

**THE CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF
THE KINGDOM OF GOD (II)
FUNDAMENTAL ATTITUDES FOR MISSION**

- I. THE FUNDAMENTAL LINES OF A NEW IMAGE OF THE CHURCH
- II. THE EVANGELICAL JUDGEMENT
- III. A COMMITMENT IN SOLIDARITY

**I. THE FUNDAMENTAL LINES OF A NEW IMAGE OF
THE CHURCH**

Once we study today's world situation in the perspective of the Kingdom of God, the question must arise spontaneously how the Church is to respond to the present situation, not only in her attitudes but also in her pastoral activity. How is the community of believers to become a sign of the Kingdom in the world? The objective of this first part of our study is to gather and to analyze in summary form those significant facts which reveal that a new image of the Church is indeed emerging in our time. It is a matter here of carefully observing this new development, and of spiritual discernment, not of evaluating it. The span of time for our analysis is the period from Vatican Council II up to the present moment.

1. Elements for a Discernment of the New Image of the Church

First, what do we mean by "image"?

The word image comes from the Latin *imago*, and its meaning is varied:

- a portrait, effigy, physiognomy, referring to the physical and moral aspect;
- a mental representation of the object seen or thought of;
- a manner in which something presents itself to our view;

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-a live representation, idea, concept which one has or makes of something; a live thought of something or someone.

An image is the very "visualization" (embodiment) of human thought, of the realities man encounters, and which, in turn, are conditioned by the manner of perceiving (sensitive "visio") proper to human knowledge. Man learns every "concept" only through its "representation."

In this discussion we speak of "image" in relation to the future. We are not dealing with a phantasied mental image, or a dream, or some similar thing. We mean an "intentional" image, i.e., one which we intend to carry out, which we desire, and to which we adhere. As an intentional image, it precedes action, is capable of moving us, of arousing a tension of the will towards the fulfillment of the image in real life.

To be able to speak properly of a new image of the Church it is not enough to list a series of more or less spectacular changes in the life, and even in the structures, of the Church. Rather it is necessary to change the "horizon" of our knowledge of the ecclesial reality as a whole. Its "interpretative outline," which had been valid until this moment, must be changed.

Such changes of image, which do not occur too frequently in the history of the Church, are linked to the effort at self-understanding which she makes of her own mystery throughout the centuries. Precisely because the Church is a mystery, she can never be expressed in her totality by man. She must be translated always into partial images which stress one or another aspect, depending on the viewpoint from which it is seen. This is the reason for the various "ecclesiologies" which have arisen throughout history.

To speak of a new image does not mean to wish to build "a new Church," as some would fear. Nor does it mean to place in doubt any of the constituting and permanent elements of the Church, as some radicalized sectors of contemporary religious thought would at times appear to defend. But neither is it simply a question of "renewing" the former image, by uncritically accepting all that image's elements, which themselves have so often been the product of a certain way of man's understanding the Church, with mental categories taken from a particular socio-cultural context, and so always of relative value and limited validity. This would lead to an irremediable rupture with the world and with men, who must be saved at every point of time.

That we find ourselves today before a process of change of image of the Church at the "conjunctural" meaning or level is asserted by so many events we are witnessing. Its origins must be sought in the challenge brought upon the Church by the accelerated change to which the world, in which the Church lives (and to which she has the duty to communicate the entire message of salvation), has been subjected for several decades:

-A generalized rejection of the present image of the Church, which resistance goes much farther than being a mere resistance of the world to allow itself to be penetrated by the message of the Gospel.

-The new experiences of Christians who wish to live their faith in sincerity, which go beyond the traditional patterns, e.g., the birth of small communities striving towards the liberation of man as an imperative of faith; movements of renewal in the Spirit; ecumenical dialogue at all levels; dialogue with adherents of other religions and with non-believers, etc.

-The interventions of theologians who try to enlighten all these recent phenomena by the light of the Word of God, Tradition, the analogy of faith... starting from the facts and experiences of life in order to go back to them later, in a path of to-ing and fro-ing which constitutes a process of mutual enrichment.

-The hierarchy at various levels taking a stand: magisterial action by the Pope in various forms; contributions of the last Synods; declarations of bishops and episcopal conferences; etc.

-And to take as a point of reference of exceptional significance, the Second Vatican Council, in which already converge many of these vibrant and theological currents, but which, as we know, is of greater importance for what it stood for as a starting point than for what it meant as a point of arrival. The Council without doubt has made some of the most authoritative contributions to the formation and consolidation of this new image, but subsequent theological reflection has cast a light on this image which the Council alone could not have shed. Without the Council, though, the theological effort of the past years would have been unimaginable.

On the other hand, it is an easily proven fact that every important change throughout history, in the manner of understanding and living the ecclesial reality, is intimately related to the socio-cultural changes of the environment in which the Church places herself at any moment. These constitute a challenge which is for the Church a "sign of the times," through which she feels challenged by God Himself.

Therefore, before examining the great lines of the knowledge which the Church has about herself, it is convenient to take a rapid and schematic look at the self-understanding of today's man, which no doubt has had a great influence on this whole process of ecclesial change.

We must add here that the presentation which follows is limited and should be enlarged and corrected by the experiences of the reader.

2. Our Starting Point: The Contemporary Self-understanding of Man and of the World

There are many ways to try to understand man and his new world. We may speak at different times of "secularization," "liberation," "cultural change," and of others. These are, as it were, so many "codes," each one a reflection which tries to describe in a global fashion the situation of our world, and therefore of man, its protagonist. What are the basic aspirations of man today? Into what historical tendencies are these aspirations translated? What basic problems do they cause to emerge, or bring about? What challenges do these aspirations create for us men and believers? How can they help us better to define our service to history?

We concentrate now on man's self-understanding. Our aim is to approach man precisely from the angle of the awareness he has of himself, of his constant and passionate search for the "meaning" of his existence. This awareness is what determines his behaviour in history, the "situations" and the "phenomena" which we have in other ways studied, at the same time as it is in turn determined by these situations. History is only one, *man's* history.

Therefore, we aim now to recall and synthesize, and perhaps complete, elements already present in those other reflections and expressed by those other "codes," precisely from the angle of man's self-understanding today.

This self-understanding naturally also determines the image or images with which the Church is to approach him, in order to serve him, "accommodating" herself to his way of being and of understanding the proposal of salvation which she makes him in the name of God.

For the purpose of describing the contemporary self-understanding of man, we feel we can point out some lines which are the more radically and universally present in his thought and in his behavior, both individual and collective. They are as follows:

- The growing assertion of the centrality of man himself.
- His critical attitude to history.
- The orientation of all his attention and all his energy towards the future.

The distinctions we make of these three tendencies are conventional and made with a pedagogical aim. Man is increasingly more aware of his centrality (first point). This is the basic fact. His attitude vis-à-vis past and present history (second point) and the future (third point) are consequences and expressions of this awareness.

A. The Centrality of Man

1. In other times, in his vision of reality and in his behaviour, man has been less independent. He was determined by a series of facts and elements prior to himself, valid "a priori," and accepted or imposed as such. Beforehand, he had to take into account a series of truths, customs, situations and prohibitions, which were more or less un-touchable. Today, man knows he is, and feels himself to be, the center and measuring rod of everything.

There are now no barriers which can "dogmatically" obstruct the possession by man of the world with all its realities (hominization). The contents of truth, behavior, organization and the structuring of his living together with others at its various levels — economic, political, cultural, religious — are considered valid or not according to their efficiency in qualitatively improving man's existence (humanisation).

This tendency is present in all the great phenomena of our time. In secularization, for example, which entails a new manner of situating man less dependently, more autonomously, vis-à-vis nature and the world, vis-à-vis society and history, vis-à-vis ideologies and religions, vis-à-vis God Himself. It is also to be found in the phenomenon of liberation: centuries of domination and injustice justify neither domination nor injustice; each group or people struggles to restructure in a new way, in "their way," in the way congenial to them, their internal and external relations to economic, political and cultural affairs. One factor is common to both phenomena: as an individual and as a collectivity, man considers himself the center and measuring rod of all other reality.

2. The presence of great values in this tendency is evident. The Council registered this same fact and its basic value: "Believers and non-believers are generally agreed upon this point: all the goods of the earth

should be ordered around man, center and height of all of them" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 12). On the condition that by "man" is meant "all of man and all men," as stressed Paul VI in his *Populorum Progressio*.

Components, or expressions, or valid consequences of this tendency are, for example:

-This growing assertion of inviolability: the "sacrality" of life; the dignity, the awareness, the autonomy, the personal liberty, the identity, the intimacy of each man; the formulation and affirmation of human rights.

-The tendency to simplify: the inclining towards simplicity, in the manner of perceiving and speaking the truth, in organizing our existence, in our relationships with others; "authenticity" counts more than "form."

-Personal responsibility; the desire for culture and information; the desire to "rate" and "to be someone."

-In the organization of any of the forms and levels of living together with others: the assertion, on the one hand, of the rights of the individual (real and active participation, with all its components); and on the other hand, the assertion of the rights of each human group (pluralism, with all its demands).

-In addition, the tendency towards personalism in interhuman relationships; the spontaneous solidarity on the occasion of personal needs and misfortunes; the growing appraisal of "basic" organizations, etc.

The list is open-ended. But it is clear that there is a whole series of values in this tendency, which tries to confer upon man, from the very fact of his being one, his central position in reality. As a whole, and without limits and incoherences nullifying its values, one must admit there is found in this trend an authentic form of man's growth; in full accordance, for us believers, with the love of God for him, just as this is formulated in Genesis (1:28).

3. But this tendency, and above all the concrete forms in which man today translates it into history, is overshadowed by tremendous limitations. We give a few here, leaving unsaid so many other ambiguities, contradictions, incoherences and problems.

-Man's centrality is frequently stated "unilaterally," leaving ignored, and even denied, other values which are equally human. Thus: the negation of the experiences and achievements of the past, precisely for being of the past. Moving on from the oppression of those who do not think as we do to making difference of opinion a crime; and even more, on to the elimination of those who oppose our interests. The violation of the most fundamental human rights. Rejecting racism and yet approving the intent to eliminate entire races. The moral collapse evidenced in a society which has made lying, hypocrisy, demagoguery, favoritism, privileges, etc., a system of life. The disregard of the luxury, debauchery, illegal gains of some, and the growing poverty and social insecurity of others, etc. All these indicate that every statement of the centrality of man is false if it is not accompanied by the parallel insistence upon the equality and dignity of each person.

-The egoistical concept with which we have asserted man's centrality, when by "man" we mean in fact my own interest, or the interest of my group, my class, my people, my system, has created never ending problems. We witness the one extreme of the new forms of totalitarianism, and the other extreme of the indiscriminate use of natural resources. Examples: the arms race; the hegemony of a party; water and air pollution, and the depletion of some natural resources; the brake on progress with consequent economic crisis, unemployment and social insecurity; the crisis of our systems with no alternative fitted "to man's measure," etc. All this has created a state of living together with others in fear, feelings of powerlessness, anguish and loneliness. Hence, we see violence in social relationships in their most irrational and desperate forms; escapism towards so many forms of alienation, of social exclusiveness, and the creation of new idols. From all this we conclude that man's centrality will only be a reality when togetherness, solidarity and participation occupy the center of human living.

