

**CHURCH, MISSION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD****A REFLECTION IN MISSION THEOLOGY**

- I. Church and Mission in Relation to the Kingdom of God, especially in the Third World Context, by Bishop Patrick D'Souza.
- II. The Message of the Delegates of the International Mission Congress

**I. CHURCH AND MISSION IN RELATION TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD,  
ESPECIALLY IN THE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES**  
by Bishop Patrick D'Souza

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The International Mission Congress was held at Manila 2nd – 7th December, 1979, under the co-sponsorship of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Mission-Aid Societies of the Philippines, and as part of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the foundation of Manila as a diocese. The theme of the Congress was: "The Good News of God's Kingdom to the Peoples of Asia." The Most Reverend Patrick D'Souza, Bishop of Varanasi, India, and chairman of the Office of Mission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, delivered this keynote address.

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## Introduction

The study of the Church's mission of evangelization is a continuing process. The meetings in each country in preparation for the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization, the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Taipei, the Synod of 1974, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI are some of the important landmarks in this ongoing process.

In this reflection, the teaching of the Scriptures, the Council Documents, and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* are the main sources of inspiration and guidance.

### I. The Third World Church

Various interpretations are given to the expression "Third World." For the present purposes the following will suffice: the first World is the

West, dominated by capitalism; the second is the East oppressed by communism; the third is the South threatened by neo-colonialism under various disguises. To a large extent, then, the Third World embraces that group of peoples who are making their debuts on the stage of present-day world politics.

#### A. Its Peoples

While looking at the situation of the Church in the world, one becomes aware of a process of change in which the center of gravity is slowly shifting into the Third World. In making this gravitational shift southwards, the Church is tending towards the "peoples of antiquity." Asia, Africa and Latin America have cultures of their own, some of them of great antiquity. Their peoples are perhaps more important — from the point of view of the history of culture, the origin of man and population growth — than those of the North.<sup>1</sup>

The Church is gravitating towards "young peoples" with a high proportion of youth in their populations. 43% of the population in Asia, and 44% in Africa are under 15 years of age. Two-thirds of the population of the three continents are under 25. The young Churches of the South are Churches of youth.

The Church is gravitating towards peoples in the spring time of their new (modern) life, remarkable for their optimism and freshness on the world scene, while, not rarely, at the same time paralyzed by the poverty and social oppression of centuries.

The Church is gravitating towards poorer peoples. And there she finds the opportunity not only to become in a real sense the "Church of the poor" but also to have some experience of the goodness, humanity, simplicity and integrity of poor people. Perhaps through this shift the Church will be able to speak like Mother Teresa when she received the Pandit Nehru Peace Prize in 1972 from the President of India: "The greatest gift I have received is the way I have been enriched by knowing and appreciating the poor. They are marvellous people."

The challenge for the Church in the Third World is to be the Church in the full sense, that is, a home of love, a sign of hope and salvation, in a hemisphere of poverty and exploitation, of political instability, of non-Christian religions and seekers of truth.

## B. Its Characteristics

### 1. Context of Living Religions

Religions are playing a major role in almost every sphere in most of the countries of the Third World, especially in Asia. Excepting the Philippines, in the Asian context they are non-Christian religions. The traditional alliance of religions with the ruling class, the use of religion by the ruling class to pacify, distract, domesticate their subjects, the revolts of liberation which religion has inspired and fostered, directly or indirectly, from time to time, the role the religions play at the moment in South America, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Iran, are examples of the influence that religions have on the lives of the peoples in the Third World. The ancient religious traditions still live among the masses, affecting them deeply.

Religiosity is strangely related to the poverty of the people. To the continent of Asia in particular, these two, religiosity and poverty, are central factors as old as the Buddha, perhaps much older. The ancient perennial struggle against poverty and suffering has in recent times become a colossal and effective force for liberation in the socialist movements of Asia. These movements have sharply questioned the role religions and cultures have been playing in the history of the continent. This role has been ambiguous. On the one hand, religions have insisted on inner liberation, without which even socialist movements will not succeed in their struggle for full humanity. On the other hand, religious and cultural systems have at least in the past played the role of legitimatizing feudal relationships and dampening any revolutionary struggle for liberation.<sup>2</sup>

There is a religious revivalism in almost all the major religions of the Third World. These religions are beginning to perceive the urgent need to meet the challenges that the Third World is facing, to be with the people in their struggles, to revive the religious fervour of the youth.

Islam deserves a special mention because of its political and world-wide importance. The missionary activities undertaken by the Muslims all over the world from the very early days of Islam still continue and their number today amounts to over 550 million. The political resurgence of Islamic countries in West Asia, their interest in their Muslim brethren the world over, the rise of Islamic theocratic states are an important aspect of Third World politics today. The followers of Islam are also faced with all the problems of decolonization, moderniza-

tion, industrialization, social development; their traditional religious ways and even their understanding of the Quran are challenged by the advances of science and secularism; their old self-sufficiency breaks down under the invasion of the world culture; atheism and materialism solicit adhesion.<sup>3</sup>

Briefly, the Third World shows a longing for divine communion, i.e., for religious experience. It is most evident in Asia but it is not limited to it. In some cases the thirst for religious experience manifests itself in an intense desire for human brotherhood, illustrating in some way the words of St. John: "God is love. He who lives in love, lives in God" (1 Jn 4, 16).

The literature of the Third World throws light on some fundamental aspects of this religiosity: the mystique of liberation and commitment to work for others (South America), the tradition and experience of "negritude" (Africa), the pre-eminence of the spiritual (Asia). H. Gunther says: "The poetry of 'negritude' is among the most moving and the most genial of this century. The black renaissance is probably the decisive spiritual event of the 20th century." By their religious spirit they are capable of making the modern world in all its complexity more religious.

On the other hand, many, especially among the young, feel that religions and ideologies have failed not only to satisfy the thirst for inter-human justice, but even to facilitate a satisfying union with God.

## 2. Socioeconomic Situation

A quick glance at the socioeconomic scene in the Third World reveals massive poverty and misery, oppression and exploitation, inequalities and injustice, glaring differences between rich and poor, population explosion, masses in revolt.

The oppressed peoples of the Third World are yearning for a just and human society. They strive for development; struggle against all forms of exploitation and enslavement; try to change inefficient and authoritarian political regimes, wrong and frustrating economic planning, and unjust structures and trade regulations which keep developing countries in perpetual and ever greater dependence on the different nations.

### 3. Political Situation

In many countries of the Third World the forces that were united during the struggle for independence have disintegrated once the common enemy has pulled out. Many of the old tribal, cultural and religious conflicts flare up again.

Political instability, widespread corruption, lack of proper leadership are some of the salient features on the political scene of many of the Third World countries.

Many young nations are going in for excessive military spending to defend themselves against internal fissiparous tendencies and external attacks. While the average national income in these countries increased by 2% during the second half of the sixties, expenditure in arms increased during the same period by 7%.<sup>4</sup>

Instability has become a permanent feature of the Third World countries. Latin America (the most volcanic area) comes first with 62 regimes overthrown between 1945 and 1970. Only 7 out of the 24 states have not experienced a coup d'état. Next, Africa, with 43 coups (some unsuccessful) in 24 countries between 1950 and 1972. Asia has been more fortunate, but not a few national heroes and founders, instead of finishing in the nation's pantheon, have been exiled or assassinated.<sup>5</sup>

Peoples of the Third World are yearning for a stable and just political system.

