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THE CHURCH, THE REIGN OF GOD, AND THE "OTHERS"

ESSAYS IN A CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

I. THE CHURCH, THE REIGN OF GOD, AND THE "OTHERS"

by Jacques Dupuis

A certain traditional type of theological vocabulary perpetuates expressions which no longer correspond to present theological understanding. If care is not taken, there is a risk of such expressions maintaining artificial barriers between Christians and "others," which more careful theological language would have helped to eliminate. This is why, in the very title of the present essay, the term used is not "non-Christians," but "others." For the first of these terms has the disadvantage of defining the others by what they are not — namely, Christians; what is even more serious, it defines them with reference to what we are ourselves, thus placing the Christian community at the center of theological discourse as an obligatory point of reference.

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It would be easy to make a list of the theological terms which fall more or less under accusation. A few examples will be sufficient. Some of these terms refer to the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and thus the dialogue between Jews and Christians. The Church is said to be "the new people of God." This would imply that it takes the place of the former people of God, Israel. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (LG) does not itself escape from this danger when it speaks of the Church as the "new people of God," with which God has made a "new covenant" (LG 9). Similarly, the International Theological Commission, in its *Select Themes of Ecclesiology* (1985), gives to the second chapter the title "The Church as the 'New People of God'."[1] Referring to LG 9, the document states: "The new people of God presents herself as a 'community of faith, hope and charity' (LG 8), whose source is the Eucharist (LG 3,7)."[2] Now, whereas the term "new convenant" is biblical (Jer 31:31-34; 2Cor 3:6; Heb 9;15; 12:14), even where the New Testament describes the Church as the "People of God" (1Pet 2:9-10), it does not qualify it as the "new people." Recent exegesis, for its part, rightly reacts against an abuse of language according to which the coming of the Church would exclude Israel from the people of God. This exegesis has shown that it is not here a question of the substitution of one people of God for another, but rather of the expansion of the unique people of God beyond its own limitations by the extension to the nations of the Church which now belongs to it.[3]

The distinction commonly made between the Old and the New Testaments would call for similar remarks. It also runs the risk of leading one to think that the New is a substitute for the Old, just as the "New Covenant" established by God in Jesus Christ would abolish that which he had made of yore with Israel under Moses, and which is qualified as "Old." Now, it is obvious that the New Testament exists and can only be thought of in relation to the other. No one has expressed better than St. Augustine the reciprocal bond uniting them: "*Novum in Vetere latet*; *Vetus in Novo patet*." The New Testament neither replaces nor abolishes the one which precedes it. This is why exegetes today prefer to refer to them respectively as the "first" and the "second." Moreover, Paul himself bears witness that the Mosaic Covenant has not been abolished by that which God established in Jesus Christ. Paul, it is true, did not find a definite answer to the question of the relationship between Israel and the Church. However, he expresses his firm conviction with regard to the permanent nature of God's election and gift with regard to the Israelites; "To them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rom 9:4-5). To the question

"Has God rejected his people?" (Rom 11:1), Paul replies, "By no means!" (Rom 11:1); and he explains "For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).[4] Accordingly, several recent documents of the magisterium state with a certain insistence that the Mosaic Covenant remains valid and efficacious even though God has established a "New Covenant" in Jesus Christ; and in a parallel fashion the "first" Testament maintains its validity in relation to the New.[5] Such clarifications are not without a profound effect on Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Now in traditional theological vocabulary there exist expressions which have a negative effect on the relations between Christianity and other religious traditions, even more harmful than their effect on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Such is the case with the term "People of God" already mentioned. Is it sufficient to include under the same term, though in different ways, the Jewish people and the Church, while continuing to exclude all "others"? Without denying the special choice God made of the people of Israel, which in Jesus Christ is extended and fulfilled in the Church, can the other peoples be considered as excluded from divine election? Or should one say rather that divine choice extends, in one way or another to all peoples, and thus affirm that all are "chosen peoples"?[6] It has often been observed — and with justification — that the introduction into the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* of Chapter II on the People of God marked the transition point between the pyramidical pre-conciliar ecclesiology and the ecclesiology of the Council which was concentric or circular. There is less sensitivity to the exclusivism or triumphalism which the ecclesiology of the People of God may convey with regard to relations between Christianity and other religious traditions. Vatican II does not provide a remedy against this danger. Nowhere does the Council state formally that the peoples of other religious traditions are the object of a divine election, and that therefore they also are "chosen peoples," even though the Council Fathers recognized that the Spirit of God is present and at work in the persons constituting these peoples and in their traditions. "This impossible People of God," said a theologian familiar with interreligious dialogue.[7]

