the originator of a movement with a corresponding life style and world vision.³⁴ To carry on this movement he gathered a group of committed followers. All that he wanted from his followers, whether they be Jew or Gentile, was a radical faith (cf. Mk 1:15), hence he associated himself with the Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles, and with people from different strata of society. He wanted to form a new community that transcended the existing structures and their limitations, and required of them a new kind of loyalty, conviction and commitment which would lead to a new life. Whatever be the nature of their conversion, Jesus refers to the conversion of the Ninivites at the preaching of Jonah (cf. Mt 12:48; Lk 11:32; cf. Jonah 3:8)

Some of these specific episodes should be looked at from this new perspective of Jesus, who transcends the boundaries of his religion and appreciates the Gentiles and Samaritans for their profound religiosity: the case of the Roman centurion (cf. Mt 8:10-12; cf. Jn 4:46-54) or the Canaanite-Syro-Phoenician woman (cf. Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30) are examples. Jesus also made a remark about the Gentile nations finding a place in the Kingdom with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. Mt 8:11), and praised the "good Samaritan" and presented him as an example of being a good neighbor (cf. Lk 10:25-37), or the Samaritan who returned to praise God (cf. Lk 17:11-19).

Jesus took the courageous step of travelling through Samaria, and by encountering the woman of Samaria brought her whole commu-

³⁴ J. PATHRAPANKAL, *Time and History: Biblical and Theological Studies*, 235.

nity to faith in him (cf. Jn 4:4-42). He spoke of a new type of worship (cf. Jn 4:23), and that too with a Samaritan woman, not to a Jewish leader, and in Samaria, not in Jerusalem. John presents the challenging story of the Greeks coming to meet Jesus because they were impressed by his person (cf. Jn 12:20-26). Transcending the barriers of religion, he welcomed them (cf. Jn 12:20-26), and it is significant that the event is mentioned in the context of his being lifted up and *drawing everyone to himself* (cf. Jn 12:32).³⁵

In the case of the early Church too, it is difficult to take a clear position, and it is risky to give absolute value to any texts, devoid of their contexts.³⁶ There are texts in Paul which paint a very dark picture of the Gentiles with so much polemics against idols (cf. Rom 1:21; 1 Cor 10:6-10; 2 Cor 6:6; 1 Thess 1:9). But he also speaks of a “law written in the heart” (Rom 2:13-16), and maintains that any civilian authority comes from God (cf. 1 Tim 2:1; Tit 3:1). However, the apostolic Church was conscious of the universality of the Christian message: “God shows no partiality” (Ac 10:34-35; cf. 1 Tim 3:3-4). The *Areopagus* discourse illustrates Paul’s positive overtures to the intuitions of Greek poets and philosophers (cf. Ac 17:28).

3. The Bible and Other Religions

While it is difficult to find religious pluralism as we understand it today in the religion of Israel described in both the Old and the New Testaments, it would be a great injustice to the sacred writers to highlight only a one-sided negative trend of thought.³⁷ It is also incorrect to single out texts without integrating them into the entirety of the biblical message, which is an example of a positive openness to other religions. Israel and the early Church *adopted and adapted* ideas and practices that were found useful. The critical, yet unbiased attitude of the Bible toward other literatures is of “pressing relevance today for interreligious dialogue. [...] The *semina Verbi* [seeds of the Word] are scattered throughout the world”³⁸ and open the way for

³⁵ Cf. ID., *Critical and Creative: Studies in Bible and Theology*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore 1986, 71-84.

³⁶ Cf. L. LEGRAND, “The Other Religions: A Biblical Perspective”, 267.

³⁷ Cf. R. DE MENEZES, “Religious Pluralism in the Old Testament”, 843.

³⁸ PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred*

meaningful dialogue. Can we say that the presence of the Word “which enlightens all men” (Jn 1:9) was active in other religions and their scriptures in an initial manner? Is it possible that Paul was doing a *re-reading* of the stoic poets in the light of the Gospel? While from a biblical point of view, the non-biblical scriptures cannot be regarded as channels of God’s *historical* revelation; yet, can we recognize in them whisperings and enunciations of the Word?