### 4. Youth

42% of the 2500 millions in the Third World are under 15. That is to say, 1050 million youngsters are looking wide-eyed at this world of their hopes and longings. In the year 2000 they will be in their prime. What will the next 25 years bring them — and then the next millennium? Hopes fulfilled or disappointed?

Many young peoples are looking for deep and genuine religious experience. Our young people have (as the final statement of the First Plenary Assembly of Asian Bishops' Conference says) "all the splendid gifts that are theirs." They have freshness of outlook, vitality, creativity, courage, compassion, integrity, generosity, the open heart, willingness to learn.

“The youth in the Third World want to be ‘modern.’ They are turned resolutely to the future, rather than to the past. Theirs is a passionate concern for human freedom, dignity, justice. They search for meanings and values which will give sense, direction and solidity to their lives in a world of uncertainty and seeming meaninglessness.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, they lack leadership, are restless and are exploited by political parties.

## 5. Communism

The growing influence of Communism in the Third World is a fact which cannot be met by opposition but should be understood and appreciated as a challenge and an opportunity.

The relationship between Christianity and Communism has undergone profound changes since their first encounter. Both have reached a point in their understanding of themselves which makes a genuine meeting in some specific areas possible. The growing aspiration towards a just society inspires deeper dialogue. Through contact with Communists, and challenged by them, Christians have realized more clearly the social dimension of their Faith.

## II. Mission and Kingdom

The Church in the Third World is a Church increasingly alienated from its own people paradoxically through the kindness of Churches in affluent countries. The relatively massive financial help from these countries, whether for developmental or pastoral purposes, is making church institutions, churchmen, increasingly independent of the financial support of local believers. Hence, there is little relationship in the standard of living of priests and religious and of their people. While in Catholic countries the churchmen are in prosperous or adverse conditions along with the people, a drought in the Third World or a wage freeze affects the people, not church institutions or churchmen, who continue to be maintained by funds from abroad. So we have a Church that is alienated from its peoples. This is the most tragic meaning of a “foreign” church.

What is the mission of the Church in this context of the Third World?

Before answering this question, let us briefly consider what is the mission of the Church in relation to the Kingdom of God.

## A. In the Scriptures

Understanding "Kingdom," we shall know the Church. Not only is the Kingdom of God the central theme of the public proclamation of Jesus<sup>7</sup> (Mk 1,14f), the referent of most of his parables (Mt 13,1-52), and the object of a large number of his sayings (Mk 8,11f; Mk 9,1; Lk 16,16); it is also the content of the symbolic actions which form so large a part of his ministry — his table fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners (Mk 2,13-17), his healings and exorcisms. A key text is the brief account of the Galilean preaching of Jesus in Mk 1,14-15. Its formulation could be accounted for as follows:

	The time is fulfilled	— early Christian apocalyptic
Jesus	( The Kingdom of God is at hand ( Repent	
	Believe in the good news	— early Christian mission preaching

Although Jesus steadfastly proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom and frequently attempted to describe it obliquely in the allusive language of the parables, he nowhere tells us clearly just what the Kingdom really is. This is because the Kingdom of God is in fact a symbol and as such impervious to conceptual definition.<sup>8</sup>

### 1. The Old Testament Background

"Kingdom of God" translates the Greek *basileia tou theou* of the Gospels, and this in turn stands for the Aramaic *malkut di yy* which Jesus would have used. Although nominal in form, the expression is verbal in meaning. It stands not for the territory ruled over by God ("kingdom"), nor even for his royal power ("kingship"), but for the concrete exercise of power in actions through which he shows himself to be king ("rule"). The Kingdom of God is God's *kingly activity*.

The theology of the times pictures this kingly activity of God in two different ways. God shows himself to be king by creating the universe and by liberating his people through his mighty deeds in history. We leave aside the concept of Kingdom as creation, as this way of conceiving the Kingdom is not of primary importance to the Old Testament, nor original to it. It is rather in her awareness of God as the Liberator King who sets his people free that the specific note of Israel's theology is struck.



God is Liberator King, exercising an (ultimately) eschatological kingship, inasmuch as he intervenes in history to save his people from the situations of desperate peril they encounter. He rescues them from slavery in Egypt (Exodus), from starvation in the wilderness (Numbers), from annihilation by powerful enemies during the wars of the conquest (Joshua, Judges) and from exile in Babylon (Deuteronomy, Isaiah). It is in these mighty saving acts that Israel has its specific encounter with her God, experiencing him as the Covenant God deeply concerned about the concrete historical welfare of his people. Israel is his prized possession (Ex 19, 5; Dt 7, 6; Ps 135, 4); he is her Redeemer (Is 41, 14; Jer 50, 34; Ps 78, 35).

There is a striking passage in Exodus 6, 6-7:

I am Yahweh  
and I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians  
and I will deliver you from their bondage,  
and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm  
and with great acts of judgement,  
and I will take you for my people and you shall know that  
I am Yahweh, your God  
who has brought you out from under the burden of the Egyptians.

Later on, God will make himself known under yet another name, revealing himself as "Abba," the "dear Father" who loves all men with a universal and wholly unconditional love. But his name, before this new revelation through Jesus, remains Yahweh, and Yahweh means the God who redeems. Israel experiences God primarily as the liberator God, the redeemer.

Yet it is precisely this core experience of Israel which leads to the great creative tension which dominates the whole of her history. For while Israel trusts implicitly in the promises made by her liberator God, she does not experience the realization of these promises. What has been promised is the "land" — a comprehensive symbol for salvation, conceived of in a very material way, as freedom, peace, long life, prosperity (Ex 3, 17; Dt 28, 1-14). What is experienced is poverty, conflict, oppression, colonization, exile. Promise clashes with fulfilment, resulting in a tension which can be resolved only by projecting the fulfilment of the promise into the future. The promises of the liberator God will *one day* be fulfilled. God will *one day* fully liberate his people. God's kingdom (his definitive saving act) will one day come. The kingship of the Liberator King becomes an eschatological kingdom.

So the core experience of Israel (God experienced as the concerned and caring Lord of History) leads inevitably to the basic attitude of the Old Testament, an attitude of steadfast hope. From end to end, the Old Testament is a book of hope, just as the New Testament is from end to end a book of love. But this hope takes various forms in the course of Israel's history. Two forms are especially important, because they have largely determined the thought patterns of the New Testament and indeed Jesus' own understanding of his mission. They are messianic expectation and apocalyptic hope.

Messianic expectation looks forward to the realization of God's promise of liberation through a descendant of David, who will be raised up by God as the "Messiah," that is, the "anointed one" or the king *par excellence*. The Messiah is to establish a world-wide kingdom of justice, peace and prosperity in which all the promises symbolized by the "land" will finally be realized.<sup>9</sup> The hope expressed in Davidic messianism (at least in its earlier forms) is a thoroughly this-worldly one. God's promises are to be realized in a this-worldly kingdom to be established on earth and within *our* history.

Davidic messianism received a severe setback with the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile of 587 B.C. After this, not unnaturally, Davidic messianism finds itself giving way to a new type of expectation strongly coloured by influences from the Persian and Babylonian religions which Israel had encountered during her exile. This is apocalyptic hope. This looks forward to an imminent, catastrophic intervention of God, in which he will destroy "this evil age" and usher in "the age to come" by creating "a new heaven and a new earth" (Is 65, 25) as the home of the risen just (Dan 12, 1-3). Apocalyptic hope, unlike messianism, is strictly eschatological. It foresees salvation not as the fulfilment of our history but as its end.