In the context of the theology of religions and of dialogue, the term "Reign of God" in traditional theology, even of recent date, also raises problems. Is it limited to the hope of Israel and, in its historical realization in the world, to Christianity and to the Church? Are the "others" excluded from it? Or, on the contrary, are they full members, though remaining outside of the Church? Or again do they belong to it "in some way," which could be qualified as implicit or invisible? In short, are Christianity and the Church to be identified with the Reign

of God, insofar as it is present in the world and in history? And what is to be said about the Reign of God in the stage of its eschatological fulfilment beyond history? How is it related to the Church and to the "others"? Do Christians and "others" belong equally to the fulfilled Reign of God?

There are no unanimous answers to these different questions. Without any doubt the theology of the Reign of God developed during the pre-conciliar period. The Second Vatican Council was able to draw benefit from this contribution. It did not, however, resolve all the questions. The intention here is to show the development of the theology of the Reign of God, from the pre-conciliar magisterium to the post-conciliar magisterium.

I. A Survey of Recent History

The time is not far gone when the theology of the Reign of God was characterized by a double identification. On the one hand, the Church was identified quite simply with the Reign of God; on the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church was well and truly thought to be identical with the Church itself. It is well known that the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943) of Pope Pius XII affirmed this second identification in no uncertain terms. The Pope wrote: "If we would define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ — which is the holy, catholic, apostolic, Roman Church — we shall find no expression more noble, more sublime or more divine than the phrase which calls it 'the mystical Body of Jesus Christ'."[8] The Mystical Body of Christ, the mystery of the Church, was thus identified with the Roman Catholic Church. As for the identification of the Church with the Reign of God, this was commonly affirmed or presupposed by theologians at a time when ecclesiology was not overly concerned with distinctions which would be called for by further studies in eschatology. The result was a double identification between the Reign of God and the Church, on the one hand, and between the Church and the Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand. A single example will be sufficient. In his treatise *De Ecclesia Christi*, T. Zappalena wrote a few years before Vatican II: "The whole of ecclesiology could be summarized and put in the form of a rectangle: the Reign of God = the Church of Christ = the Roman Catholic Church = the Mystical Body of Christ on earth."[9]

It is known that the schema on the Church proposed to the Second Vatican Council by the preparatory commission, referring to the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, maintained the strict identification between the mystery of the Church and the Roman Catholic Church.[10] The schema having been rejected by the Council Fathers, the document

went through several drafts on this particular point. It is not necessary to describe the process here.[11] The discussions during the Council and the successive amendments to the document, however, led Vatican II to distance itself quite clearly from the identification of the mystery of the Church with the Roman Catholic Church. This non-identification comes out very clearly in the formula: *Haec Ecclesia . . . . subsistit in Ecclesia catholica* (LG 8). In spite of the discussions which have arisen over the *subsistit in*, it appears from the Acts of the Council that it was chosen as a weakened version in order to break with the simple identification.[12] The new formula allowed for recognition in the other Christian Churches of the existence of "many elements of sanctification and of truth" (LG 8), and so of real aspects of the mystery of the Church. The mystery is present, without any doubt, in the Catholic Church, but it is also present elsewhere.[13]

What about the identification, made by traditional theology, of the Reign of God with the Church? Did Vatican II adopt this position, or did it, on account of a renewed eschatology, take a certain distance with regard to it? Care must be taken not to answer these questions in an oversimplified way. Various distinctions are called for.