-Everywhere today we speak of — and perhaps this is our radical limit — a "loss of meaning," "a loss of transcendence." From so many men's horizons there seem to have disappeared those dimensions which would incarnate the "different," the "other," that which by transcending the limited frontiers of our immediate experience would make us grow: the other men ... the other dimension of our own self, that different quality which I do not obtain by having more but rather by becoming different ... the "other" life represented by faith in God. Even more, this personal loss is due to the "inherent" passion for "having" and for "being

able to do” which we have built into our habits, into our prevailing ideologies, into our systems.

It is clear that these values and limitations condition us and guide us in our search for a new image for which the Church strives. Only those images will be accepted which speak of a Church of persons and a Church at the service of man; only images of a Church which will help him find his real horizon will be of use to man.

B. A Critical Attitude Towards History

1. This critical attitude towards history is a consequence, or component, of the characteristic immediately described above. Aided by the enormous technological means at the service of the human sciences, man today has overcome, or is overcoming, a fatalistic, passive and resigned attitude towards history. Whatever happens today, whatever good or bad the past centuries may have transmitted, whether acceptable or unacceptable, is now explained as a consequence of free decisions and the behavior of men. In the same way, history is viewed as susceptible to change. We are its protagonists; we can change its course. It is not “human” to submit passively to history, to let oneself be determined by history, for all it may indeed condition us.

With this change of attitude, man today confronts the past and the present. And not only individual or more or less particular history, but, above all, the large collective history. There are the human groups — workers, farm laborers, women, youth, social classes, entire peoples, races, continents — which are striving in a more or less organic way to analyse unjust situations and their causes, to organize ideologically the content of their collective awareness, to make this known, and to plan and carry out the structural changes needed to make way for different situations.

The presence of this trend is evident in the great phenomena of secularization and liberation. And it is not hard to recognize it in many of the new phenomena of the life of the Church herself. Here are some of the values which guarantee it:

-The capacity to question one's own point of view in order to search for new horizons.

-The initiatives of cooperation at an international level in the fields of habitat, health, culture, economy; and the creation of permanent forums for dialogue and confrontation.

-The general conviction that, at least in the long term, it is not possible to ensure one's own welfare without looking after everyone else's welfare. And in this context, the ever-increasingly repeated proposal to create a new international order.

-The growing assertion of the imperatives of the dignity and liberty of human groups, of equality among them all, of justice for all and of all.

-The growing conviction that any other reality — received traditions and rights, formulations of social rights and structures, formulations of ideological structures and systems, etc. — is not enough to justify any kind of injustice.

2. And there are limitations. Nor are shadows and ambiguities lacking.

-Often the analysis of history is partial. Too many dimensions are forgotten. The record of the past is easily deformed, when we are interested in justifying positions taken in advance.

-Truth very often has to give place to "ideologies," and personal interests are camouflaged behind them. Propaganda is self-interested, untruthful, disrespectful.

-The techniques of struggle very often contradict the cause of justice in whose name action is taken. And the end result of many "revolutions," if achieved, has not the value of being a true alternative to what was opposed. Only the leader is new, or the flag of the protagonists of the day. But man (all of man, all men) continues to be kept outside the game, "represented" by those who have the most power, and not being able himself to play the role of protagonist, which was promised him before the revolution.

-While on the other barricades, there is resistance opposed to change by those momentarily in power; the brutality and violence which they use to maintain the "status quo."

-When at the service of the established power, or of those whose aim is to gain it, everything is justified: organized lying, programmed alienation of groups, the arms race, wars in foreign fields, torture, terrorism, blackmail, violence in all its forms. The causes of justice, in their totality, take too many innocent victims.

-Once again, we meet, deep down, the lack of a perspective, the absence of meaning, the loss of transcendence. Whether this critical attitude towards history is to blame or not, we cannot say.

The challenge this presents to the Church is evident. On the one hand, she must make common cause with men and groups who criticize and do try to correct the injustices of the past and present. On the other hand, she must do so in the name of a concept of man proclaimed by the Gospel, so that the future may be more authentically human (cf. Synod of 1971 in its Document on Justice, and Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*).

The Church's image is also at stake, especially if we take into account that those who accuse her of having historically compromised often on the status quo do not themselves lack personal motives.

C. An Orientation Towards the Future

To the centrality of man and his critical attitude to history we add here his creativity, his passion for efficiency, his growing technical power over all kinds of resources, be they the new sources of energy or the techniques of social psychology, and we make note of the powerful help that cybernetics gives for such knowledge and programing.

What enthruses man is the future to be built. Paradise is not a lost situation to be recovered but an utopia to be carried out. With his possibilities for action man has magnified his capacity to dream better futures, and has quickened the rhythm of his march. Futurology, forecasting, programing... draw an increasing interest and gain new means.

1. If we ask what values this tendency implies and incarnates, we have only to recall a few:

- An awareness of our responsibilities vis-à-vis the future itself; imagination and creativity; pragmatism and a passion for efficiency; a tenacity in work and a rationalization of such dedication.

- And all the other linked values: dialogue as the only road to progress; free time as a cultural and contemplative opportunity; the overcoming of all ideology which, for being such, closes in on itself in a repeated past; etc.

- The enormous number of possibilities to raise one's living standards offered man by progress in culture, communications, information, participation, etc. In a word: a larger space in which to be more, with and for others.

- It is worthwhile here to mention a trend that, at least as a trend, is present in this universal preoccupation about the future.

We refer to what the Vatican Council calls the “unification of the world” (*GS*, 55). Apart from a geographic integration (overcoming distances), we can today see the existence of a universal passion for achieving new forms of cultural integration (the fight against illiteracy, more dialogue between different cultures), social and political integration (so many are striving to diminish social class differences, to give each man, group, people, his or her place and voice in the solution of common interests), sexual integration (struggles to correct secular injustices to women), and generational integration (so much effort so that the young can fill the place which corresponds to them in history), and even religious integration (the new relationships between different creeds and religions). Such a process of integration is by all accounts irreversible.

2. But here too we stumble upon some limitations, ambiguities, setbacks, new problems.

-The idea that a substantial rectification of the course of the history of humanity is the only thing needed is crumbling. Once it was thought that progress is the main and only task. On the one hand, we had only to continue advancing along these lines, and no limitations whatsoever were in sight. On the other hand, its conquests would certainly reach all men, and relatively soon, improving their existence and guaranteeing them happiness. All of a sudden, the ingenuous optimism with which we had endorsed this myth of inevitable progress collapses. The crises — planetary in their extension — of energy, food, ecology, on the one hand, and of the economic and political systems, on the other, have laid bare to us the urgency now simply of guaranteeing the very survival of man, and the need of coming up with a new order of existence and of living together with others.

-Next to this presentation of the problem in its most universal and radical terms, there are other partial but no less worrying problems:

-the irrational crowding of so many people in our enormous cities, condemning us to anonymity, distrust, rootlessness;

-the speed and noise in which our lives are immersed; the automation and mechanics of our production systems; the bureaucracy and coldness with which we have organized our lives in common; the efficiency and selectiveness with which we disregard so many men and view them as non-productive.

-and the consequences: brutality in some, hedonism in others; alienation for the majority; instability in so many; insecurity and confusion in almost all; complexes, psychoses, escapism, violence, suicide, fear.

It is this type of man who, despite everything, is hopeful about a better future, aware that it is still possible, one with the urgent need for authentic alternatives, whom the Church must serve; to whom she should offer a new image, capable of provoking hope and arousing commitment, capable of showing the paths open to an authentic future, and of anticipating it in a significant manner.

By way of conclusion, we again recall that this appears to us to be the most radical challenge that men, and therefore the Church, have before them. Pope Paul VI said that the best service the Church could offer men struggling for liberation is that of validly putting to them the "anthropology" of the Gospel (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*).

From a different angle, Eric Fromm proclaims his conviction that we shall be off the path as long as our obsession is one of "having," because the only task which will guarantee us happiness is one of "being" ("to have or to be"). These are two ways of stating what is becoming one of the most profound and fitting formulations of the diagnosis of humanity today. Because we have lost it, our greatest need is to recover or rediscover the "meaning" of existence.

More than production programmers and technocrats, without depreciating their services, we need men who are contemplatives, prophets, masters of humanity.

In principle, we believers are convinced that "the meaning of life" is lost and regained only along with the "meaning of transcendence." The humanism which believed it had finished with God is on the point of finishing with man; and only a renewed discovery of God would reveal again to man the mysteries of his own being.

This is only to say how necessary it is for the Church to be faithful to the "originality" of her mystery: human reality penetrated and transformed by a divine presence. Only thus can she be recognized as the People of God in the world and as the universal sacrament of salvation. And these are precisely the aspects we shall consider now, as we reflect upon the self-understanding of the Church.

3. The Contemporary Self-understanding of the Church

Nobody denies that we are living today in a privileged moment of the Church's self-understanding. As such, it was never lived in the past, with the exception of the incipient theological reflection of the New Testament and of the early Fathers of the Church.

In this self-understanding, which encompasses the whole spectrum of her own mystery and her specific mission, we can point out some elements which must be considered achievements already in peaceful possession. Others elements must be considered still open to the task of discernment, and as such we cannot incorporate them without reservation into an image of Church which we may and should promote in the Christian consciousness.

Our task now is one of dialogue with the man of today and tomorrow, the unavoidable duty of the Church — continuer in the world of the dialogue of salvation inaugurated by Christ Himself (Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*).

The following presentation does not wish to be exhaustive and complete, but is simply an initiative. As such it is open to contributions from others also reflecting upon the new image of the Church.

A. The Major Contemporary Descriptions of the Church

This self-understanding of the Church is expressed in many ways and has many different manifestations. But she cannot avoid taking as principal indicators of this self-understanding the major titles now being used to describe the Church. These dominate the panorama of present-day ecclesiology, as others did the ecclesiology of the past.

Just as post-tridentine ecclesiology was dominated by the designation of the Church as a "perfect society," around which notion were grouped the functions, tasks, powers, prerogatives which characterized such a society, and just as the ecclesiology immediately prior to Vatican II was dominated by the description of the Church as "mystical body of Christ," so present-day ecclesiological reflection has as its points of reference three titles. Accepted by Vatican II, these titles have undergone a further development, and have shown themselves particularly impregnated with the self-understanding of the Church found in post-conciliar theological reflection. The Church is called

“mystery of communion,” “People of God,” and “universal sacrament of salvation.” Around these we shall group what we consider the predominant features of the image of the contemporary Church. What we are doing is now quite conventional, and can be done in several ways.

The Church, Mystery of Communion

This description differs from the other two in that it is not found in the very words the Council. However, what is meant by this designation is found in the opening assertion of the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 1), and its implications are found in all post-conciliar ecclesiology.

1. From it, in the first place, may be easily illustrated some of the most characteristic aspects of the change of image we are studying. What changes do we detect?