Davidic messianism and apocalyptic hope are only two of the many forms that the hope of Israel assumed at the time of Jesus.

## 2. New Testament

All these varied forms of hope are taken up into the expression "kingdom of God." For "kingdom of God" is not, as we have seen, a concept which can be precisely defined, but is a polyvalent symbol standing for all Israel's hopes of liberation. When therefore Jesus announces the coming of the Kingdom, what he is saying is that Israel's long-sustained hope of liberation (no matter what form this takes) is about to be, indeed, is be-

ing *fulfilled*. That is, it is being realized but in a new, more perfect and therefore wholly unexpected way.

All Israel's expectations, no matter what their form, looked for liberation through an outpouring of power. Davidic messianism relied on the political power of the ideal king. The zealot nationalists of Jesus' time opted for the power of arms, wielded in a "holy war" waged for and under God. The Pharisees trusted in the moral power generated by their perfect observance of the Law. The apocalyptists hoped for a mighty display of cosmic power by God. All such ways are rejected by Jesus (Mt 4, 1-11). For him power is not the key. There can be no genuine liberation through an exercise of power, for power does not really free; it merely creates new structures of unfreedom. The only truly liberating force in the world is love, and it is just this that Jesus offers when he proclaims the coming of the Kingdom.

For when Jesus announces that the Kingdom of God has come (i.e., that God is revealing himself as the Liberator King by definitively fulfilling the hopes of his people), he is drawing on his own experience of God as "Abba," the dear Father who has declared his unconditional love for men. It is this revelation of God's love (God as "Abba") that is the true content of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom. For it is only when we encounter this love and respond to it appropriately in trusting surrender that we experience genuine freedom as individuals and in community. The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus, then, is ultimately his *revelation of God's unconditional love*.

The offer of God's love that the Kingdom symbolizes demands from us a response. This response has been defined by Jesus as "repentance."

Although the Greek word for "repent" used in the Gospels means literally "to change one's mind," "to have afterthoughts," and therefore "to have remorse for some one action or the other," this is not what Jesus intends by his call to repentance. For underlying the Greek *metanoein* of the New Testament is the prophetic ideal of repentance, expressed in the well-known Hebrew *shub* (= to be converted, to turn), which in the Old Testament always signifies the turning of the whole man to God (Is 31, 6; Jer 3, 12-14; Hos 14, 1).<sup>10</sup> In line with this the repentance demanded by Jesus involves the whole man and not some one compartment of his life; and it involves him in a dramatic positive movement of turning away from sin.

When the revelation of God's love (the Kingdom) meets its appropriate response in man's trusting acceptance of this love (repentance), there begins a mighty movement of personal and societal liberation which sweeps through human history. The movement brings freedom inasmuch as it liberates each individual from the inadequacies and obsessions that shackle him. It fosters fellowship, because it empowers free individuals to exercise their concern for each other in genuine community, and it leads on to justice, because it impels every true community to adopt the just societal structures which alone make freedom and fellowship possible. Freedom, fellowship and justice are thus the parameters of the Kingdom's thrust towards the total liberation of man. Together they spell out the significance of the Kingdom and tell us what the Kingdom, in practice, means today.

### 3. The Marks of the Kingdom

In Jesus' proclamation, the Kingdom of God demands the conversion of the heart, *metanoia*, which implies a new outlook on our human life in all its dimensions. The main dimensions of this conversion are the following:

a. The New Relationship to God. At Jesus' baptism, heaven opens, the "voice" of the Father acknowledges Jesus as the beloved Son, on whom the Holy Spirit descends. For Jesus, God is "Abba," the loving and beloved Father, in whom his life is sheltered, with whom he is most intimately united, to whom he owes unconditional obedience. For all men Kingdom of God means that we are included in this relationship to God, who forgives and loves us unconditionally, in whom we have the absolute assurance in every situation of our life, who claims undivided loyalty. The Kingdom of God is rooted in and based on this new relation to God. Without it the Kingdom of God does not exist for Jesus.

b. Kingdom of God implies the newness of man, the new integrity, dignity and freedom of man, the liberation from all alienations. The model of this new humanity is Jesus himself who stands in absolute freedom above all deceptive supports of human existence of wealth, political power, social acceptance and conformity, all forms of legalistic and ritualistic self-righteousness, apart from all parties and pressure groups of this world, relying exclusively on his Father.

Jesus calls his followers to the same integrity and freedom. This is the theme of the Sermon on the Mount; it contains an entirely new scale of values, the Beatitudes, freedom from clinging to material support (Mt

6, 19-34), a change of heart, not the mere exterior observance of the laws (Mt 5, 21-47). The Christian life in its main aspects (of charity, prayer, sacrifice) frees from the concern of the image before people, lived only before God (Mt 6, 1-18). Man is good or bad not by ritual observance or contamination but through the decision of his freedom, by "what comes from the human heart" (Mt 15, 19).

c. Jesus displays in his life the new relationship to the neighbour. He is "man for others," intimately concerned with the people and their needs, spiritual and temporal, caring in a special way for the underprivileged, despised, degraded. His concern is personal, not limited to exterior help but committed to personal service, "not to be served, but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10, 45).

Jesus demands the same attitude from his disciples. He wants them to feel responsible for the people when they are hungry (Jn 6, 5-10). The call to repentance is explicitated mostly in terms of the relation to the neighbour. Already the Baptist tells the people that conversion consists in abstention from exploitation and oppression and in active sharing with the neighbour (Lk 3, 10-14). Jesus consistently complements the commandment of the love of God with that of the love of the neighbour and exemplifies it in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10, 25-37).

The fellowship of the Kingdom is strongly urged by Jesus, who both practices and preaches a radical and absolutely universal concern for everyone in need (Lk 6, 27-36; 10, 25-37). The great commandment of Judaism ("hear O Israel") of Dt 6, 4-6, which urges us to love God with all our hearts, is modified by Jesus into his "love commandment" (Mk 12, 28-34) and by the addition brings "neighbour" on to a level with God, urging us to love both God and neighbour at the same time, and it profoundly modifies our understanding of the *shema*. For by adding Lev 19, 18 to Dt 6, 1-5 Jesus is probably proposing a new interpretation of the great commandment of Judaism. To love God with all one's heart now means to love one's neighbour as oneself. One loves God by loving neighbour. The love commandment of Jesus is, then, that we love God *in* neighbour.

This is how the New Testament understood Jesus' love commandment. Except for Mk 12, 28-34 and Lk 11, 42 (an obscure "woe" which condemns the Pharisees for scarcely ever speaking about our loving God). Instead it urges on us the law of loving one's neighbour as oneself (Gal 5, 14; Rom 13, 8; 1 Pet 4, 8; Heb 13, 1), or the "New Commandment" of Jesus that we love one another as he has loved us (Jn 13, 34; 15, 12; 1 Jn 3, 23; 4, 7-12; 2 Jn 5). Our appropriate response to God's love

for us is not that we love God in return (for God cannot be the object of our concern: "no one has ever seen God"), but that we love our neighbour (1 Jn 3, 19-21) — in whom we encounter God (Mt 25, 31-46). Fellowship, that is, radical concern for the neighbour (*agape*), thus becomes the great value of *the Kingdom*.

d. This new life is animated by absolute hope. Jesus not only preaches the absolute trust in God's providence, but fearlessly faces the failure of his work: "My father is with me" (Jn 16, 32). He knows that there is a life, the real life, which is lost if we try to keep it, which is won if we are ready courageously to give it (Mk 8, 35).