1. The Reign of God and the Church according to Vatican II

Recent theology has rediscovered the Reign of God as an eschatological reality. As a result it has now become essential to distinguish between the Reign of God in its eschatological fullness and the Reign of God as it is present in history, that is, between the "already" and the "not yet." God has instituted his Kingdom in the world and in history in Jesus Christ. It could be said that he instituted it in two stages. For, in fact, the Reign of God is already instituted through the earthly life of Jesus, through his words and deeds; it has, however, been fully instituted through the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. But the Reign of God instituted in history in Jesus Christ must develop to eschatological fullness at the end of time. So while Israel's eschatological expectation was entirely directed towards a definite but indeterminate future, in Christian faith this expectation follows henceforth a two-stage rhythm: the "already" of the Reign of God in history, and the "not yet" of its fulfillment at the end of time[14]. This is a datum commonly accepted in recent eschatology, even if different theories accentuate either one or the other aspect[15].

The Second Vatican Council, of course, took over this by now indispensable distinction. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, where it treats of the establishment by God in Jesus Christ of the Reign of God in history, specifies that this Reign is progressing towards its

fulfillment at the end of time (LG 5). It speaks clearly of "the kingdom of God which has been begun by God on earth and which must be further extended until it is brought to perfection by him at the end of time . . ." (LG 9). This does not, however, supply the answer to all the questions. It can still be asked whether Vatican II identified or on the contrary distinguished between the Reign of God and the Church. The question can be put first of all regarding the Reign of God in history: Is it to be identified with the pilgrim Church, or does it represent a larger reality which extends beyond the boundaries of the Church? The question then arises regarding the Reign of God in its final eschatological stage: is this to be identified with the Church in its eschatological fulfillment, or does it, once again, extend to a larger reality which would include the Church?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary to analyse closely the texts of the Council and to align the affirmations contained in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. The Council recalls, first of all, that to carry out the will of the Father "Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven on earth" (LG 3). More precisely, the birth of the Church coincides with the coming of the Reign of God in Jesus Christ. In fact, the Council affirms: "the Lord Jesus inaugurated the Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the kingdom of God . . ." (LG 5). This Kingdom of God "shone out before men in the word, in the works and in the presence of Christ" (LG 5). It is made manifest in the word of Jesus: to listen to his word is to receive the Reign itself (LG 5). It is made manifest in his works: the miracles of Jesus "also demonstrate that the Kingdom has already come on earth" (LG 5). It is made manifest "above all" "in the person of Christ himself, Son of God and Son of Man" (LG 5).

What then, according to the Council, is the relationship between the Reign of God instituted in Jesus Christ and the Church present in history? The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* does indeed seem to identify the two. In fact, when it speaks of the mission which the Church has received to proclaim the Reign of Christ and of God, and of establishing it among all peoples, the Council affirms that the Church "is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom" (*huiusque Regni in terris germen et initium constituit*) (LG 5). It then adds: "While she slowly grows to maturity, the Church longs for the completed kingdom . . ." (ibid.). This would seem to identify the "seed" or the "beginning" of the Reign of God with the pilgrim Church, and to understand the progress of the Reign towards its final completion in terms of the passage of the Church on earth to the Church in heaven. The Constitution confirms this when, with regard to the destiny of the "messianic people," i.e., the pilgrim Church it

affirms: "Its destiny is the kingdom of God which has been begun by God himself on earth and which must be further extended until it is brought to perfection by him" (LG 9). Here also the "extension" of the Reign which tends towards its final completion seems to be identified with that of the Church in progress towards its perfection. It will be noted too that in Chapter VII on "The Eschatological Character of the Pilgrim Church and its Union with the Church in Heaven," the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* speaks of "perfection" (LG 48) of the Church in heavenly glory without any reference to the theme of the fulfillment of the Reign of God. This would be a further indication that the completion of one coincides with the completion of the other[16].