The Bible invites us to broaden the horizons of our thinking and to see everything from a universal perspective³⁹, and challenges us to engage in the search for a meaningful paradigm for interreligious interface. Jesus carried out his mission with an emphasis on the principle of universality of salvation. Hence, it is important that we look for a foundational or controlling concept that brings into focus the universal and transcendental dimension of the biblical religion. The concept of the Kingdom of God seems to be such a concept which formed the centre of Jesus’ ministry (cf. Mk 1:15).⁴⁰

4. The Patristic Approach

We need to keep in mind that Christianity was born in a religiously plural world and continues to exist in such a world.⁴¹ The response of the Fathers to other religions has thus to be placed in their context of explaining and defending the uniqueness of Christ and the Christian faith in a religiously plural world and against heresies

Scripture: The Word That Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World, n. 148, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 2014. Some try to make a parallel between the non-biblical scriptures and the Old Testament’s Scripture. They ask for example: just as the Old Testament is considered as inspired in relation to the New Testament, is it possible to consider the non-biblical scriptures as containing ‘seeds of the Word’ in relation to the New Testament? But an important question remains: is the inspiration of the Old Testament to be seen only as dependent on the New Testament? Cf. Pope Paul VI’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* 18, as well as VD 118-119 and EG 251.

³⁹ The Bible begins with this perspective of divinization in the creation story. God is the originator of everything (Gen 1:1) and concludes with the creation of a new humanity (Rev 21:3-4).

⁴⁰ Cf. J. PATHRAPANKAL, *Time and History: Biblical and Theological Studies*, 240-241.

⁴¹ Cf. I. PADINJAREKUTTU, “Religious Pluralism in the Teachings of the Church”, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, n. 64, November 2000, 846.

within the Church and false philosophies. Second, except for Judaism, the early Fathers were not in direct contact with the 'organized' religions like Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism.⁴² Instead, they were more confronted with different schools of philosophy; hence, we find a philosophical tone in their presentation.

The basic attitude of the Fathers toward other religions (*pagan* religions as they were frequently called) was one of opposition.⁴³ They strongly rejected their myths and cults as gross superstitions infected by evil. Even when they noticed certain similarities with biblical myths or cults, they denounced them as the work of the devil who perverts the truth and mixes it with counterfeit ideas of worship.

The Fathers in general, however, were quite positive toward the Greek philosophy, which deals with the higher truths about God either by derivation from the writings of Moses or through the exercise of the divinely given reason (*logos*). So, Justin Martyr explains that the *logos*, who only by becoming human has been wholly revealed, has nevertheless been partly perceptible through the seeds of the *logos* implanted in all people from the creation of the world and found in the philosophy of the Greeks (I Apol c. 46, n. 2-5; II Apol c. 10, n. 1-5).

The wisdom of other religions and Christianity has God as the source. This was the context of Justin's words, "Whatever all men have uttered aright is the property of us Christians" (*Second Apology* 13). The idea of *logos*-seed (*spermatikoslogos*) is important to understanding non-Christian religions. Although the divine *logos* appeared in his fullness only in Christ, the seed of the *logos* was scattered among the whole humankind long before Christ. This laid the basis of the theology of the cosmic Christ,⁴⁴ for he believed that both Hellenism and Judaism have a place in the divine plan of salvation. But, he preserves the unique character of Christianity for his

⁴² For the early Church, religions meant "the polytheistic religions and mystery cults of the (Roman) empire and perhaps Judaism". See *Ibid.*, 849.

⁴³ The author is indebted to the following work for the section on the Fathers of the Church. M. DHAVAMONY, "Theology of Religions", in S. KAROTEMPREL (ed.), *Following Christ in Mission: A Foundational Course in Missiology*, Indian Edition, Pauline Publications, Bombay 1995, 251-252.

⁴⁴ I. PADINJAREKUTTU, "Religious Pluralism in the Teachings of the Church", 848.

was a unique philosophical attempt to dialogue with non-Christian cultures.

Clement of Alexandria maintains that the idea of God was implanted in people at creation, and all people possess this notion (cf. Strom. V,133. 8-9). In *Protrepticus* (Exhortation to the Greeks), he tries to convince the worshippers of false gods about their folly. There is a spark of nobility in the soul which is kindled by the divine *logos* (cf. Protr. 117: cf. Strom. I. 10.4), but in Christ is found the full truth, not partially apprehended as in different philosophies, each of which having an element of truth (cf. Strom. I.57; V.55.3).