In the disciples this hope broke down on Good Friday. It was reawakened and finally confirmed on Easter in the encounter with the risen Lord.

Thus, Jesus stands against two extremes. He rejects the idea of an earthly kingdom with blueprints for the social, economic, political order to be established. He does not introduce a new theocracy in which earthly realities and Kingdom of God would coincide. With equal firmness he rejects a mere eschatological kingdom, which has to be expected, which is to come only on the ruins of the present world and society.

For Jesus the Kingdom is present, with its demands on our present life, with its new outlook, which is meant to form the individual and collective conscience of the people. This new orientation has to be realized in whatever social, economic or political structure people live. This orientation is the frame in which the Church has to understand her mission in the present time.

## **B. In the Consciousness of the Third World**

It will however be the decisive task of Third World theology to "translate" the Christian message into a language which is understood by our people and has a resonance in their hearts. The "Kingdom of God" belongs to the Jewish world and had its meaning in the context of their history. It will hardly be understood by people whose minds have been formed by the thinking and experience of Buddha, of Hindu saints and sages, of Confucius and Lao-tse, all of whom have no access to a concept like the "Kingdom of God." Would such a concept have any appeal to the intellectual elite of Asia who have been studying at Western universities or even trained at Asian centres of learning? Could we imagine that such a concept as the "Kingdom of God" would be "good news" for the

Chinese should they ever turn again to the Catholic Church after their traumatic experience under Chairman Mao Tse-tung? Whether they have been deeply influenced by democratic ideas or communist ideologies, a king will hardly figure in their belief that religion is something that had better go to the museum.

“Mission” has acquired in its historical development in the countries of the Third World a connotation that is permeated with bitter colonial experiences and, in fact, could easily convey a wrong notion of what “mission” actually intends, i.e., the building up of self-supporting, self-reliant local churches, and not of ecclesiastical territories dependent on structures outside their own countries for their material and spiritual support and survival.<sup>11</sup>

Maybe we can reformulate the mission of the Church to the people of the Third World today as “preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, the “liberator.” This term “liberator,” if retranslated into Asian concepts and not taken in its present South American version, takes up the cry of thousands of years, still reverberating through the length and breadth of the Asian continent, for liberation. Indian sages have sung for 4000 years:

“From the unreal, lead me to the real  
from darkness, lead me to light,  
from death, lead me to immortality!”

(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I, III, 28)

This cry of the Asian soul is today echoed within a new context described above. This clear-cut concept of “Christ the Liberator” at the same time does away with the illusion that man could free himself from sin and all the sinful structures that are consequences, individual and collective, of man’s falling away from God. Liberation is understood here in its fullest theological sense, as a freeing from sin and all sinful structures, especially in the social sector, that are consequences of sin, to make man free for God and the infinity for which he has been created by God’s love.

Many of our concepts, like the “Kingdom of God,” have to be rethought thoroughly, if they are to be presented to the Third World today. The fact that we have not done this rethinking sufficiently in the past might be part of the explanation why the good news has just not been understood in Asia and other countries of the Third World.

The Church, the Kingdom, "mission," together with the way to bring them to the people of the Third World, are one. And yet, there is a world of difference, depending on where we put the emphasis on these terms, and more, on these realities. There is even a danger that we might use a wrong key that will never open the heart of the Third World. Therefore, we will have to translate the message of the "Kingdom" into our own cultural, sociological, religious context, in whatever part of the Third World we live. Unless this is done right from the beginning we may miss the very goal towards which we are working.

As long as we apply the traditional concept of "mission," especially as developed during the colonial period, we shall come to no conclusion and find no solution. We shall be disturbed still more if we identify "missions" totally with the Church that is running them — a Church that in many places has not been able to put down any roots and therefore is unable to produce any fruits.<sup>12</sup>

### III. The Third World and the Mission of the Church

What then is the mission of the Church in the concrete situation obtaining in the Third World today?

#### A. Mission and Kingdom in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* has placed the mission of the Church into perspectives which are appropriate to our times and regions. It recognizes "evangelization" understood in terms of "proclaiming Christ to those who do not know him, of preaching, of catechesis, of conferring baptism and the other sacraments" (EN, 17). But it does not regard these activities which are part of the universal sacramentality of the church as the only legitimate "mission work." In the same paragraph (EN, 17), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states that "any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of destroying it." Then *Evangelii Nuntiandi* defines what it means by evangelization: "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the good news into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new." This statement immensely widens the very concept of evangelization, and yet it in no way waters it down. On the contrary, it brings it out more forcefully by continuing: "But there is no new humanity, if there are not, first of all, new persons renewed by baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is



therefore precisely this interior change and if it had to be expressed in one sentence, the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciousness of people, the activities in which they are engaged and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs" (EN, 18).

The next paragraph, No. 19, of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* contains one of the weightiest statements concerning our mission in Asia. "For the Church, it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation."

"All this could be expressed in the following words: What matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures," (taking account of their immense pluriformity in the Third World), "in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*, always taking the person as one's starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.... The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our times. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly, of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place, if the Gospel is not proclaimed" (EN, 20).

## **B. Sociological Implications of Baptism**

It is important to pay attention to the great difference of the meaning of Baptism in the theological tradition of the Church, and its sociological implications.

There are many in the Asian continent, certainly in India, who know and love Christ, but will not be of the Church. They explicitly exclude Baptism as an unbecoming change of one's society, the Church as unnecessary in going to Christ whom they venerate. Due to various sociological factors, sometimes Baptism appears to them as a sign, not of a new life but of a new society with its roots abroad, as a giving up of a society of their birth, as the beginning of an ostracism in their family. One cannot say with certitude exactly how many such persons there are, but they would seem to surpass the pitiful number of Christians. They

know and love Christ but they do not wish to be part of the Church. Mahatma Gandhi is a good illustration of this group. While they yearn for the saving activity of God, they are afraid of what is presented as his Kingdom.

What is the responsibility of the Church towards the growing number of these people who are interiorly very much committed to Christ, though sacramentally, i.e., by Baptism, they do not desire to be of Christ's Church?<sup>13</sup>

How is the Kingdom to be presented to this growing group? Does the Kingdom begin with Baptism? With the desire to be of Christ fully? What is the mission of the Church towards this group? To urge them to Baptism? To wait for the growth of their numbers, till, perhaps, in a generation or two, they understand and desire Baptism, and the fulness of communion in Christ? How far is it advisable to keep silent about the necessity of Baptism?

The problem is not completely new. The working paper of the 1974 Synod of Bishops spoke of "those many who, though they have been baptized, do not share the life of the Church," do not live as Christ's. They have the fulness of sacramental commitment but very little, if any at all, of personal commitment.<sup>14</sup> Can we think of another group that has almost the fulness of personal commitment but no sacramental incorporation because sociological factors hinder them? Is the Kingdom, i.e., God's saving activity, in Baptism or in a personal commitment? If both cannot be hoped for simultaneously now, what is the mission of the Church now to those millions of the Third World?

One can discuss the question further. With the old "mission" concept, the passport for the citizens of God's Kingdom was Baptism. Very few of the heroic missionaries and fewer of the theological theoreticians of the past realized that "Baptism" means something very different in many of the Third World countries from what it means in Scripture. We must accept that the sacrificial element of the commitment to Christ is an essential dimension of our Faith. This consists in the death to self, a complete conversion to God. But many other implications of Baptism are due to historical accretions. When the Apostles baptized the first Jews, little changed externally. Christ entered fully into their personal lives and created at the same time a new Christian community that adored the Father in spirit and in truth. All the rest remained the same. Even when the first "pagans" were baptized in the Greek-Roman world, things re-

mained more or less the same. When Roman citizens were baptized, they remained Romans as before. It is not so with the people of the Third World who were baptized. In many of these countries, especially in the Asian continent, Baptism often meant and still means a radical *social* change. In India, for example, the one who is baptized also automatically passes over into an entirely new system of law that henceforth governs his marriage, his property rights and his entire social life, and in most cases cuts him off socially from his former background, the very root from which he draws his life.