How is one, then, to understand that statement that "the Church — that is, the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery (*Ecclesia, seu Regnum Christi iam praesens in mysterio*) — grows visibly through the power of God in the world" (LG 3)? Here again, the Church on earth does seem to be identified with the Reign of God present in the world. If this presence is qualified as "mysterious," it is insofar as the Reign — or the Church which is identified with it — although present in the world, must still grow to its eschatological fullness. It would be forcing the intention of the Council to interpret *in mysterio* to mean a "mysteric" or sacramental presence in the Church on earth of the reality of the Reign of God at work in the world and in history, but going beyond the boundaries of the Church, even if the latter is, in a privileged way, the sacrament of the Reign. It will be necessary to come back to this interpretation, which is possible but which goes beyond the intention of the Council. For the moment, it would seem right to conclude that in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* the Church and the Reign of God are still identified, both in their historical realization and in their eschatological fulfillment.

2. The Reign of God and the Church according to the International Theological Commission

In 1985 the International Theological Commission published a document entitled "Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council."[17] Chapter X is entitled "The Eschatological Character of the Church: Kingdom and Church"[18] It was to be expected that the document would take up again the distinction made by the Council between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. It does in fact insist on it, referring to the Council: "To limit the Church to her purely earthly and visible dimension is unthinkable." The document then explains that the goal to which the Holy Spirit impels the Church on earth — that is, the heavenly Church united with her Spouse, Christ —

"determines at the deepest level the life of the pilgrim Church"; "it is part of the Church's mystery that this goal is already secretly present in the pilgrim Church." In fact, "in all her different stages of life the Church is essentially one: this is true whether we think of the Church's prefiguration in creation, her preparation in the Old Testament, her constitution in these, the last times, her manifestation by the Holy Spirit, or, lastly, her fulfillment in glory at the end of the ages (cf. LG2).

Having established the relationship — both of distinction and unity — between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven, the document studies the relationship between the Church and the Reign. It notes that the Council did not deal explicitly with this question, although it is possible, by comparing different texts of *Lumen Gentium*, to outline the Council's teaching on this matter. It also warns against "accentuating somewhat unilaterally the eschatological aspect of the Kingdom and the historical aspect of the Church" (p.302).

The Theological Commission then observes that on examining the texts of the Council, "one finds no difference between Church and Kingdom" with regard to the final consummation, despite the ambiguity of some of the expressions used: "It is clear that in the Council's teaching there is no difference, so far as eschatological reality is concerned, between the final realization of the Church (as *consummata*) and of the Kingdom (as *consummatum*)" (p.302). What about their relationship in the present time? The Commission remarks that the relation is "subtle." According to the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (no.5). "In their beginnings, the destinies of the Church and the Kingdom seem inseparable . . . . The origins of the Church and the advent of the Kingdom of God are presented here in perfect synchronicity" (p.302). The same applies to their growth. For to receive the Kingdom through listening in faith to the word of Christ is equivalent to belonging to the Church. "And so one can use the same terms for describing the growth both of Kingdom and of Church. It is, in fact, in the growth of the Church that the Council discerns the growth of the Kingdom" (p.302). The two, in fact, coincide. As the Council has said, the pilgrim Church is "the Kingdom of God already mysteriously present" (LG 3); its growth is nothing other than the progressive growth, through its mission, of the Kingdom of Christ and of God of which she is "on earth, the seed and the beginning" (LG 5). According to the document, "this evocation of the Church as 'seed' and 'beginning' of the Kingdom expresses their simultaneous unity and difference" (p.303). So it concludes: "Belonging to the Kingdom cannot not be belonging — at least implicitly — to the Church" (p.303).

Thus, the unity, and the difference, between the Church and the

Kingdom seem to be understood as the relation between the seed and the plant, between the beginning and the end, between the pilgrim Church, which is the Kingdom in its becoming, and the Church in heaven, which represents the Kingdom in its fulfillment. It is from this perspective that the Theological Commission asks whether, and to what extent, one can describe the Church as "the sacrament of the Kingdom," according to the formula proposed by some theologians. The use of the expression is legitimate, it replies, but on certain conditions of which the following are the main ones:

2. The expression's aim is to relate, on the one hand, the Kingdom, understood in the plenary sense of its final realization, with, on the other hand, the Church in its 'wayfaring' aspect.