-From a Church centered on structural and juridical elements, there is a movement to a Church-Mystery which, while not denying the institutional, lays much more stress on the elements of profound communion, in its two-fold dimensions:

-vertical and trinitarian, which introduces her to the inner life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and

-horizontal and interhuman, which commits her to all men, as sign and instrument of the unity of the whole human species, in the universal salvific design of God and in His unifying love.

-From a Church entirely identified with institution, to a Church open to communion with all men: Christians, non-Christians, non-believers.

-From a Church-mediator, within which operated various other derived mediations, to a Church-server of the salvation worked by the one Mediator; a service which she carries out through the multiple charisms and ministries which the one and only Spirit “distributes to each, as it wishes for common use” (1 Cor 12:7,11).

-From a centralized and centralizing Church, in which the dioceses were easily taken for more or less incomplete “portions” of the one Universal Church, to a Church in which local or particular Churches retain all their significance and importance, and out of whose “communion” the Universal Church arises.

-From a Church-mass of individuals, in which "communion" is no more than a wish, without the possibility of becoming an actuality, to a Church made up of small communities, of an experimental nature, in which the communion in faith, hope and love is a messianic reality-sign, as the priesthood of the Old Testament or of pagan religions was understood to be "signs" of Christ's priesthood.

-From a Church-arbitrator and mistress of all and everything, to a dialoguing Church, searching along with all men of good will, in an effort of mutual enrichment in truth, justice and love.

2. Granted the centrality of this dimension in the Church's present awareness, there still remain many points not entirely clear, which will be influential in forming the Church's new image. We note a few:

-The right balance between the Universal Church and the particular Churches. Communion not only allows but supposes differences. The frontiers are not easily discernible. The younger Churches are aware that the "models of development" of the older Churches which evangelized them are not adequate. Meanwhile, they anxiously search for their own identity. Rejecting the old levelling and uniformist centralism, we may fall into a disintegrating pluralism. But this danger does not impede; rather it stimulates the work of reflection and search which must be promoted.

-Although the Council developed with a certain amount of detail the doctrine of the collegiality of the bishops, it did not develop a corresponding doctrine of the collegiality of the Churches, a subject particularly congenial to the patristic thought of the early centuries. One example of this insufficient cooperation between Churches can be seen in the uncertain steps of the Synod of Bishops towards its proper identity; it is still a modest dialogue among physical persons, and not properly speaking among Churches as such.

-This collegial relationship, which is valid enough for the Churches in full communion with the Church of Rome, has particular importance with reference to the Churches which for one reason or another do not live in full communion but are inclined to union with each other. What are the real ties and what must be the concrete forms of living out this communion?

-In such a context the importance of eucharistic intercommunion of the Churches becomes evident, and this is at one and the

same time both aspiration and obstacle to a more fruitful and satisfactory dialogue in the task of ecumenism.

-Intimately related to this eucharistic sharing is the unsolved problem of the value of the forms of the ministries in the various Churches.

-Within the Catholic Church herself, and by reason of her extraordinary importance to the other Churches, it is necessary to delve much more deeply into the full nature of the "Petrine ministry," and possible — perhaps necessary — changes in its exercise, without detriment to the mission Jesus committed to it.

-Nor can the relationship between bishop and priest be judged already sufficiently explained. Nor that of other ministries with the bishop or community. Nor the subject of the priesthood of women, even accepting that reasons may not have been clearly proposed to warrant a change in the traditional discipline at this time.

-Without placing in doubt the definition by the First Vatican Council of the Pope's infallibility, which coincides with "the infallibility Christ wished for the Church," the last word on the way this infallibility is to be exercised has not been spoken.

The Church, People of God

Theological reflection after Vatican II has given privileged position to the description of the Church as the People of God. This was to be expected from the central place it had already been given in the Council (*LG*, 2). Dogmatic theology and spiritual and pastoral theology of recent years have been deeply influenced by it. This description is without doubt at the base of many of the most characteristic attitudes of renewal in the Church at the present.

1. From this perspective we are able to discover many of the distinctive traits of the new image of Church which is making headway in the Christian consciousness of our generation. Here are some changes which we think important:

-From a "Church-perfect society," as she used to call herself — an expression in itself ambiguous and strongly dependent upon Roman law and the French Revolution — we have passed to a Church which knows and wishes herself to be People of God, in the most genuine sense of biblical, patristic and liturgical tradition.

-From a "pyramidal" and verticalist Church, with different grades of dignity and different calls to sanctity, to a Church made up of different members with a clear consciousness that "the People of God is one: the dignity of its members is common to all, derived from their regeneration in Christ; common to all is the grace of filiation; common to all the call to perfection; one the salvation; sole the hope; indivisible the charity" (LG, 32). This doctrine is especially important in order to understand particular vocations, be they of the members of the hierarchy or of the religious, in their relation to the rest of the Christian community.

-From a "messianic" Church in the purely passive sense of being "saved" by the Messiah, to a "messianic" Church in the active sense, of being "sent" in her turn to continue the work of the Messiah, the salvation of man. Therefore, the Church conceives her vocation much more as a task than as a privilege; a Church far more concerned with the idea of saving the world than of saving herself.

-From a static and "essentialist" Church, realized once and for all, and now concerned above all with defending the institution, to a Church with a strong "historical" awareness of being a pilgrim people, propelled far more towards her future in order to build it, than towards the past and her own preservation.

-From a Church inclined to identify herself with the very Kingdom of God, at least in her earthly and temporal stage, to a Church clearly conscious of being entirely at the service of the Kingdom which is the only absolute reality in Jesus' preaching (EN, 8), before which she too is relative. The Kingdom, on the other hand, is still present in time, but extended far, far beyond the borders of the Church.

-From a Church strongly tempted by self-satisfaction and triumphalism, to a Church which, knowing that she is the People of God, a pilgrim in a sinful world, accepts kindly that she not only carries sinners in her bosom but that she also is a sinner, tempted by idols, constantly in need not only of renewal but also of reform — *Ecclesia semper reformanda (Unitatis Redintegratio, 6)* — and too must advance with humility along the path of purification and penance (LG, 8).

-From a Church strongly conscious of her authority and power come to her from the Kyrios, the resurrected Lord, to a Church more intent on her mission as "servant," in imitation of the Son of

Man, who came not to be served but to serve, and of her perennial vocation to fulfill her task “in poverty and persecution” (LG, 8).

-From a Church so sure of, and so enhanced by, her “legislative power” that the faithful were hardly able to distinguish between divine laws and norms coming from men, to a Church sincerely intent on reducing to the absolute minimum her own norms and precepts, while still proclaiming with all her strength that the law of the People of God, which identifies this People as such and by which all shall one day be judged, including the Church herself, is the supreme law of loving each other as Christ Himself loved us (LG, 9).

2. In this description we also find quite a number of open questions. Having overcome at least in theory the old clericalism of the *duo sunt genera Christianorum* (“there are two kinds of Christians”) of the Gratian Decree, there is still a long road left to travel, not only to put the new consciousness into practice, but also to clarify some of its doctrinal implications.

-While the II Vatican Council has reaffirmed the doctrine of *Mediator Dei* on the “essential” differences, and not just of “grade,” between the priesthood called “ministerial” — a designation already contested today by many theologians — and the “common” or “universal” priesthood of all the baptized (LG, 10), there remain many points still to be clarified on the different manner of each one’s participation in the three-fold messianic function of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King.

-For this very reason, we must go much more deeply into the functions and “ministries” which are to be conferred by the hierarchy and those which the community itself may confer on one of its members, and on the conditions of their conferral.

-Having recognized the universal call to sanctity to be one of the great contributions of the Council (LG, 5), it is necessary to search for and find a new way of explaining the basis of the specific vocation of the consecrated religious life, long unjustly defined as the “state of perfection” within the Church. One must search out this problem, for no doubt this is one of the causes of the intense uneasiness felt by this important portion of the People of God, whose specific identity as religious seems to have vanished for many.

-Once we have accepted and recognized the “just liberty which to all is due in the diverse fields of human activity” (*Presbyterorum*

Ordinis, 9), the necessity of accepting a pluralism of different “political options” must be made clear and emphasized much more, not judging such pluralism to be a danger to ecclesial communion when some options may contradict certain political preferences — perhaps legitimate also — of members of the hierarchy.

-How are we to understand and put into practice — so that it does not remain a pious generalization — the “share of the laity in the mission of the Church,” including the role of women, expressed by Vatican II, in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel?

-Having accepted the need to reduce to an indispensable minimum the strictly legislative actions of the Church, we must still clarify much more in theology and preaching the true role of “law,” human law as well, as a necessary element in the life of the community. This also involves an in-depth look at the necessary balance between “institution” and “spirit,” which still lacks a sufficiently thought-through theology.

The Church, Universal Sacrament of Salvation

If the two preceding contemporary usages put us in contact above all with aspects of the Church’s very being, the designation of the Church as universal sacrament of salvation refers mainly to her mission, her activity.

1. As we have done before, we can also gather around this third title a series of elements of change, which may be considered sufficiently received in the self-understanding of the Church, though still not sufficiently accepted, or perhaps known, by a large part of the faithful. We note the following:

-The rediscovery in the awareness of the Church of her own sacramental nature is rapidly leading her to understand better the inescapable duty to be not only an instrument but rather also, and above all, the sign of all the salvation which she preaches and which she wishes to offer to all men.

-The new understanding of the theology of the sacraments, as privileged fulfillment of the sacramentality of the Church herself, is contributing to the overcoming of the traditional “privacy” of sacramental activity, the personal exclusiveness which brought as a consequence a dangerous separation between personal sacramental life and evangelization, to the serious detriment of one or the other in many places (*EN*, 23,47).

-One of the traits of the new image of the Church which has most surprised many people today, and which was unsuspected by them, is her concern for the integral salvation of men, a salvation not, as often happened in the past, reduced only to the soul being saved in the next world, but rather extending to the whole meaning of the Kingdom of God announced by Christ, "as liberation from all which oppresses man" (*EN*, 9).

-Part of the new image of the Church, also, is the new awareness the Church has of her relationship with the world and history, precisely by understanding herself to be "universal sacrament of salvation" (*GS*, 45). Her cordial approach to the world, her appreciation of the values which, though obscured by sin, are present in the world, her desire to dialogue with the world, to learn from it in order to better serve man, her concern for the problems of labor, science, culture, are other such signs that her self-understanding is changing, and in this she is being enriched by new riches which prepare her to respond better to her own vocation.

-Knowing herself to be sacrament of universal salvation, both in time and in space, challenges the temptation to close in on herself and to dwell on her past conquests. It impels her to open herself up unhesitatingly to all men and all times, to be attentive to the signs of the presence of God in history, and to let herself be challenged by these events.

-For this reason, in her evangelizing task she feels day by day a greater need for a faithful commitment to the liberation of the poorest, the outcast, the oppressed of every kind, not as something added to evangelization but as a "constitutive part" of it (Synod of 1971, Doc. on Justice).

-This very universality of her sacramental nature is leading the Church today to a pluralism unknown in the past, not only with regard to external forms of organization and liturgy, in a harmony with the various cultural traditions of the people, but also with regard to the expression of the one Faith in different conceptual systems which respond to the physiognomy of the local Church (*EN*, 63).