These vital implications, which an essentially religious act, Baptism, has for the life of baptized Asians, have often been overlooked by theologians, missionaries and church planners. This question of Baptism in its sociolegal implications for most Asians should be taken up for serious scrutiny by a congress like ours that wants to convey the good news of Jesus Christ to the Asian people and others of the Third World in similar situations. This vital topic I find missing on the agenda of this Congress, and I believe we will miss a good deal if we bypass this key issue: *mission and conversion, baptism and its social consequences* for the people of the Third World, *especially the Asian continent*. We must see this problem in its particular context, in the context of "anti-conversion bills," which is very different from the context in which it appears, for instance, in the West.

Certainly, the final goal must be formulated in traditional terms as the incorporation of the peoples of the Third World into the people of God, in Jesus Christ, through Baptism, reaching its fullest union in the Eucharist, and then spreading out to establish new communities of love centered around the altar and the bishop.

### C. Tasks and Challenges of the Church

The primary means of evangelization of the Church is to represent effectively through personal witness, lifestyle, concern for others, commitment, joyful hope, an authentic Christian life, the meaning of human existence as revealed in Jesus Christ (EN, 41, 76). The Church must become the sign of joy and hope to the peoples. To be this sign, she must first divest herself of whatever is coming in her way of being this effective sign (EN, 15). The Church will be a sign of hope in the Third World if through the power of the Gospel she influences and transforms society, changing mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interests, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life (EN, 19).

Much has been said and written about the mission of the Church in various spheres in today's world. Dialogue with non-Christian religions, conscientization and liberation of the poor and the oppressed, apostolate among the youth are some of the topics that are widely discussed today. Hence I shall not deal with them here.

I shall touch on some points which I consider are particularly relevant in the context of the Third World today.

The challenge which the situation poses to the Christian Churches in the Third World could be summed up in the following principles stated by the FABC meeting in Hong Kong in 1977. They constitute a concrete plan of action for our evangelization.

“a. In religious matters the question is: how to preach the good news of Jesus to our brethren so that the Church may be, and appear to be, the sacrament of salvation and a community of love.

b. In relation to the world religions: how to enrich its own Christian identity and life by opening itself to the great religious traditions of Asia in interreligious dialogue, and together with them, how to practise religion, and promote moral and religious values, in a way that all contribute to the total human development of our peoples.

c. In economics: how to contribute to the eradication of stark poverty by an authentic dialogue of life with the poor of Asia without fostering materialism.

d. In social life: how to preserve the authentic values of personalism and family life in the face of urbanization and technological process.

e. In political matters: how to help our people find an Asian style of authentic participative leadership in government at all levels.

f. In cultural matters: how to find their own national and Asian identity, by blending ancient and modern values in face of the future ahead.”<sup>15</sup>

In these short six paragraphs we have the Magna Carta for mission work in the Third World for the decade to come. We shall illustrate these tasks of the Church, reflecting on one of them, i.e., studying how the living faiths of Asia must experience the saving activity of God. This is the Kingdom.

We are now approaching the most acute problem of the mission in Asia, namely, the new relationship of our Christian message with the existing living faiths of the Third World. We are at the same time approaching one of the most difficult questions of present-day theology, made all the more difficult since the problems concerned cannot be adequately solved except by those personally acquainted from inside with these religions. So the answers cannot but be long in coming.

### 1. Discovering the Kingdom

What is required today is nothing more and nothing less than a new theological understanding of the role that "non-Christian religions" — or better still, "the living faiths of mankind" — today play in the work of salvation. They and we must understand the saving activity of God in them. The deep and radical questions that are to be investigated, and lived, solved in this context, constitute a long-term programme for mission work in the Third World. Research and experimentation must go hand in hand with a deeply prayerful and contemplative 'living in' with these religions, before we can come to any definite pronouncement on this matter, which will be vital for the entire future of "mission work," of evangelization. Above all, the "non-Christian religions" will stand up as formidable challenges to any missionary who dares to proclaim "the infinite riches of Christ" to people who may be much more deeply steeped in the experience of God. All our Christian communities in the Third World will have to face the same challenge if they evangelize, and still more if they do not evangelize!

The Church has rediscovered the deep conviction, (in fact she had never lost it, though some of her theologians, perhaps many of them, did), that "the light that was shining into this world" illumines every man, every human being in the Third World, with its divine splendour. Today, with an openness of mind we can see the tremendous treasures God created in the countries of the Third World, the living religions, which reflect this divine light and are an everlasting glory to its Creator.

We may discover to our astonishment that Christ was (and still is) present in an eminent way in the Third World much before any Christian messenger reached there. What is more: Christ may have revealed himself in new dimensions, which may not be contained in the particular way we have understood him up to now in our Christian "theology," which is always a fragmentary representation of the infinite riches of Christ and of his Kingdom. It is one of the most thrilling thoughts that the mission of the Church in Asia tomorrow will be not only to bring

Christ and his Church to this immense continent, the cradle of mankind's history, but also to discover with astonishment and amazement and immense joy the presence of this hidden Christ in his own home continent. We will realize that these living faiths are not so much fortresses to be conquered, and perhaps razed to the ground, but rather tabernacles to be lovingly opened with the love of the Lord, to be beautified and perfected by his saving presence. We will also realize that for all men, and for all religions, Jesus is the Liberator from all that enslaved them. "The words of Christ are at once words of judgment and grace, of life and death, for it is only through putting to death that which is old, that we can come to the newness of life" (AG, 8).

If this should be true, it will have some far-reaching consequences for all our mission work. We shall have to go about with much less self-assurance, and shall have to listen much more to the promptings of the Spirit, which may show us wonders we have been overlooking up to now. Very probably the missions will have to pass through a *kenosis* similar to the one which was manifested in the baptism of the Lord, when the Redeemer of the world, ready to dispense his immense riches of truth and love, went to his precursor, John the Baptist, to empty himself completely, in order to be filled with the plenitude of the Spirit. It is almost impossible to imagine what richness may be awaiting a new type of Christianity that is no longer European and Western, but genuinely Asian, once this process is initiated and finally brought to completion.

## 2. The Necessary Kenosis

### a. The Unique Mediator

This will be a *kenosis*, a *metanoia*, for both the Church — that she may become the Kingdom, — and for other living faiths — that they may be perfected and beautified into the New Jerusalem. For other religions, the first and the essential change will be the acceptance of Christ. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things" (Heb 1, 1-2). This will be a *kenosis* asked of all living religions so that they may be offered to the Father, that they keep themselves open and allow themselves to be inspired by the message of Jesus; he belongs not only to Christians but to all men. His total dependence on God, his absolute trust in him, his unconditional commitment to the struggle of the people, his faith in human dignity, in equality, brotherhood, his conviction that God will prevail over all powers of evil, that love is stronger than hatred, are inspirations to all.