According to Clement, in order to live up to her task as teacher of the nations, the Church had to confront Greek philosophy, consequently making the Christian faith a system of thought with a scientific foundation. By doing such, he tried to show that faith and philosophy are not enemies, but belong together. He defended philosophy because it is given by God to the Greeks just as the Law is given to the Jews. Going beyond Justin, he compares philosophy to the Old Testament in so far as it trained humankind for the coming of Christ. Of course, it can never take the place of Revelation, but only prepare people for the acceptance of the faith.

Augustine sees in Greek philosophy the announcement of Christian religion. He was convinced that Plato had known Moses (*De Civ. Dei*, I. 8.c.11). The Christian message is placed primarily among the religions and hence is presented as the fulfillment. Other religions which propose themselves as absolute, oppose themselves with culpable resistance to the *one logos*. He showed great reserve with regard to Platonists, especially Plotinus and his followers. They had known constantly that there existed the Word of God who is the Truth. They had perceived it in some vague way (*De Civ. Dei*, I.10.c.29). Yet, they have not discovered true life because they have not known, nor wished to recognize Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh. Augustine seems to have considered the pagan gods as polymorphic expressions of the ineffable divine power (*De Civ. Dei*, V, 18).

For Tertullian, religion was a practical reality, a matter of life, living one's life following the truth which he found in Christianity. He staunchly defended the freedom of religious conviction. In *The Apology*, he attacked pagan superstition. One reason why Christians were persecuted was that they were considered atheists because they refused to worship the gods of the empire. He considered these gods

only as human beings who had been considered gods after their death, but only the God of the Christians as the true God (*Apol* 10.3-4). In fact, he accused the Romans of irreligion.

To conclude, since Christianity is the message of the Incarnation, the Christians had to enter into dialogue with the existing philosophies; in this case, into the Hellenistic world. The alternative rigid non-incarnational Christianity would perhaps have preserved its original formulation, but would never have entered into the world around it. As they tried to dialogue with Greek philosophy with such a surprising openness, we too need to use existing philosophies for the service of the faith. Their success is the result of their ability to combine openness with commitment to their faith. *They remain a model of true dialogue today.*⁴⁵

5. The Church and Other Religions toward the Reign of God

Evangelization is the progressive realization of the Reign of God. This realization in the Church means diffusion and intensification of the divine life in its members. The missionary task of the Church is and should be more than an act of obedience to a command, but a flow of life from within to announce what has become the Good News or to share what has been received joyfully – evangelization by “attraction” (EG 15; cf. EG 10), or the Church revealing itself to be what it is by nature – missionary (EN 13). Proclamation can be val-

⁴⁵ Unlike Clement’s courageous and visionary step to delve deep into Hellenistic philosophy, especially in the *Stromata* (Carpets), Irenaeus found philosophy as a danger to faith. For him, the knowledge of God remains inscribed in the core of the human heart and makes it ready for his coming. Origen thought that every wise man in so far as he is wise, participates in Christ who is wisdom (Comm. in John I.34.246; I.37.269). Through the *logos* every man or rational being shares in the true light. Humanity is made in the image of the *logos*; Christ is the true and perfect image of God; everyone is made after the image which is the *logos* (Comm. in John I.17.104-105; II.3.26). The axiom, “outside the Church no salvation”, usually associated with Cyprian, is to be understood in the context of defending the unity of the Church. Origen clarified and developed it further, referring it particularly to the schismatic and heretic Jews. Augustine has a more exclusivist approach because of his understanding of the Church and her predestination, while Fulgentius of Ruspe, one of Augustine’s followers, was more rigid in applying the concept to pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics. Cf. I. PADIN-JAREKUTTU, “Religious Pluralism in the Teachings of the Church”, 848.

dated or made meaningful only by witness of life – proclamation by word and by deed, harmony of *kerygma* with *diakonia*. Evangelization should also aim at the here and now realization of the ‘new humanity in Christ’ marked by justice, peace, love and compassion.

It is in relation to the vision for a new humanity that we need to situate the interface between the Church and other religions. The Church has to take the lead in building bridges of cooperation, and demands of the evangelizers a great respect for the traditions and practices of other religions, as Paul showed toward the Athenians.⁴⁶ The interreligious context calls forth the development of an inclusive theocentric understanding of mission, understood in the proper way: on the one hand, it upholds the primacy of God, always as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but on the other hand, it sees the unfolding and fulfillment of God’s plan in Jesus Christ. God’s Reign is the goal, Jesus is the way (cf. Jn 14:26) and the Church is the *locus* of this way in the world.