-We can likewise point to the new awareness which is maturing in the Church of the duty to respect carefully man's interior freedom in her desire to tell him of the message of salvation, a liberty to which the contemporary world is extremely sensitive, and the respect for which the Church has the duty to give an irrefutable example, by

reason of her nature of being a sacrament. This places in the very forefront of the evangelizing task the living witness of the community of faith, prior to any intention of explicit evangelization, and involves the rejection of any method not based on "the sole divine forces of the message preached" (EN, 18), never resorting to force, influence, or the various forms of material or spiritual welfare as means of entering the gates of a man's conscience.

2. Without going into the complex problems surrounding the seven sacraments in the strict sense, both in general and in particular, we point out some open questions about the mission of the Church as servant of salvation in its universal dimension.

-Granted the teaching so emphatically underlined by the Vatican Council II about the possibility of salvation "outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church (UR, 3), the problem arises — never unanimously resolved and today particularly crucial — of the ultimate "raison d'être" of missionary activity in the world, which she considers as her unavoidable task by will of Christ (AG, 1).

-Likewise, from the Catholic point of view the real relationship of other religions to salvation remains to be clarified. Is salvation granted to each man as a person, or do these religions as such have a saving function? What difference would this latter position make in the pastoral action of the Catholic Church?

-If we start out from the position that there is a unity between universal history and the history of salvation, is it not still necessary to clarify the "evangelizing" value of some "humanizing" value whose connection with pre-evangelization is not apparent? Do we humanize by evangelizing, or do we evangelize by humanizing?

-Today the Church stresses with unprecedented force that in evangelization "only the Kingdom of God is absolute and all the rest is relative" (EN, 8). In this "rest" there must no doubt be included the Church herself. What then is her real relationship with this absolute Kingdom of God? Does the *plantatio Ecclesiae* (AG, 6) still hold as "raison d'être" of missionary activity?

-Starting from the self-understanding of the Church as sacrament, we must better explain the need, and its implications, of replacing the concern for the number of members in the Church — as if salvation in practice depended on such membership — with a

concern for the quality and significant relevance of the members, to develop more the sense of saving than of being saved. What are the theological and pastoral criteria to guide us on this point?

-Also, the problem arises about the starting point of evangelization: should it be the "religious values" of the person evangelized, or simply their human and cultural values, now seen as signs of the presence of the Word in their midst?

We end these notes on the self-understanding of the Church in which we have simply alluded to a series of problems. Thanks be to God, the Church as a whole, and the different communities within her, are getting used to the fact of having problems and unresolved questions as part of our condition as pilgrims, or men and women on the move. On the other hand, the questions assembled here do not impair the certitude and the joy the community of the faithful feels in knowing itself inserted into the mystery of God, to whom it belongs as His People, to signify to all people what is its one, sole human vocation, and that only in Christ does humanity acquire its true meaning.

In order to fulfill this mission of sign or sacrament the Church needs constantly to renew her fidelity to the Spirit and her fidelity to man. The reflections set out in this paper have no other aim than to help us understand better what it means today to be faithful to man and to the Gospel which the Spirit constantly makes actual in the consciousness of the Church.

Let us hope these reflections may help us to discern in the activities of the life of the Church both values and limitations in the light of the new image of the Church which we must promote today.

II. THE EVANGELICAL JUDGEMENT

After having reflected about the Kingdom of God and the Church, and about some significant aspects of the contemporary situation, we will now try to re-read the situation from the point of view of the theology of the Kingdom of God.

We approach in this section the task which we consider the most characteristic of Christian discernment: the evangelical or prophetic judgement. The purpose of such a judgement is to point out the signs of the presence of God and the signs of evil, and to invite men to be alert and to be converted, so that they are not excluded from the Kingdom of God. We ask ourselves: "Where do we serve the Kingdom?"

As we begin, we make the following observations:

-It is impossible to make an evangelical judgement in any simple, all-embracing manner, and this we state not only because of some reason intrinsic to the meaning of evangelical judgement, but also because we have all lived through so many experiences.

-The judgement shares the limitations of the analysis of the situation itself, and of the perspective which we take. We recognize that even with the common perspective of the Christian faith different judgements are possible.

-Wishing to look at the over-all situation, the judgement cannot always be the same in every situation, precisely because it is a particular case. We can err by using generalizations which must be verified in each concrete situation.

-Because of all this, each group and each person must translate the present undertaking into the concrete and unrepeatable circumstances of their own countries and their own situations, for greater faithfulness to God and to men.

We point out, then, some of the "signs" which seem more universal and characteristic. We propose them for consideration and study, in the dialogue with God and with men, so that the Kingdom of God which this or that sign announces may become a reality in every man and in every people.

1. The Meaning of Evangelical Judgement

At the outset, let us remind ourselves of some of the doctrinal principles presumed in what we understand to be the "evangelical judgement."

We do not understand the evangelical judgement to be:

-a judicial court which in the name of the Gospel pronounces sentences of life or death, of absolution or damnation.

-an act of power exerted over some by others.

-a judgement given out as if based on a law of public jurisprudence which represents the standard of justice of human actions.

-a judgement of the inner attitude of persons, which can be known only to God.

It is an evangelical judgement, i.e., a confrontation of the options and actions of man and humanity with the Gospel, with Christ, who is the announcement and incarnation of the love of God toward men. The purpose of it is to see what agrees or disagrees with the life of Christ, what affirms or rejects Him, consciously or unconsciously. For this reason the evangelical judgement is:

-an act of faith in the action of God in history and in the possibility of recognizing the signs that manifest this action. It deals with, here and now, under the action of the Spirit, the only word which is capable of judging: Jesus Christ who reveals the meaning of the present situation. It deals with "setting the level," to discern thereby whether the Kingdom of God, offered by Christ, is being accepted or rejected. It deals with uncovering the "signs" of evil and the signs of the action of God.

-an act of discernment, needed if we are to be protagonists in history and answer the invitation of God to cooperate with His plan. To uncover the shortcomings, and also the possibilities, of the present time. It is then, due to this aspect, both denouncement and announcement.

-the reading of the sense (direction) of the events in the plan of salvation, and so cannot be reduced to a merely critical and cause-and-effect analysis of the situation. It is prophecy, or an interpretative reading of history, done from the point of view of faith.

-an act of solidarity with the world in all that which is of sin and grace in it. Whoever exercises the prophetic judgement feels more intolerable the negative part of the world, the oppression of man, and feels with greater urgency and passion the positive, ardent desires of mankind to be more than it is and to arrive at a universal fraternity. This person knows himself to be part of the situation which he denounces and a committed agent in the process of establishing the values which he proclaims.

-an act of love towards the world, which calls not only upon the persons or institutions about which it exercises the prophetic judgement, but also upon him who makes the judgement. It is a mutual summons which is the starting point of fruitfulness for both. Both he who makes the prophetic judgement and its recipients are called to conversion, to leave their own security in order to live out their fraternity more fully.

2. A Declaration of Christian Discernment

As any Christian group, we must be fully aware of:

- our smallness and our limitations
- our being part of this world, convulsed by opposing tendencies
- our duty to take a stand and contribute our share towards building a better world.

And yet, in the light of faith, supported by hope, guided only by love toward all men without difference, we venture to declare all that according to our understanding is the Word of God in the present situation of history.

Our discernment helps us to see the kind of world we want, the kind of world we will work for, in accord with God's will for our world.

A. The Challenge of the Present Hour

The challenge of the present hour does not leave open any reasonable way for peoples and nations than the way of dialogue, in order to overcome unjust inequalities.

We must recognize that the progress of one country cannot be made with injury to others; that progress will never be effected without the cooperation of all; that the participation of all peoples in a situation of equality in the creation of a new political and economic order in the world is indispensable for an international order which is more just.

The fraternity of all people is an imperative of our times. For this reason:

-we condemn as absurd and inhuman the arms race, the threats of war, and the strategy of fear and balance of power, which are supposed to be the foundations of peace;

-we denounce the mistrust, rivalry and defense of power which often lie hidden behind conferences for disarmament;

-we consider as a betrayal of the poor countries and the poor people in the rich countries the exorbitant budgets and military expenditures made to protect the primacy of the "first-strike" power and the "war industry";

-we reject the validity of ideological justifications to continue the arms race, and denounce them as opposed to the sentiment of the people and, consequently, antipolitical.

The conscience of mankind presses for more human spheres for public expenditure. Hunger, with all the evils which it encompasses, can be overcome, and two-thirds of mankind can have the basic minimum for life. Who would have the courage to say that this is not a demand that answers God's will and the most noble aspirations of man?

The international economic situation has reached such a degree of conflict through its inbuilt injustice that the rich industrialized countries of both the capitalist and the socialist blocs have been compelled to talk with the Third World countries. The time has come when nobody can make progress without taking into consideration the other countries.

We greet with joy the decision of the United Nations and the efforts of the UNCTAD to create a new international economic order. It is the beginning of a long and tiring road, but one which is full of hope for a better future for more just international relations. We invite all men of good will — heads and representatives of the peoples of the world — not to leave the road they are treading. God wants changes in the system of international trade. The privations and the self-interest of the more privileged should not take precedence once again over the hardships and demands of the people, and of the more deprived groups.

The rich nations, in the light of the teachings of history and of more human values, should recognize that:

- their excessive wealth is today unjust; that they must accept the limits imposed for the progress of all if they do not want a revolt of the poor which will destroy them. They must not place their security in technological, military and economic power; it is a god with feet of clay. They must listen to the outcries of the poor.
- they must accept an austerity imposed by the international crisis; they should have the courage to accept the values of moderation and frugality, and austerity itself. Thus they shall be able to create new and better conditions for the poor in their countries and in the countries of the Third World. They should not fool themselves, for the era of consumerism and of unlimited progress has ended. May the egoism of self-interest not blind them once more. If they have no love for men, at least they should have the necessary awareness to understand that power will change hands if they do not have the generosity and courage needed to limit their egoistical self-interest, and to create new and more human conditions.

The people of the Third World know that their demands are just and that their difficulties are caused by the international system. They must, however, be alert that the same mistakes that they point out in others not take place also in their own countries. The poorer demand the same things of their countries that their countries demand of richer nations. While they recognize the difficulties of changing the international economic system, they must have the courage to continue the struggle with specific proposals, and to overcome rivalries. They must not want merely to take the place of today's rich countries. They must not be fooled and dragged along by their ambitions. The power to change today's economic system is in their hands precisely because they defend the poor. They must have courage, creativity and generosity in doing justice, and their people will enjoy the peace that the Lord promises those who do justice.

The owners and directors of the "multinationals," the "transnationals" (corporations), with regard to the countries where they carry out their activities, have the obligation to remember that:

-it is not fair that the benefits obtained in the countries of the Third World should go to enrich the already rich countries, draining the poor still more. Conversely, it is a duty in justice that those benefits, at least most of them, should return to the people who have produced them.

-some of them have committed abuses of power that cry out to heaven: illegal profits, usurious interest rates, tax evasion, unfair transfer of capital, etc., down to influencing and conditioning specific acts of overthrowing or imposing governments.