### b. Personal Redeemer

Another element will be the acceptance of a personal saviour. This implies a concept of personal sin. No one can become of the Kingdom unless he "loses his life." Christ the Redeemer came to give his life as a ransom for many. It is from our sinfulness that he freed us. It is this liberation from all what is worldly, this conversion from selfish values to the Beatitudes, which Christ the Liberator of sinful man offers to the Third World, which has yearned for the "real," for the Nirvana, a freedom from sin, social as well as personal. So *metanoia*, which is the beginning of the Kingdom, is not, first of all, a new outlook, like Gandhian philosophy or Marxist brotherhood. It is a liberation from sin. Without this liberation the Kingdom will be closed: So the mission of the Church is to give this awareness of our littleness, our wickedness before God and the assurance that Jesus through his sacrifice sanctified forever all his elect, individually, and in his Church.

### c. Lord of History

A third element in the *metanoia* of living faiths — we saw above how much they will contribute to the richness of the Kingdom — is the acceptance of worldly realities of time, of matter. There is a tendency among many of them to forget the meaning of history, of the values of temporal realities.

The African peoples know only two dimensions of time: a long past and a dynamic present. The future as such had no value in their thought. For them history did not move towards a point in the future but strove to re-establish the origins, to adapt the present to the past.<sup>16</sup> Asian religions remain trapped in the cycle of birth and rebirth. The neighbours of the people of Israel, the Babylonians and Canaanites, believed in gods that had fixed the world at the beginning for all time. They had no new horizon — towards which a people could journey. In contrast to all these, the God of Israel was a God of nomads who must ever continue their journey. Christ has once for all broken the barrier of death (Rom 6, 9), and through the breach has opened up for us an everlasting future.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, as a part of their *kenosis*, in their becoming the Kingdom, living faiths must accept Christ the Liberator as the Lord of History, Christ the Liberator of entire man, of society. Religions must, through this *metanoia*, provide both an intense union with God and the renewal of unjust human structures. Hence, God-experience in Jesus will have social implications. The Kingdom established by the preaching of the Word will have both the vertical dimension of sacramentality and the

horizontal one of liberation theology. The New Jerusalem will include a new social order grounded in a God-experience in Jesus.

This will also bring in the dimension of urgency. For Jesus, everything was the last hour. Hence, the importance of the decision, *now*. John the Baptist, the Pauline epistles stress the same idea.

How well this urgency suits the situation of the Church in the Third World! For the individual, it was always true. For society, it is evident today. The Kingdom of God must come now. It must be proclaimed by word and deed now. Every means of present technology, of social communication, of behavioural sciences must be pressed into service that in every way Christ, the Crucified Lord, Christ the Liberator may be proclaimed. The situation of the Third World brooks no delay. Only the coming of the Kingdom can save it.

#### IV. A. The Servant Church

##### 1. Like Her Lord

One more thing is certain: only a servant Church will be able to follow in the footsteps of her Servant Messiah. It has to be a fast and a radical *kenosis*, evidently a painful one. The great temptation of the Churches in the Third World will be the same as the temptation that accompanied the Lord's mission, namely, not to be a Servant Messiah but to achieve his mission in his own strength and power, the false notions of the Kingdom which the Lord condemned.

##### 2. The Church of the Poor

Another consequence is no less evident. If the Church is ever to fulfill this role of the Servant Messiah, it must be the Church of the Poor. Time and again this topic has come up in big congresses in various parts of the Third World, and yet the situation has not changed substantially even now. The Churches in the Third World continue to give the appearance of special association with the higher classes of society, of relying on the power of money and prestige — in spite of all the detachment from earthly things, real and imaginary, which we claim to practise.

A new orientation will mark the course of the Third World missions: the firm commitment to poverty as an essential ingredient for a credible proclamation of the Gospel, receiving everything from the Father.



Though we mention it only now, from the very first stages of our missionary witness and proclamation priority must be given to the presentation of the good news seen as "total liberation" of the socially and economically oppressed. This priority has to be proclaimed in the Third World, under the given circumstances, before time runs out for the missions and other forces take over. China, for example, whatever one may say against it, will last as a powerful model for rebuilding the Third World in the same fashion. We should have no illusions: religion will be severely tested in the Third World, and the test will be precisely the social question. No religion, be it Christianity, Islam or Hinduism, that is unable to create a world in which justice dwells, has a chance of seeing much of the third millenium.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Ongoing Renewal

Just as the public mission work of the Lord started with a clarion call for conversion, so also the new phase of the world mission starts with a similar call, which is expressed repeatedly, for instance, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 15: "The Church is the people of God immersed in the world and often tempted by idols and therefore always needs to hear the proclamation of the 'mighty works of God' ... In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelized, if she wishes ... to proclaim the Gospel. The Second Vatican Council recalled and the 1974 Synod vigorously took up again, this theme of the Church which is evangelized by constant conversion and renewal, in order to evangelize the world with credibility."

Some of the salient features which would act as the criteria of genuine conversion of the converted ones would be the realization that mission work is the overflow of the Christ-experience, and therefore can never exist without a deep concomitant contemplation and life of prayer. Mission work is not in the first place, as is mistakenly thought by some, a question of finances and personnel, but the overflow of the Christ-experience into others. This presupposes in the missionary a deep, genuine life of prayer.

#### B. The Church of Hope

The Church in the Third World has to be the Church of hope. In the midst of the complete absurdity that life can produce, the poverty, misery, oppression, injustice that exist in the world, the Christian believes that life has a meaning. He knows that salvation history is realized not only in the mighty works of God for his chosen people and in the recorded actions of Jesus so long ago. To believe in salvation history we

have also to involve ourselves in the activity and movement God inspires today. There is a feeling of worthlessness and hopelessness among many peoples in the Third World. To these people the Church has to be a sign of hope. We must believe that beyond all our horizons God awaits us with his promise of his Kingdom. For God is always the God of the Exodus and of the Resurrection; he is always ahead of us on our way, leading us out of the captivity, of the unfree conditions we have come to terms with, into the land of freedom.

The Church has to be a sign of this hope to the Third World. The Lord who rose from the dead lives. He will surely come as Redeemer, as Liberator. "Write these things. They are trustworthy and true" (Rev 21, 5).

### Conclusion

We have reached a decisive turning point in the mission history of the Third World; there is no return to the past, neither to the past mission theories, nor to the past mission methods, nor to the past mission goals.<sup>19</sup>

A new era has started, that of the Third World Mission, which grows harmoniously out of the past into a new future.

The tiny Third World Churches are no longer only "missions," the recipients of material help and of "mission personnel." They have now been entrusted by Divine Providence with a tremendous task to be and to proclaim the Kingdom of God in the Third World with great faith, and a still greater hope, even though their success in terms of the Church structures they will be able to put up may be minimal. Even so, the Third World Churches are called upon to proclaim God's Kingdom not only to the Third World but far beyond to the whole world.

Our attitude should not be one of fear and despair but of immense expectation. The Lord of history will manifest his mighty deeds in this world of ours.