3. The term "sacrament" here is understood in its full sense of *jam presens in mysterio* (cf. LG 3), where the reality present in the sacrament (the pilgrim Church) is the Kingdom itself.

4. The Church is not a mere sign (*sacramentum tantum*) but a sign in which the reality signified is present (*res et sacramentum*) as the reality of the Kingdom (pp.303-304).

It would seem that one must conclude that, in keeping to the teaching of the Council, the Theological Commission, while distinguishing clearly between history and eschatology, affirms that at both levels Kingdom and Church coincide.[19]

3. The Reign of God and the Church in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*

The final report of the extraordinary Synod on the Second Vatican Council did not consider the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God.[20] The theme is treated in a rather new fashion by the encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) on the permanent validity of the missionary mandate.[21] The second chapter of the encyclical deals with "The Kingdom of God." The structure of the chapter is indicated clearly right from the beginning: it treats of the Reign of God "prepared for in the Old Testament, brought about by Christ and in Christ, and proclaimed to all peoples by the Church, which works and prays for its perfect and definitive realization" (n.12).

The encyclical shows that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom is made present: "The proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom are the purpose of his mission . . . But that is not all. Jesus himself is the 'Good News' . . . the secret of the effectiveness of his actions lies in

his total identification with the message he announces: he proclaims the 'Good News' not just by what he says or does, but by what he is" (n. 13). Thus, the ministry of Jesus contains something new which is of primordial importance in relation to the Reign of God: "The eschatalogical reality is not relegated to a remote 'end of the world,' but is already close and at work in our midst. The Kingdom of God is at hand" (n. 13). Jesus gradually reveals the "characteristics and demands" of this Kingdom. It is destined for all mankind: "To emphasize this fact, Jesus drew especially near to those on the margins of society, and showed them special favor . . ." "The liberation and salvation brought by the Kingdom of God come to the human person both in his physical and spiritual dimensions. Two gestures are characteristic of Jesus' mission: healing and forgiving" (n. 14). "The Kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another." "The Kingdom's nature, therefore, is one of communion among all human beings — with one another and with God" (n. 15). There follows a description of the Kingdom of God, realized in Jesus Christ, which because of its importance is given here in full:

> The Kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the Kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness (n. 15).

Already present in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is accomplished and proclaimed in the person of the Risen One. "By raising Jesus from the dead, God . . . has definitively inaugurated his Kingdom . . . . The preaching of the early Church was centered on the proclamation of Jesus Christ, with whom the Kingdom was identified" (n. 16).

The relationship between Christ and the Reign of God thus appears clearly. The encyclical insists on this, in opposition to a "Kingdom-centered" perspective conveyed by a certain type of theology of religions which passes over this relationship in silence, wishing to substitute a theocentric view of the Reign of God for the traditional christocentric understanding. According to this view, Christians and others are called to build together the Kingdom of God in history by instilling into it the "Kingdom values" proclaimed by Jesus. This perception is doubtlessly in part correct — and it will be necessary to return to it later — but it is quite incomplete insofar as it

disregards the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Reign of God. In so doing, it also weakens the relationship between the Church and the Reign. It "ends up either leaving very little room for the Church or undervaluing the Church in reaction to a presumed 'ecclesiocentrism' of the past," and perceives the Church only as "a sign, for that matter, a sign not without ambiguity" (n. 17).

"This is not the Kingdom as we know it from revelation. The Kingdom cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church" (n. 18). To detach it from Christ is to change its meaning and run the risk of transforming it into a purely human or ideological goal; it would also be to change Christ's identity. On the other hand, to wish to disconnect it from the Church would be to lessen the importance of the Church and of the Church's mission. There follows an important passage on the relationship between Kingdom and the Church:

> It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both. Christ endowed the Church, his Body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in her, enlivens her with his gifts and charisms, sanctifies, guides and constantly renews her (LG 4). The result is a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role; hence the Church's special connection with the Kingdom of God and of Christ, which she has "the mission of announcing and inaugurating among all peoples"(LG 5) (18).