-the situation of economic dependence of Third World countries and the limited and incomplete industrialization in which they find themselves are due in large measure to these corporations and to the rich countries that they defend. Because of this a general sense of resentment, ill feeling, and even hate, increases against them and their countries. This we understand, although we do not approve of it. We recognize, however, that it is a sign of the need for change. Change indeed, or else revolt and hate, will be the only escape valves for the powerlessness that they impose.

-a change of attitude, and one that brings changes, is not easy, but they should remember what John Kennedy once said, referring to the United States: "We should not ask ourselves what we can do for other countries of the world, but what the world needs us to

do.” This is the change that the Third World countries expect, a change to which they are entitled.

-it is necessary that they respect the liberty and autonomy of the countries in which they operate, encouraging their economic development, creating solutions for the needs of the various peoples, showing respect for the various cultures and political systems that they express. Then, they and their countries will have the right to be respected and recognized.

-they should accept the challenge, and request a moral code be elaborated, as requested by the United Nations. It is the least that can be asked.

The time has come in which God asks from all men of good will — peoples and governments — that they change their attitudes. If until now it was historically possible to enrich oneself at the expense of the others, today it is not so. God calls today’s rich people to the conversion of Zachaeus, and calls all men to love their neighbor as themselves. Only in this way can mankind have the necessary wisdom to make the world more livable. Only in this way can the Kingdom of God come to His “house” — the world.

B. The Crisis of Systems

The crisis of the communist system of the Soviet bloc and that of the capitalist system of the Western industrialized countries point out that human coexistence and society itself are not just and human if the system does not respect the fundamental values of man, such as liberty and solidarity, participation and equality.

The time has come for a change in society, making it accord more with the dignity of man, which would help bridge the blocs into which the world is divided today.

Material progress must be accompanied by a qualitative progress in the way of living. This is required by the dignity of man and by the will of God.

1. The Communist System

We denounce the lack of freedom of opinion, of association and of the movement of the people, which is found in the communist countries. The supremacy of only one party, the concentration of economic,

military, cultural and political power in the hands of a privileged group, and the methods of control and repression which protect them, are contrary to the dignity of man. The lack of participation of the people in carrying out civil affairs turns the leaders and the party into an oppressing and dictatorial caste.

We reject the sin which generates this situation: the idolatry of party, ideology and leaders. It is the "golden calf" which will be destroyed by the law written in man's heart.

Hypocrisy is undermining the system. The contradiction between the human goals and the selection and use of means which are in obvious contrast to the values expressed in the goals — the absolutizing of programs, the system of police control expanded to all spaces and levels of life — show the falsehood and fundamental incoherence of the system. Democracy becomes dictatorship; the dictatorship of the proletariat, the privilege of the party; the democratic centralism, the centralized bureaucracy; the people in arms, the alienation of the people. The system has lost its credibility.

The system, as a consequence, has turned violent to defend the ruling group. There is institutionalized violence in politics, economy and culture, which embraces all dimensions of life. Violence has caused the pushing aside of the masses, becoming a fatalism for many and an opportunism for others.

The atheism of the system has become persecution of the religions, imposing the dogma of atheism in education, mass media and culture. A systematic indoctrination has reached the highest point of pretense: the control of the conscience of the people in order to fit the thought of the controlling group.

The symptoms of change are already present in the increase of intellectual and rural resistance, the people's feelings of frustration, the inefficiency of production to fulfill the needs of the people, the chronic imbalance in the rigid and authoritarian planning, and in the critical revision of the ideology itself. In all this, it is man who recreates himself after having experienced his own limitations and mistakes.

We acknowledge the dignity shown by the people of the socialist bloc in their austerity and frugality of life, in the strength of their patience, in the overcoming of unjust inequalities. Social security, the

guarantee that basic needs will be satisfied, equality and opportunity for study and work and, in general, an access to culture, the promotion of sports for the masses are without doubt some of the achievements not only of the system but also of the people.

The suppression of blatant inequalities and the greater equality in social and economic status, the more equitable distribution of the benefits of production, the cooperative movement, the absence of a consumer mentality, the preference of the common good above the individual good, and the sense of solidarity and human community which all this presupposes show the social dimension of man and his dignity.

The growing consciousness of these values brings forth the need for other values. Social and economic equality, to be authentic, requires freedom and participation. A socialism "with a human face" is trying to surface, and armored cars are not enough to keep it submerged. Man, once again, will overcome despotic power. Today's conquest is the source of new conquests.

Our admiration goes out to the men and women in those countries who are fighting for freedom and participation. Our respect and solidarity are with those who live in the forced-labor camps or in the mental hospitals or in prison or in exile because they believe that it is worthwhile to give one's life for human dignity. It can be said to them in the light of our faith that they are close to God, i.e., that they have become "neighbors," samaritans to those who have no strength to react. If in their courage they add love for their enemies, forgiveness for those who persecute them, understanding for those who do not follow them, then their names will be written in "the book of life."

Of the leaders and of the parties of the communist countries it is asked that they listen to the voice of their people, widen the room for participation and religious, political, economic, social and cultural freedom. In this way they will serve their people and thereby overcome what today is the inhuman part of their system. What is valid will become part of the patrimony of mankind and the foundation for a new page in its history.

2. The Capitalist System

We denounce, on the other hand, the economic and social inequalities found in industrialized countries with a capitalistic system.

These injustices constitute the fruit of a system which is based on profit; which unchains an unmerciful conflict of interests, with victory to the strongest; which subordinates politics to economy, common good to private society, etc. The awareness of these inequalities compels changes which demand subordination of economy to politics, the creation of new ways of participation, and brings into question the very goals of their society.

We challenge the structural violence which produces the fruits of the system: chronic unemployment, migration in search of jobs, international division of labor, war industry, social imbalance, the marginalization of groups considered unproductive, or of some geographical areas for the benefit of other areas.

There is a source of violence in the pursuit of profit as the only impulse of the economy, and we see this invading all trade relationships, from the small merchant to the great economic powers. When competition is the sole law, it creates a ruthless struggle for the conquest of markets and the control of certain productive sectors. The violence of economic power imposes such conditions on loans and on "aid" that in fact these groups and poor countries sink still more into debt.

There is a moral violence in luxury and waste, for these are contrary to the social sense of material goods. The greed to have more, and the envy of those who have more, have undermined all human relationships, putting in question such values as honesty, friendship, family, etc.

This institutionalized violence of economic power is based on political power. Frequently the latter is subordinated to economic interests, to the point of becoming more or less explicitly a dictatorship or a "puppet" government, with the purpose of defending the "constituted order," and so in reality consecrating an unjust situation and defending internal or foreign economic powers. It reaches the point of absurdity when the political power in the defence of business powers justifies the inhuman repression of all challenges, or uses subversion to consolidate power or re-acquire it, once lost.

It is the violence of political campaigns which are frequently based upon contempt, accusations and insults between opponents. It is the abuse of power in the exercise of public duties, the bad administration of public funds, privileges and bribes for election purposes. These and other forms of achieving or supporting one's own political power show up not

only the violence which is exerted on democratic institutions but also some of their hypocrisy.

It is the hypocrisy of a system which has reduced democracy to a formality, since in fact the people participate only in the election of their government officials. Freedom is proclaimed but there is no effective participation; equality, also, but where is the justice which can overcome gross inequalities? Mass media and the educational system are manipulated, and the point is even reached that opposing opinions are more or less hiddenly suppressed.

We recognize, on the other hand, that in the democratic system there is space for the exercise of fundamental liberties; that managerial creativity has produced material progress without precedent; that the political participation of the people does have some impact on the orientation of the state; that the political consciousness of the people has political channels to express itself and to influence the political direction; that respect for the dignity of the person is protected by laws; that the division of power — political, economic, judicial and social — means a greater democratization of power, and allows for a process to defend the rights of some against others; that freedom of information allows for the formation of the critical consciousness of the people.

These are some of the achievements of a system in which we cannot help but see signs of God's action: freedom and personal dignity. At the same time, we believe that God calls for a qualitative growth in the sense of equality and participation. The need for a growth in the consciousness of the people along this line is evident.

This is the challenge that the people give to the economic and political power groups, to the intermediate groups, and to all men sensitive to the dignity of man. A new kind of democracy must arise that brings present-day democracy to still more authentic and more human forms. Egoistical self-interest must be put aside for a creative imagination, participation and solidarity that unfold into an authentic community.

We would like to remind the people of both blocs that behind the situation which forces economic trade between blocs today, there is the call from God to overcome the barriers created by illegitimate interests.

-They must admit their mutual dependence if they are to fulfill their respective needs; that ideologies are only instruments of power

which do not serve the general interests of man; that cooperation must take place not only at the economic level but in all fields; that both need a profound change in attitudes if they are to find new common bases for coexistence.

-They must accept the lessons their respective histories have painfully taught: that what is conquered and maintained by military force is provisional; that forces the conclusion today that peace is possible only in a true democracy; that freedom and participation, equality and solidarity are values which, when existing isolated from each other, cause abnormal deviations, but which existing together, bring the right human balance for which they aim.

-They must accept their historical responsibility and not allow the interests of egoistical power prevail over their most noble traditions. It is up to them to change and force their governments to change, if they do not want to accept the responsibility of being the cause of international conflicts which would injure the whole world, and themselves as well.

-They must renew their efforts for international collaboration, mutuality, the exchange of ideas, persons, experiences, as part of the way to tear down the wall that separates them. They must be in contact with their Christian tradition, and renew their faith in Christ, to whom they have given their lives, in order to "tear down the wall of division."

In a time of the crises of both the communist system and the liberal-capitalistic system we are still joyful and filled with hope, for we are witnessing not only the breaking down of their myths and seeing the evidences of their incompleteness but also detect the seeds of change which will carry both to a new historical synthesis. God created men and women to be brothers and sisters, and contemporary history constrains them to be such.

3. The Challenge of the Third World Countries

Political independence, the consciousness of the unjust situations in which they live, the aspirations to be in charge of their own roles as leaders have made the Third World countries the carriers of change in international relations.

While colonialism, independence struggles and the initial efforts to organize the various states politically are in the past, all the problems re-

main of the earlier situation: new forms of dependency, demographic growth, hunger and undernourishment, unfavorable and oppressive international conditions, and the awareness of all these problems that the people have.

We denounce the unfair conditions of international trade imposed on the Third World countries; the international political, economic and military pressures that they become aligned with the interests of the stronger nations and groups; the ideological doctrines invented by the super-powers in order to intervene, more or less directly, in the internal affairs of these countries.

We denounce the local oligarchies which serve foreign interests and sell out their peoples in order to benefit from the crumbs that fall from the tables of the rich countries; the dictatorships and the governments imposed from outside; the inhuman repression of those who do not side with the ruling bodies in charge.

We denounce all those who in one way or another, from within or outside those countries, take advantage of the weakness of their institutions, and of the misery and the ignorance of their people. We cannot forget that the Bible condemns him who profits from the poor man and his poverty in order to make him a slave.

In their powerlessness, their poverty and oppression, the Third World countries today have their strength. They are witnesses to the falsehood of the ideologies and the injustice of the systems of the other peoples of the world. They are the living indictments of unjust riches, egoistical interests and the abuses of power.