## Footnotes:

- 1 Walbert Buhlmann, O.F.M.Cap., *The Coming of the Third Church* (Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1976), p.3. The contents of this book have been used also elsewhere in this first part.
- 2 Samuel Rayan, S.J., "Asian Theological Conference, A Reflex of it Dynamics," *Vidyayoti* (1979), pp.246-260.
- 3 Richard V. De Smet, "Advances in Christian Muslim Dialogue, Service and Salvation," *Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelization* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1973), pp.521-529.
- 4 *Herder Korrespondenz*, 1972, pp.119-122.
- 5 Buhlmann, *op.cit.*, p.33.
- 6 Julio R. Cardinal Rosales, "On Youth and the Laity," *His Gospel to Our Peoples, Book III — Rome* (Manila, 1977), p.79.
- 7 Cf. the survey of recent discussion in Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963); 13-157; and Goesta Lundstrem, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963).
- 8 N. Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (London: SCM, 1977), pp.33-34.
- 9 On Davidic Messianism, cf. E. Jenni, art. "Messiah, Jewish," *Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible, III* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 360-64; and S. Mowinkel, *He that Cometh* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), pp.155-186.
- 10 E. Wuerthwein, "Repentance and Conversion in the Old Testament," Ed. by G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament IV* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 980-989.
- 11 Kittel, *op.cit.*, *Basileia*.
- 12 "Asia's Search for Full Humanity," *Dialogue*, VI (1979), nn. 1-2.
- 13 Patrick D'Souza, "Non-institutional Christian," *His Gospel to Our Peoples*, pp.129-131.
- 14 Working paper for the Synod of Bishops, 1974, I, 10, of *His Gospel to Our Peoples*, p. 132, note.
- 15 *FABC Paper No. 3* (Hong Kong, 1977), pp.2-3.
- 16 J.S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (Oxford, 1971), pp.23f.
- 17 J. Danielou, *Vom Heil der Volker* (Frankfurt, 1952), pp.82-103.

18 E. Zeitler, S.V.D., "The Signs of the Times for the Religious in Asia," Keynote Address for the Asian Conference of Major Superiors, (Pune, 1978), p.26.

19 E. Zeitler, S.V.D., "The Future of Missions," (Pune, 1978), p.22.

#### Abbreviations

AG — *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church.

LG — *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

EN — *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI.

## II. THE MESSAGE OF THE DELEGATES OF THE INTERNATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS

1. The joyous and grateful celebration of the 400th anniversary of the foundation of the diocese of Manila has brought us together — bishops, priests, religious men and women, representatives of the laity from some forty countries and every continent in the world in an International Congress on Mission co-sponsored by the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and by the Pontifical Mission-Aid Societies of the Philippines.

2. It was fitting that our gathering together began as an act of thanksgiving, for the first and most spontaneous sentiment that arises in our hearts is truly an act of gratitude to the merciful love of the Father in Jesus Christ His Son. For He has called us and our peoples into His marvelous light, and given us the good news that is His Gospel and the gift, beyond all pricing, of our Faith, of baptism and fellowship in the community of the Church. He has given us the gift of His Spirit poured out into our hearts, the Spirit through whom we call Him Father, the Spirit through whom we call each other — of whatever race and color and nation, — brother and sister beloved in His Son, our Brother Jesus Christ.

3. We raise an act of gratitude to God for all those who have brought the Gospel, and with dedication and self-sacrifice planted and nurtured the Church not only in Manila and in this Christian country, but also throughout Asia, — from the very time of the Apostles, when Christian faith first came to this continent. We recall with grateful reverence the scores of Asian martyrs whose blood has watered the faith that we treasure and proclaim today.

4. Several assemblies of our Asian Bishops and their collaborators have preceded ours, and many of them have situated the work of

evangelization in this continent within the context of this vast and varied, this restless and swiftly changing world of nearly two-and-a-half billion people, nearly two-thirds of all mankind. Like them we have been deeply moved by a vision of a new world being born, of millions of men and women in search of new social structures and relationships, of a renewed humanity.

We discern a common search, every year more tangible and increasingly more articulate, for light in the midst of so much confusion and groping, for life in the midst of so much suffering, conflict and death, for love in an age of growing violence, oppression and inhumanity. In a sense this search is a search of many centuries, even of millennia, but no one will deny that in breadth, restlessness and urgency it is indeed new, and that it defines the turbulent history of our time.

5. The ancient religions and religious traditions of this part of the world, which in the past have shaped the histories of our peoples, and which are written into the very fabric of our cultures, our character, our very humanity, have reawakened in a remarkable manner in the last few decades. They, too, are joined in this effort to seek a better way and to create a new world of the future for our peoples.

6. We Christians and the Church with us are part of this common search. In this Congress we have realized anew how great a challenge this moment of history places before the Gospel and the Church. We have heard the imperatives it addresses to all of us who, in all unworthiness, have yet been chosen to tell the story of Jesus, to speak His message before our brothers and sisters, and as His people to carry His Spirit and live His life in our own, to bear His light so that by it we ourselves and others may come to the Truth and the fullness of life all men seek.

7. Throughout Asia a profound religious sense still remains and many retain and cherish religious values, which greatly influence their lives. But many too, have begun to turn away from religions, partly because of the inroads of materialism and secularism, partly, too, because they have been disillusioned by men of religion. In some similar way many have turned away, too, from ideologies and political systems because they have been betrayed by leaders who have failed them, by promises not kept and hopes which have not been fulfilled.

8. Many in our Asian countries have in diverse ways met Christ and His Gospel and have been deeply attracted by them. With sorrow we confess that many have not been equally drawn to the Church because so

often they did not see in us, in our institutions and in our lives the image and the realization of the Good News we proclaim. Have we not too frequently made His message mere words and doctrines, His deeds mere precepts and practices, His life merely a complex of rites and institutions?

9. We believe that what our peoples are seeking they will find in Jesus and His Gospel. This conviction is born from our own experience of faith, hope and love. And yet somehow we have not been able to find ways to release this power of the Gospel, so that it can truly reach and move the minds and hearts of multitudes of our Asian peoples. We have not spoken His Word and lived out His deeds in such a way that these are heard and seen as bearing the promises and hopes of the future of mankind.

10. Thus the communities of Christian faith in Asia are challenged to an ever renewed conversion to God's Word, and (as the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* tells us) to a constant re-evangelization of themselves (EN, 15). They are ever summoned to a deepening of faith and life in the experience of the power of the Spirit. They must respond creatively to the imperatives of a deeper and more extensive inculturation of the Christian life, so that our Asian peoples may find the Christian existence and message truly transparent to Jesus and His Gospel, genuinely vibrant with His life.

11. We do not, of course, now face these challenges and try to respond to them for the first time. Already, we believe, the Spirit has been at work among the faithful, quickening their response. Already we discern, with wonder and gratitude, some signs of this renewal even now taking place in our local churches.

12. There is today an undeniable thirst and hunger for prayer and contemplation. We see this all around us, but especially among the laity, especially among the young. Surely this is a sign of the presence and action of the Spirit. There is the longing to hear and reflect on the Word of God, especially with others in a community of prayer. There is the eucharistic assembly increasingly celebrated and experienced as truly the heart of the Christian's pilgrimage through life. There is the desire in many also for greater simplicity of life and even the experience of poverty as a following of Jesus, and as solidarity with the suffering and powerless poor. There is the increased commitment to tasks and struggles for justice and human rights. There is, in some countries, the rapid multiplication of "grassroots ecclesial communities," so often alive with

the freshness and enthusiasm of early Christian times. In these communities an experience of genuine Christian fellowship and love is often found, as well as the emergence of diverse charisms and ministries. These enable the laity to participate ever more actively in every phase of ecclesial life. There are the new missionary initiatives among the former "mission churches," i.e., among priests and religious, and — most encouraging of all — among the laity.