In the midst of many serious issues and threats to basic human values, the interface of religions should move beyond being a mere concept toward a dialogue of life and of action, especially social involvement for the cause of human dignity, justice, peace, environment and ecology. This can help to usher in a more *humane* humanity. In our search for understanding the deeper implications of the mission of the Church in the multi-religious context, we should remind ourselves of the promise of Jesus to send the Spirit who would lead us into understanding of the whole truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

⁴⁶ In *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions proclaimed by Paul VI in 1965, the Second Vatican Council teaches us to appreciate the “rays of truth” (NA 1) in other religions. Subsequently, in 1999, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, made reference to Paul’s Areopagus discourse in Ac 17 (cf. EA 20). Benedict XVI’s *Verbum Domini* reaffirms the Church’s respect for the ancient religious and spiritual traditions and religious books (VD 118-119). These magisterially documents also provide the necessary theological foundations and guiding principles regarding the Church’s approach to other religions. This means to see their scriptures as part of the long process of God speaking to humanity (Heb 1:1-2), requiring of Christians *sufficient knowledge of the scriptures of other religions*. In particular, theologians are called to make more efforts to adopt an inter-scriptural approach to the study of various issues, especially in the social domain.

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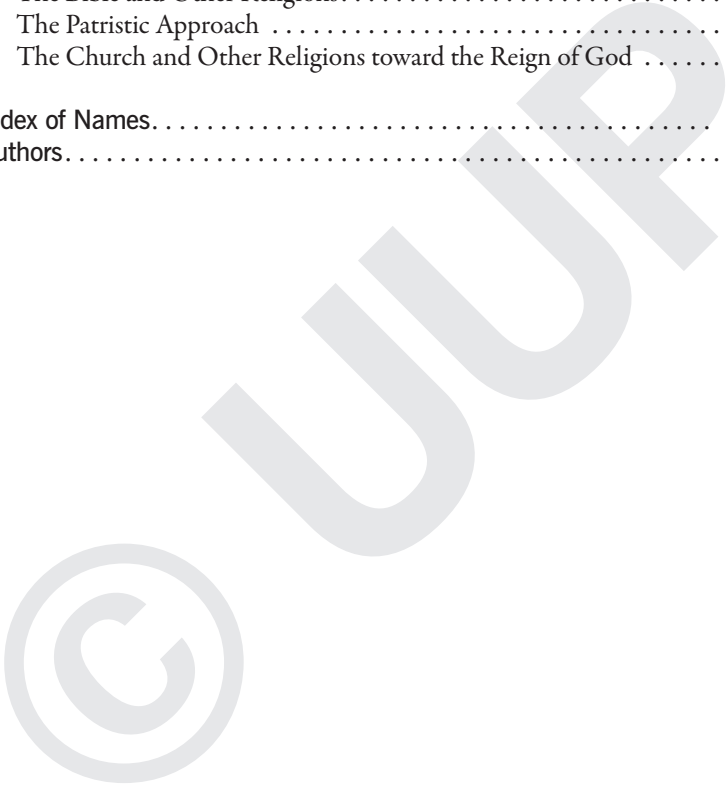
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The Future of Evangelization in Asia

Theological Reflections

Amid the complex “social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia” (EA 5), how can the particular Churches overcome the “difficulties in proclaiming Jesus as the only Savior” (EA 20)? How can they best prepare the faithful to perform their tasks as Jesus’ missionary disciples? What are the modes of effective Christian presence and witness to be followed? *The Future of Evangelization in Asia: Theological Reflections*, the latest editorial endeavor of the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU) within the series “Omnis Terra – PMU CIAM Publications”, provides insights and food for thought on how to address these major issues that keep testing the Church’s mission on the Asian continent.

This volume springs from the research and study carried out by scholars from Malaysia, South Korea, China, Japan, and India. Their essays put forward useful guidelines and recommendations for all Asian “agents and co-workers in the Church’s mission” (EA 47), who are engaged in reaching out to their many brothers and sisters adhering to different religious and cultural traditions and with whom they live side by side.

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