The present conditions impose what has always been an historical patience in the face of slow change. It is necessary, however, not to fall into the temptation of submission or into one of revolt and hate. Purify hope. Do not depend on easy messianisms. Build the future with tenacity and creative imagination. Continue the effort of collaboration and unity already started. Support each other. The love of work, the development of natural resources, and creativity are conditions without which one cannot succeed in becoming the agent of one's own development. The injustice of others should not become a reason for one's own irresponsibility and passiveness.

One must be aware of the danger of becoming instruments of others under new forms of nationalism; that in the search for material progress

one will not in the long run benefit only international powers by increasing the condition of dependence. There is always the danger of becoming the victims of demagoguery and public opinion, which cover over the real situation in order to defend foreign interests.

At the same time, the difficulty of the government official must be recognized, when the state of international affairs does not allow him enough room to defend the legitimate interests of his own nation.

It is thus necessary to grow in a critical awareness that contributes to an understanding of and a commitment to what is possible, and avoids thereby illusions and subsequent frustrations.

Government officials and politicians of the Third World must help their people grow in this critical consciousness, so that they understand what is possible and what is not. They must believe more in the strength of truth and in the capacity of the people to understand it than in the strength of military and police repression; demand of themselves and the whole state apparatus, austerity, efficiency, respect for the public business; not allow that official corruption be added to the nation's social and economic difficulties; give to the judicial power and the administration of justice enough freedom to be able to act with equity; assure the basic rights of freedom of opinion and association; not make prisons out of their countries.

They must recognize that they are not able to satisfy adequately all the desires and needs of their people. In such times of national difficulty they should resort to information and dialogue, not to demagoguery or the more or less evident forms of dictatorship which in the long run turn against those who use them.

They must open the road to the creation of a new kind of society which includes better the values of freedom and participation, equality and solidarity, in accord with their own culture. It is necessary that there be created valid alternatives to the present systems of the liberal-capitalist or communist brands and of the industrialized countries.

Persons and groups involved in the change of society must be clear-minded and alert not to fight for ideologies alien to their people, and for solutions which in the long run respond to foreign interests. Let them be faithful to the sentiments of their people and their wisdom. Their strength is in their capacity to express their aspirations and to answer

their needs. They must not fall into the easy temptation of violence, hate and armed strength; today these are not efficient, nor do they echo the feelings of their people. Violence only begets violence. On the other hand, they must be capable of helping to create a popular critical consciousness that favors consensus on common ideals. They must use "non-violent" methods to bring change; in the end they are the only ways that are effective, though they take time. They must have the strength of patience and perseverance. Quick solutions lead nowhere. Today hope requires magnanimity, so that it not be destroyed by what is immediate, and longanimity, to be open always to a better future.

To those among them who are persecuted we assure our respect and solidarity, whatever the opinions and ideology that may motivate them. Torture, ill-treatment of all kinds, imprisonment without the due process of law, repression of persons, deportation or exile, all are forms that we reject, because they are contrary to human dignity, and because they create a social coexistence based on hate, fear and terror.

On the other hand, precisely because hate, fear and terror carry within themselves the seeds of destruction, the sufferings that they create are the seeds of life, if accompanied by forgiveness and understanding of those who persecute, by penance for one's own mistakes, and by love that keeps on believing in the power of the good. With faith in Christ and the strength of the Spirit, these are possible. Then they are witnesses to God's mercy and builders of His Kingdom.

All men of good will, whatever their beliefs or positions in society, whether acting in the name of God or moved by the aspirations for peace and brotherhood in the hearts of their people, are reminded of their sacred duty to give to others what one desires for oneself. "Love thy neighbor as thyself." This is the commandment of the Gospel and of this moment of humanity. This is the only law by which we can reconstruct a coexistence among persons, groups and nations.

4. The Transformation of Man

The cultural transformation, to which man is subject and at the same time of which he is the protagonist, calls him to new responsibilities, and to find new foundations for the harmony of personal and collective life. It is, therefore, a crisis of growth which we observe, full of hope, trusting in the love of truth and goodness which is rooted in the heart of every man, and in the common sense and wisdom of all peoples.

We welcome the broadened freedom and autonomy of man over cosmic nature. Through scientific research and technology man ever increases his knowledge of the laws of nature and his control over nature itself. At the same time he discovers that he cannot disturb with impunity the harmony which exists in nature. Air and water pollution show that his dominion over nature is not such that the power he exerts over nature cannot be directed against man. This is a fundamental law of creation: God has created everything for man, so that man direct everything to the good of all mankind. Man is the lord of nature only when he guides his discoveries towards the good of mankind.

We have denounced already the use of certain discoveries of the war industry. There are, however, other forms of sin against the life of man which we now denounce:

- the unscrupulousness of industrial and public powers who for self-centered economic interest cause or allow the pollution of the environment, especially of air and water, to the point of creating serious hazards to public health, to the land's capabilities, and to sea life.

- the immorality of the executives of corporations and public facilities who knowingly do not take all the necessary security measures so that their employees may work under human conditions of safety for their health, especially in the chemical industries with their products which carry a high risk to public health.

- the hypocrisy of some researchers and scientists who, excusing themselves that such a concern does not fall under their responsibility, do not take a position against the immoral use of their discoveries.

Worthy of respect and support, on the other hand, is the struggle in defense of the environment that various social groups — scientists, politicians, union leaders, etc. — carry on. It is part of the defense of man himself, and a demonstration that man is more than an economic interest, and more than part of the myth of progress.

In the same way, we recognize the right and legality of the struggle for freedom of conscience. The autonomy of personal decision is asserted, and it is for civil laws to allow the necessary space for the assumption of responsibilities by the person. There is no doubt that such a legal posture manifests an awareness of the inalienable responsibilities

of each person, and this too is a sign of growth in the sense of human dignity. But there is no doubt also of the particular difficulties that this carries with it, since each personal option by its own nature is also a social option.

If the law is a "pedagogy," it is right to demand that it not usurp the role of freedom of conscience. Because it is a "pedagogy," the law must also defend those whose rights can be violated.

We acknowledge as a step forward in social development the acceptance by many countries of alternatives to military service, i.e., the possibility of spending time which would ordinarily be given to military service in other services to the national community, when such an alternative is asked for and justified by reasons of conscience. We know, however, this leaves an opening to hypocrisy when, simply to avoid military training, many more would opt for such an alternative:

Another realm where freedom of conscience is requested pertains to everything related to marriage; divorce, birth control, abortion, the private sexual relations of consenting parties. These are all important subjects, and the teachings of the Church, which we accept, are well known. Nevertheless, they raise challenging questions. Does our present society help child-bearing, or does it create such urban, labor, educational and other conditions that for many people it is a heroic deed to have children? How can sexual harmony be achieved when all formation seems to come from what is lewd? How can we preserve faithfulness in conjugal love, and the values related to love between the sexes, when all society is based on self-interest? We cannot but condemn the exploitation of the sexes, carried out by individuals and even by international rings. We denounce the business interests which have made sex an industry and a modern form of slavery. We denounce the falsehood, the hypocrisy and the deceit of a fake freedom which is identified with uncontrolled use of what is a human instinct, making such freedom not a gift of oneself but the use of the other for self-satisfaction.

Precisely because of this exploitation, we can only praise the feminist movements which struggle that women are no longer considered only sexual objects, and that they achieve equal rights with men. In many other ways though, they can be trapped into new forms of exploitation; of these they must be aware, if they are to aim at an authentic liberation.

A third area where the struggle for freedom and autonomy is going on is that of freedom of opinion and association. It is the reaction of

man and his dignity against the forces of the monstrous realities of violent political persecution which is carried on in a thousand ways. They are in themselves a denunciation of violence which turns against those that use it. It expresses itself in the struggle for freedom of information, one unconditioned by economic, political and ideological interests. Man today wants to assume his political responsibilities but he is also conscious that this is not possible without these fundamental freedoms, only through which will he be able to participate actively in the construction of a more just society.

We must recognize that objective information is very difficult to come by, as much as an objective opinion. But the very awareness of this is a positive step towards the creation of new channels of information, along with a growth of the critical sense in those who receive and those who provide information. At the same time, we must lament the failure in personal responsibility of a large section of the people who "ingest" the massive amounts of information without the capability or will to comment, to criticize, or the desire to have access to alternative reports.

In order that they do not fall into new forms of egoistical individualism, freedom and autonomy require participation. It is not by chance that to the aspiration and struggle for freedom is joined the will for participation. This is how the person reveals himself to be in his basic nature a "being in relation." What is most authentically human and in accord with God's plan is the coming together of these two values: freedom which becomes a gift of oneself, and participation in the assumption of one's own responsibility. A participation in carrying out and controlling politics, the economy and culture at various levels constitutes without doubt the sign of the action of God in history. It leads man and society today towards a qualitative growth which must be supported, encouraged and hastened. To make this participation grow is in accord with God's will and the coming of His Kingdom. It demands:

- a greater and continuing political participation at various levels, and the creation of structures which will make this possible.

- a political participation in socioeconomic questions, in determining the limits of private property, and in the use and distribution of goods; in the administration of the public good; in the elaboration, decision and control of planning for health, housing and education, etc.; in labor organizations and business management.

-a creation, in final analysis, of a democracy based on liberty and sharing.

Any step in this line, in spite the presence of an inevitable ambivalence to be found in everything human, is today a sign of the eschatological hope which is at the base of all hope, and is a definite gift of God. In this effort there is no doubt but that patient effort, creative imagination and some realism will transform little by little the present reality. It is an effort that will bring us little by little to the birth of an authentically new society, different from both the capitalist and communist models.

Precisely because of this vision, and because we live in a world where everything is interdependent, we cannot be silent in front of:

-the more or less explicit forms of dictatorship or institutionalized violence which under the pretext of defending the "constituted order" consecrates in fact an unjust situation.

-the violence of groups or individuals who, in order to defend their own economic, political or cultural power, use deception, corruption and pressure of a thousand kinds, including the physical elimination of their opponents.

-the violence of those who pretend to do justice by their own hands, and in fact they do nothing but increase hatred, lack of understanding, and the rupture of the social fabric.

-the evasion of one's own responsibility, looking for a "tranquil" place to hide one's own egoistical disinterestedness and to make for oneself one's own self-enclosed world; the laziness of those who "don't want to get involved," in order not to commit themselves; and the conformist passivity of those who "don't see or hear," deluding themselves that they are "living in peace."

-the evasion of one's own responsibilities through amusements, drugs, sex, new fads and ideas, etc.

-the ambition for power on the part of those who fight the rich and powerful of today, yet only with the desire to replace them; and their illusion that once in their rightful place they will be more just than those they have dethroned.

These are not the ways which will lead to an authentic renewal of a human community which will bring man to his fullness. On the contrary,

it will be the silent effort of so many men who in the humblest places and occupations know how to put into everything they do humanity, goodness and justice. And it is the effort of those who in public positions do the most they can to safeguard liberty and to create space for participation.