13. It is our belief, confirmed by the exchanges of this Congress, that with God's grace this re-evangelization and renewal of our local churches is a promise and earnest of a new age of mission. Through it the Holy Spirit, we are convinced, is readying them *for a true renewal of mission in Asia and throughout the world.*

14. What is the newness of this "new age of mission"? First, the realization in practice that "mission" is no longer, and can no longer be, a one-way movement from the "older churches" to the "younger churches," from the churches of the old Christendom to the churches in the colonial lands. Now — as Vatican II already affirmed with all clarity and force — every local church *is* and cannot be but missionary. Every local church is "sent" by Christ and the Father to bring the Gospel to its surrounding milieu, and to bear it also into all the world. For every local church this is a *primary task*. Hence we are moving beyond both the vocabulary and the idea of "sending churches" and "receiving churches," for as living communities of the one Church of Jesus Christ, every local church must be a sending church, and every local church (because it is not on earth ever a total realization of the Church) must also be a receiving church. Every local church is responsible for its mission, and coresponsible for the mission of all its sister churches. Every local church, according to its possibilities, must share whatever its gifts are, for the needs of other churches, for mission throughout mankind, for the life of the world.

15. Once again, what is the newness of this "new age of mission"? We believe that the Spirit of the Lord calls each people and each culture to its own fresh and creative response to the Gospel. Each local church has its own vocation in the one history of salvation, in the one Church of Christ. In each local church each people's history, each people's culture, meanings and values, each people's traditions are taken up, not diminished nor destroyed, but celebrated and renewed, purified if need be, and fulfilled (as the Second Vatican Council teaches in *Ad Gentes*) in the life of the Spirit.

16. In many Christian communities in our midst something of this "original vocation to the Gospel" so often emerges. We may discern how, in the Spirit, they become manifestations of the joyousness, freedom and purity that the grace of Christ brings to full flowering within the heart of every people, race and nation. This actualization of the unique vocations of peoples within the catholic unity we cannot but rejoice in.

17. It is then with an immense joy and hope, despite what seems like the gathering darkness of our time, that we foresee the dawning of this "new age of mission." We do this, not in any spirit of triumphalism or vain-glory. Rather we believe in the perennial youthfulness the Spirit gives to the Church. For by His action and charisms He constantly quickens God's holy people to new life and new initiatives. Our task is to follow where He leads us, to discern His guidance amidst the many movements of our age, and to second it with all the courage and fidelity at our command.

18. This task of renewal of our local churches in the Gospel and by the power of the Spirit, we must admit, still has a long way to traverse. The discussions of this Congress have made us see with even greater evidence how much remains to be done in all the crucial areas of evangelization we tried to take up in our reflection. In our consensus papers we have developed this agenda more fully.

19. It suffices for the present to indicate here the continued building up of the local church as the focus of the task of evangelization today, with dialogue as its essential mode, through a more resolute, more creative and yet truly discerning and responsible inculturation, through inter-religious dialogue undertaken in all seriousness, through solidarity and sharing with the poor and the advocacy of human rights, through the creation of "grassroots ecclesial communities" with structures of genuine coresponsibility and ministries of charism and service, through the fostering of evangelizing education in schools and by non-formal education modes, and through an adequate media ministry.

20. A more thoroughgoing renewal is called for in catechesis, in the knowledge and study of the Scriptures, in our methods of formation for ministries, in the fostering of family life within contemporary society, in forms and processes of our institutional structures, in the lifestyle of our clergy and other leaders, in the hierarchy of values we set for ourselves and our communities, and the like.



21. This congress has reawakened our awareness of what mission today and in the future, especially in Asia, demands of us. It has shown us more clearly what ongoing efforts and labors it will ask of us for many years to come. For

we have reached a decisive turning point in the mission history of the Third World. There is no return to the past, neither to the past mission theories, nor to the past mission methods, nor to the past mission goals.

We commit ourselves to these tasks of re-evangelization and renewal, and to the new tasks of mission which the future demands of us, with a resoluteness born of our confidence in the promise of Jesus who told us that He would be with us all days until the end of time.

22. The exchanges of this assembly have impressed on us how small we are in number and influence in the world of Asia and throughout the globe. We have seen how inadequate we are for the mission to which Christ sends us anew today. The meager material — even the human — resources we have, tempt us to hesitation and fear. And yet we do not lose heart or hope, because we have known in our own lives that when we are weakest, and must rely wholly on the power of the Spirit, there the greatest strength is given to us. For the power of the Lord is made manifest in human weakness, and we know, as Paul did, that it is when we are weak that we are strong, with the power and strength of the Lord.

23. We conclude this Congress on Mission with the conferral of mission mandate and cross to seventy Filipino men and women who will from this country bear the Word of the Lord to almost every part of the earth. Gathered around the Special Envoy of our Holy Father, officiating at this rite, we joyfully reaffirm our bonds of communion with the Roman Pontiff, Pope John Paul II. From this assembly we send our greetings to him and to the bishops, priests, religious and laity in all our sister churches, in Asia and all the other continents of the world.

24. We wish to turn to our parish priests and parishes which have supported the work of mission through the years, to catechists on whom so much of the work of evangelization depends, and in a special way to the youth whom today above all the Lord summons to fields “white already for the harvest.”

25. We address ourselves, too, to the religious men and women who have rendered such outstanding service in the tasks of mission. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* has spoken of the religious life itself as a privileged means for

effective evangelization; with deep gratitude for the past we seek to affirm our support.

26. We thank our brothers and sisters in other Christian churches who have carried out in times past and up to today such great missionary labors. We are grateful for the participation of their observers and pray for the increase of collaborative efforts and common Christian witness to the world.

27. To our brothers and sisters of the "living faiths of Asia" we send, in the heart of Christ, a special message of brotherhood and peace. Joined with them in the common quests for truth and freedom, justice and love for our peoples, we pray that the coming decade may be one of greater mutual understanding, forgiveness, collaboration and oneness.

28. We speak again to our fellow Christians in the widening Asian "Church of silence," as well as all those who suffer under totalitarian regimes of every kind. We have noted with sadness the absence of those whom we expected to be with us at this assembly. We know of the steadfastness of their faith, the courage of their suffering, the fidelity of their witness. We have kept them in our hearts and in our prayers during this Congress and reach out to them in solidarity and with shared hope and trust in the Lord.

29. We wish to call to the urgent attention of our fellow Christians, as well as to that of all governments and of all people of good will and compassion, the desperate plight and the terrible suffering of hundreds of thousands of refugees from different countries, but especially those from Indochina, now in camps or on the high seas or seeking to cross frontiers. We urge on all to show them the concern, acceptance and welcome that they so greatly need as being in a special way the poor and the powerless in our midst. We ask the leaders of nations to do all they can to come to their relief and assistance. And we call on our fellow-Christians in Asia and other parts of the world to translate into deeds on their behalf the many statements of our concern for the poor and the suffering, the deprived and oppressed of the earth.

30. We close this Congress, which has been for all of us a source of joy and grace, on the eve of the Feast of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, patroness of this archdiocese and patroness of this entire land. We recall with gratitude the role she has played in the evangelization of this Christian people, and in the faith and devotion that is theirs today: in almost every home her image is found, in almost every corner of this na-

tion her shrines are placed. We turn to her during this Advent season, asking her to pray that the good news her Son brought to the world may reach more and more hearts, and that the fulfilment of His prayer that all men may be one might be more fully realized in our time.

And as we end we pray,

Our Father in heaven,  
do not look upon our unworthiness  
but hear, speaking in us and through us,  
in the longings of our peoples,  
the prayer of your Son  
that all men may be one  
In You,  
and in the coming of Your Kingdom. Amen.

Mary, Queen of the Apostles,  
pray for us to your Son.  
Come, Lord Jesus, come!

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