We acknowledge at the same time that freedom and participation demand by their very nature an equality of the personal dignity of every man and woman. As we observe a growth in the collective consciousness acknowledging the fundamental equality of all persons, we cannot but see here a sign of the active presence of God and an authentic advance in all human relationships.

We share in the struggle for an equality of rights and of those opportunities which will allow each man to develop his personal qualities. Equality of opportunity to obtain an honorable and honest job; equality in access to social services, so that, when in need, he may receive equal assistance; equality to enjoy the goods necessary for the dignity of the person and his family; equality before the law, so that justice be administered with equity; and a fundamental equality without regard to sex, race or religion.

By reason of this all-embracing equality we see as an offense to the very dignity of the person all those unjust inequalities, the manifestations of which are the marginalization of groups and entire peoples, chronic unemployment, hunger and undernourishment. We condemn the unjust treatment, conditions, and even structures of inequality in so many countries, in which live immigrants, farmers, artisans, minors, women, etc. We condemn likewise the uncontrolled luxury and the squandering of public and private resources, as contrary to the social meaning of material wealth and to the most basic respect for the poor in the whole world.

Finally, as mankind moves toward a greater authenticity and acceptance of the most genuine human values, we discover, it seems to us, a new appreciation of the things of the spirit, especially of contemplation, transcendence, fundamental religious values. Materialism, violence and hypocrisy, which have invaded all sectors of human life, have brought man to such frustration that signs of an intolerable boredom are already perceived. Man searches and needs almost desperately to rediscover those values that he so haughtily scorned some years back.

We are witnessing the rediscovery of a harmony in nature; the diffusion of Oriental religions in the West; the ever-spreading search for prayer, quiet and silence; a longing for time dedicated to culture, study, etc. We believe man is on the way to recovering one of the highest values of human activity, that of contemplation. As Christians, we cannot but acknowledge in all these one of the most sublime signs of God's action, which is calling man to the very contemplation of faith itself.

Likewise, in reaction to present-day society's hypocrisy, a more and more profound desire for authenticity is being born. We are looking for:

-a peace, that is really such and not just a word behind which are hidden deceptive treaties, arms sales and "war by proxy."

-a dialogue, that is not an excuse for the stronger to impose themselves on the weaker under the pretext of avoiding violence to which in fact the former provokes the latter.

-an autonomy of peoples, that is not reduced to a formal proclamation and which is denied by the very negotiations that precede such proclamations, and by the thousand forms of intervention defending one's own interests.

-a liberty, justice and participation, equality, etc., that are not mere slogans for election time, while maintaining afterwards oppressive and unjust situations for the weaker and the poorer.

-a democracy, that is not reduced to a "moment" of civic life, but that prevades it through and through, overcoming both the formalistic democracy of a liberal origin and the proletarian dictatorship of a communist origin.

We stand alongside and we are part of the mankind which wanted to construct a community of man for men, and which today finds itself in the midst of contradiction and upset, disillusioned before what we ourselves have produced; which questions itself about its meaning and destiny. We are a humanity which, as the prodigal son, has started on the way back to our Father's house. Those who until yesterday maintained the dogma of the need to deny God in order to be able to promote man, ask themselves today what the world can offer man if God is denied. Those who until yesterday held to the tenet of the existence of God but remained unconcerned for the transformation of history ask themselves if a love of God is possible which does not pass to the love of man. Immanence and transcendence are again two dimensions which

modern man looks to in a new and higher harmony. We have a long way yet to go but we do not doubt that the sincerity and honesty of so many men will take mankind to new syntheses of the human and the divine, a new relationship of God and man.

Once again we believe God is calling mankind today into the path of humility, that we acknowledge there is no other God but He who is God.

The idols man has created for himself — money, sex, party, power, etc. — have demonstrated their inability to bring salvation, and have in fact rendered man less human. Humanity finds itself anew, as the rich man in the Gospel, before Christ and it asks Him, and asks itself: what must I do to be saved?

A humanity, more conscious of its own limitations, more humble, is doubtlessly closer to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, in turn, is within man's reach, though not without the help of God, to the extent that he realizes the evangelical commandment of love of God and love of man, as Christ Himself did and taught us to do. This is the announcement, the conversion, and the commitment possible to every man of good will today.

III. THE CHURCH'S COMMITMENT IN SOLIDARITY

The division of contents of this part follows as much as possible the discussions of the contemporary situation of Church and society and of the evangelical judgement. The sub-divisions are:

1. The Commitment of the Universal Church
2. The Commitment of the Church in Industrialized Countries
3. The Commitment of the Church in Third World Countries
4. The Commitment of the Church and Cultural Transformation

This division does not imply that whatever is said in its parts does not correspond to the whole Church, but simply that some aspects which seem to have a more direct relation to the parts indicated are stressed. This is the reason for some repetitions.

Needless to say, what we consider a commitment for the Church becomes our personal and group commitment as well.

Introduction

This is what the world is struggling to. What must the Church "become" in order to "do"? What must we, the Church, "be" in order to serve the Kingdom of God?

The evangelical judgement we formulated in the previous part is not authentic unless we, as the Church, recognize there the voice of God who calls us as well to conversion, to renewal, to commitment, precisely from history, i.e., the world that is happening today. Our concern here is not to give another doctrinal exposition of the Church but to indicate some lines of renewal of the Church, which come to the fore from our reading of the signs of the times. These are the features which must define her in the world today. Nor is there a concern for pastoral planning, but for attitudes and characteristics of a presence in our times, which should orientate the kind of pastoral action that the Church must develop.

In the light of the conversion that God asks of the world we will try to see towards what life-horizons that same will of God is inviting us. It is a concern to be faithful to God in life, and thus faithful to man and his deepest meaning.

If the Church is not an end to herself but a means of salvation of all men and women in a communion with God, she must ask herself how today she can be an efficacious sign, and how she can become credible to modern man. We search for a contemporary image of the Church.

The viewpoint within which we focus our theme is one of fidelity to God and to man. Having started from a christological reading of history, we intend to propose a re-reading of the Church as a message of salvation (*GS*, 44). The conversion to the Kingdom of God, with the horizons of holiness that God Himself proposes, constitutes the sense of this reflection.

Nor are we concerned to pass judgement on the Church but rather to issue a call to conversion, renewal, and commitment to a growing faithfulness (*UR*, 6).

1. The Commitment of the Universal Church

As the world becomes involved in a process of interdependence, the Church is called to witness **unity**, a sign of the Church of Christ, the way and instrument of evangelization (*EN*, 77).

1. A Church that:

-assembles herself in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; not in the name of parties, ideologies, or of other interests which are not to the praise of the Father and the service of man.

-“happens” in the world through concrete communities which feed themselves on the Word and Eucharist, review and revise their temporal commitment, and search the will of God to make their prophetic commitment.

-creates spaces for dialogue, at different levels, in order that differences be integrated and unity favored.

-promotes the freedom of the children of God; acknowledges and admits the different charisms; and overcomes all forms and structures of oppression or anything contrary to the dignity of man.

-promotes and organizes participation at all levels and in all spheres of cooperation, decision and organic action.

-creates new spaces for participation for the laity, both men and women, for religious men and women, even in the guiding of the Church.

-creates new systems of information, communication, consultation and representation in order to search out the will of God all together as the People of God.

-organizes at different levels the sharing of resources: distributing persons according to the needs of local Churches, circulating pastoral and spiritual experiences, theological reflection, etc.; putting together in common all material goods; and distributing them according to the needs of local Churches.

-promotes unified pastoral goals and pastoral planning in order to make all our energies converge to the greater good of the Church and of mankind.

-promotes and associates herself with all ecumenical initiatives that contribute to a witness to Christ's charity; and moves towards the full unity in Christ.

-is open to the needs of all men, whom she wants to serve, subordinating whatever she has and does to the universal good of mankind, in keeping with her mission.

It is a **fraternal** Church.

2. A Church that:

-prefers, to the security of a uniformism and centralism, to an image of a "disciplined army," the image of an organic body with a plurality of charisms, functions, ministries.

-favors those differences — theological, liturgical and organizational — which permit a greater expression of indigenous cultures in the universality of faith (*EN*, 20).

-considers the Oriental Catholic Churches — the non-Latin Churches — not as an exception but rather as authentic expressions of a true pluralism; as models to be kept in mind in searching out new forms of indigenous expression in the different local Churches.

-promotes the self-identity, incarnation, maturity and creativity of the local Churches, and a communion among themselves.

-accepts the fraternal mediation of the Pope and the organisms which help him whenever unity is in danger or when it is necessary to restore it.

-takes for granted tensions, conflicts and difficulties in her own life; and in the name of Christ looks for solutions and answers at the level where these are found, without recurring to higher levels of decision; and when she must, it is in virtue of the exigency of charity and not to defend positions, status and ambitions. Similarly, the Roman Curia does not preempt that which must be resolved at the level of local Church or episcopal conference.

It is a **diversified** Church.

3. A Church that:

-purifies and adapts the Gospel message in accord with the differences of cultures, liberating it from any colonizing elements.

-announces the Gospel, without self-serving adaptations, but preaches the whole Gospel for the whole man and for all men.

-announces the Kingdom of God and its demands, so that all men and women of good will may be willing to construct the world according to the values of the Kingdom of God.

-reads and teaches to read the signs of the times in order to stir up a response of faith, at once faithful to God and to the man of this time and space.

-promotes ecclesial community at all levels, beginning with basic ecclesial communities as "special destinaries of the evangelization and at the same time evangelizers" (EN, 58).

-witnesses her faith in Christ by means of word, presence and action; she does not aim to conquer followers but offers her faith as a contribution to the maximum fulfillment of men in general, and of the non-Christian religions in particular.

-receives of the religious experience of non-Christian religions, purifies and elevates it by living it in faith; and thus she transforms herself into a witness of the salvation Christ has brought to the world.

-establishes spaces for dialogue and religious experiences with non-Christian religions; and allows herself to be evangelized by the "seeds of the Word" existing in them.

-establishes fields of collaboration with non-Christian religions in all that can serve the human development of persons, groups and peoples.

It is an **evangelizing** Church.

4. A Church that:

-declares the word of the Gospel to be a condition for a more just society; and she examines herself in the light of the Gospel whether she should have or not present material resources, and how they are to be used and administered.

-takes positions in favor of justice; and is not scandalized when bishops, priests, religious and laity also take positions in agreement with the social doctrine of the Church, but rather supports them and helps them.

-promotes a consciousness of the need for a new world order.

-promotes education for justice and peace through every means at her disposal.

-defends human rights against all forms of marginalization, political persecution, and abuse of power.

-takes a clear position before all ruling systems, supporting every effort on behalf of justice; calls to conversion all those systems which impair it; and so takes a position before multinationals, economic systems, individualistic or collectivistic conceptions of property, etc.

-prepares her members for "non-violence" and suffering till martyrdom, knowing that her commitment to justice will bring upon her persecution by the powerful of the world and a situation of real poverty.

-opts for man and for all that is authentically human; and thus witnesses that man is more than a party, more than a system, more than an ideology, more than a servant of the state, etc.

-considers "Christian" not what is labelled as such, but rather whatever promotes man and his dignity; she does not get provoked by those who "say" they deny God yet try sincerely to help man; and is not indulgent with those who "say" they believe in God but do not promote man.

-makes herself the voice of the poor — persons, groups and peoples — and from amidst them calls for a conversion to justice as a foundation for peace.

-calls for the reconciliation of races, social classes, nations, mentalities, etc.

-promotes world unity by helping national unity, supernational (European, Latin American, etc.) unity and international unity; and by calling for the overcoming of new nationalisms and that nations accept the self-sacrifice which is thus implied, for the sake of the construction of universal brotherhood.

-makes her own, in final analysis, man's cause as God's cause, with all the consequences that this stand entails.

It is a Church committed to justice and peace.

2. The Commitment of the Church in Industrialized Countries

We refer here mainly to countries of the West. In order to be able to promote unity, the Church present in these industrialized countries, although not only there, is called to witness to **evangelical poverty** as the only path to universal justice and brotherhood.

1. A Church that:

-places her security and finds the strength of her efficacy in the power of faith in God and in the Resurrection and not in economic means, nor in those socio-political conditions which assure her the "status" due a strong and influential organization.

-accepts her condition of being only the "human mediation" of Christ, the only Mediator; and thus accepts her own intrinsic limitations, including in part, her impotence and sin.

-acknowledges by way of penance, even publicly, her own sins, limitations and weaknesses in order to give a place for the power of the Spirit, and thus to witness that only Christ is her Lord and that she serves Him only.

-considers nothing done finally and definitively; discerns continuously what is the will of God "here and now"; gives a place for everything that the Spirit says and promotes in the Church and in mankind; is open to holiness from which she feels herself far away; and disposed to take whatever steps God asks for her.

-accepts that she exercises Christ's authority "with fear and trembling," and acts in such a way that whatever she does is received by reason of the moral force of her sincerity, honesty and openness to whatever is true and good.

-experiencing her own tensions and divisions, endures them in the silence of love; does not take sides, but rather tries to restore unity through truth and charity.

-as part of the world's realities, she makes herself a disciple of whatever truth and goodness they can offer her, well aware that she does not possess a monopoly of truth in theology or morality, or in the knowledge of man and society.

-while she acknowledges that she is not God but only His imperfect instrument, she acknowledges at the same time that because of God's gift, she is a privileged instrument of God for man.

-before mankind she acknowledges having received the mystery of mercy, which she exercises in such a way that the weaknesses of this world are recognized in her, sinners feel themselves called to penance, and the proud of this world feel themselves challenged in their self-sufficiency.

It is a **humble** Church.

2. A Church that:

-speaks her concrete word, interpreting human existence, in a language understandable to the poor, the uncultured, those who have no voice; proclaims the Word of God, which does not come

from “on high” but from the Spirit who speaks in history; and offers it to all men and women, inviting them to a free response.

-expresses herself with simplicity in her exterior aspect: her gestures, her rites, her works, her ministries, her fraternal relations among bishops, priests and laity, etc.

-renounces riches, power, honors, privileges; renounces even defending herself, as long as the good of mankind does not demand it.

-does not possess properties, structures, institutions that are not required by her religious and spiritual mission.

It is a **simple** Church.

3. A Church that:

-is not interested in putting herself forward as a society parallel to the State, but presents herself more and more as a religious reality.

-is not guided by the ways of judging of “this world” but by the wisdom of the Spirit, i.e., by love and truth and universal goodness; does not pursue her own interests but serves the development of people as “the People of God.”

-exercises her critical function of acknowledgement or denouncement of what is or is not in conformity with human dignity wherever it may be needed, whether in the political, economic, social or cultural scenes, and by whatever organization or social group.

-defends the poor of the world — persons, groups and marginalized people — and risks her destiny along with them; and thus she becomes witness of:

-A God of mercy whose heart is with the wretched who have no voice or rights or opportunities in this world.

-A God of compassion who makes His own their suffering, pain, hunger, sickness, etc.

-A God of goodness who offers whatever He has and puts it at the service of those who have not and cannot change their situation. He does not consider anything His own but places everything at the disposition of His people.

-renders herself the voice of the Third World Church in industrialized countries, and shares her personal and material resources with the Church more in need.

-conscientizes people, and helps them to develop their critical conscience in order to achieve the freedom of the children of God.

-conscientizes the rich and powerful of this world regarding their duty as "administrators" and not as "owners" of the goods of this earth.

-alongside those immediate charitable works which care for those whom society rejects and ignores, she creates new services, methods, etc., and so runs the risk of being considered demagogical, dangerous, disturbing the public order, uncomfortable to the complacent.

-does not allow herself to become used for partisan or sectarian purposes.

-gives a reason of her hope in the liberty and strength of the Spirit and not in the "prudence of the flesh."

It is a **selfless** Church.

3. The Commitment of the Church in Third World Countries

If the entire Church is called to witness to unity, the Church present in countries of the Third World is called, although not only there, to give a reason for her **hope**. Only thus will she be able to accompany these peoples along the way of liberation as "a sign of a new era," and to construct the only Church of Christ.

1. A Church that:

-concentrates her energies on what is already possible; gives time for what is coming; does not get tired of waiting; does not believe in facile, quick solutions.

-cheers up those who get tired, those who despair, those who become disillusioned.

-upholds those who fight for a new order, whatever be their position; serving the convergence of their efforts, and never the supremacy of one over the other.

-detects in people's patience the seeds of Christian patience and

helps them, so that their patience is not converted into disinterestedness or egoistical passivity.

-accepts the impotence of not being heard, of not being taken into account, or of not knowing what to say in particular situations.

-accepts insecurity, not being popular, even being persecuted; and puts her hope in the Risen Christ.

It is a **patient** Church.

2. A Church that:

-does not make an absolute of anything she achieves; she knows that the "figure of this world" passes, and that she herself has no lasting form in this world.

-is detached from whatever she has achieved — fame, goods, security, etc. She is open to all the seeds of the Spirit wherever they are sown.

-puts her security in God, in the saving love of the Father, and not in the "powers of this world."

-keeps a distance from the powers of this world, not to be against them, but to make herself a mouthpiece for the powerless, and to encourage those in authority who sincerely wish to serve the people.

-is attentive to the people's voice; she accompanies them in their historical options; serves in gathering together different trends; helps them to discover "the moment of God," and to make their historical experience a religious one.

-assumes the responsibility of being the "conscience" of the world, even though it means loss of prestige and followers, and even brings persecution.

-renders present to the Church in industrialized countries the condition of her peoples, their aspirations, possibilities, conditions, and even their frustrations.

-lives in constant tension as she moves toward the sanctity to which she is called, towards a better future, towards a fuller and fuller realization of unity.

It is a **pilgrim** Church.

3. A Church that:

-has courage and energy to announce God's will, relying more on the "prudence of the Spirit" than on that of the "flesh."

-goes to the defense of those who fight even imperfectly for a better situation, whether in the Church or in society.

-believes in the transforming force of charity; opts for non-violence; and calls to conversion all sectors, in order to construct together a more just future.

-opts for the people — the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the powerless — inasmuch as they are the depository of the expectations of the near future of the Kingdom of God; and at the same time takes a position for an authentic Christian liberation and not a mere "populist" or "historicist" one.

-identifies herself among the poor not for "political" or tactical motives, but because of her fidelity to Christ and to her vocation as a sign and instrument of universal salvation.

-exercises the desacralizing and conscientizing functions of faith in relation to the concrete conditionings of people; and promotes the "new man" renewed in Christ and in communion with God, and, therefore, able to believe in and construct more efficacious forms of brotherhood.

-opts for justice and peace; discerns what "here and now" can favor them; offers her help so that men of good will can discern and choose the best possible.

-accepts the consequences of her own courage, of her freedom in the Spirit, and does not fear men but only God; shares the cross of Christ; enjoys and celebrates the realization of the Kingdom; lives the Paschal mystery and builds her hope in it.

It is a **valiant** Church.

4. The Commitment of the Church and Cultural Transformation

A historical-cultural transformation by which man puts in the first place the values of equality and participation, liberty and solidarity, and inserts himself at the center of the construction of history, demands the Church give testimony to the mystery of the redeeming incarnation.

Transcendence and immanence are the two dimensions that the

Church must bring together into a new synthesis, and thus reveal Christ to the modern world.

All the above-mentioned elements enter into this part of our exposition. However, we point up some which seem to us worthy of being stressed, and which can complete our reflection.

1. A Church that:

-lives in the presence of God, and fixes her mind and heart on Him; everything she does is from Him, in Him and for Him.

-promotes an experience of God in which are integrated in a new synthesis the world and human history, time and eternity, in the charity of Christ, in the Paschal mystery.

-opposes to the cults of activism and efficiency the gratuity of time for the praise of God; favors the contemplative leisure of prayer and liturgy as an highest expressions of the freedom of man "being man."

-creates spaces and methods favoring interiority, so that modern man may rediscover himself, recover and strengthen his interior freedom, experience the peace of a communion with nature, with other men and with God.

-helps all men to discover and to love their meaning and their destiny — God; thus they may see themselves to be equal in the fundamental equality and dignity of children of God, and brothers and sisters among themselves.

-redeems and restores the fractures in human community in the love of Christ; and proclaims that same unconditional, gratuitous love of God as the only effective and lasting source of a fully authentic human community.

-does not believe in an alienating kind of spirituality; nor is she content simply with change in the world scene, but looks to the transforming power of the cross of Christ; and thus she believes that only in its saints and in holiness does the true transformation of history happen.

-discovers and enjoys the signs of the presence of God in mankind.

It is a **contemplative Church**.

2. A Church that:

-lives the values of freedom and participation, equality and solidarity, according to the understanding of faith; and renews herself in her historical image, anticipating how mankind itself must live and act.

-puts at the disposal of mankind her own reflection and experience to help it along the way towards higher forms of human community.

-respects the autonomy of temporal realities, but goes along herself, by reason of her mission, wherever man risks for his meaning and his destiny.

-exercises her critical and liberating function in order that man keep his achievements in true perspective; and does not make absolute any ideology, system, or any other human reality; does not herself construct idols, myths or alienating messianisms.

-contributes to the formation of persons, groups and peoples working for the common good; makes those sacrifices demanded by this common good; and educates in those attitudes which permit a peaceful convergence towards a justice which is the foundation of peace.

-collaborates with all men and women of good will, whatever their race, religion or political party, in every initiative and program which seeks to lift man from less to more human conditions (*Populorum Progressio*, 21).

-makes credible her moral authority to unbelieving mankind by the power of her message and a life lived in accord with it.

It is a Church for man.

Conclusion

To a world coming together, the Church is called to witness to unity. This will not be authentic without evangelical poverty as a condition and inescapable demand of universal brotherhood. To this brotherhood, in turn, we cannot come but by the way of theological hope, and the deep core of this hope is the contemplation of God-made-man, so that man may share in the life, God's very life, for eternity.

These are the beliefs that the Church must witness to today, not only to be credible and acceptable to man, but to be faithful to God and to

His Christ in the Spirit, and to give a reason for hope: the new heavens and the new earth in which all human aspirations will be fulfilled because "God will be all in all."

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