The Church is, then, as the encyclical goes on to explain, "effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom." She fulfills this "especially through her preaching which is a call to conversion;" she fulfills it also by establishing communities and founding particular Churches; she achieves it, furthermore, by spreading throughout the world "Gospel values which are an expression of the Kingdom and which help people to accept God's plan" (n. 20). Then the encyclical adds:

> It is true that the inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live "Gospel values" and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf.Jn 3:8). But it must immediately be added that this temporal dimension of the Kingdom remains incomplete unless

it is related to the Kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fullness (cf. EN 34) (n. 20).

Finally, chapter II of the encyclical explains the function of the Church in relation to the eschatalogical Reign: "The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all humankind, and her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message. She is a dynamic force in humankind's journey towards the eschatological Kingdom, and is the sign and promoter of Gospel values" (n. 20).

These texts are decisive for our present concern. They contain an explicit recognition that the Reign of God in its historical reality extends beyond the Church, to the whole of humankind (why the apparent restriction "can also be found"?), that it is present where Gospel values are at work and where people are open to the action of the Spirit. They affirm, moreover, that the Kingdom in its historical dimension (why "present in the Church," since it has just been said that it extends beyond her?) remains oriented towards its eschatological fullness, and that the Church is in the world at the service of the Reign throughout history. Thus, while maintaining the unity, a distinction is made between, on the one hand, the Reign in time and its eschatological dimension, and, on the other hand, between the Reign and the Church.[22]

II. The Reign of God And the "Others"

The recognition that the Reign of God in history is not restricted to the dimensions of the Church but extends beyond them to the world is not without interest and importance for a Catholic theology of religions. The Second Vatican Council has recognized the presence and action of the Spirit in the world and among members of other religious traditions. It also spoke about the "seeds of the Word" among the Nations.[23] As regards the Reign of God, while distinguishing between the historical and eschatological aspects, it continued to identify the Reign in time with the Church. If our analysis is correct, the encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* is the first document of the Roman magisterium to distinguish clearly, while keeping them united, between the Church and the Reign of God in their pilgrimage through history: the Reign present in the world is a reality which is broader than the Church; it extends beyond its boundaries and includes — even if the modalities may differ — not only the members of the Church but also the "others."

What the recent encyclical on the Church's missionary mandate has now recognized had already appeared in other expressions of the Church's magisterium, presented simply as a fact to be affirmed

without any hesitation. By way of example, reference can be made to a recent document of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), dated November 1985. It contains the following passage:

> The Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom. The Kingdom, God's gift and initiative, is already begun and is continually being realized, and made present through the Spirit. Where God is accepted, when the Gospel values are lived, where man is respected . . . there is the Kingdom. It is far wider than the Church's boundaries. This already-present reality is oriented towards the final manifestation and full perfection of the Reign of God (II.1).[24]

What now remains to be done is to articulate theologically the relationship between the Reign of God, the Church and the others, in the context of a Christian theology of religions.

1. Jesus and the Reign of God

There can be no doubt at all that the Reign of God is at the center of the preaching and mission of Jesus, of his thought and life, his words and actions. The documents referred to above affirm this clearly, quoting the Gospel in support[25]. That the Reign of God which God had begun to institute in the world through the earthly life of Jesus became really present through the mystery of his death and resurrection, this too is equally certain. There is, therefore, no break in the continuity between the "Kingdom-centered" character of Jesus' proclamation and the "christocentrism" of the kerygma of apostolic times. Moreover, the Gospel bears witness that according to Jesus himself the Reign he proclaims, which is already present must develop towards its fullness.

Now did the historical Jesus connect the Reign of God with the Church? If he did refer to the relationship between the Reign and the Church, did he consider them to be identical? Or, on the contrary, did he distinguish between them? Answering these questions is made more difficult by the fact that Jesus' references to the Church are only indirect. It is known that the term *ekklesia* is found only twice in the Gospels, in Matthew. In Mt 16:18 "the foretelling of the Church" has been retouched editorially in the light of the Easter event; in Mt 18:18 *ekklesia* refers to the local community, without necessarily having its technical meaning. It remains a fact, nevertheless, that Jesus chose "the twelve," and entrusted to them in the first place responsibility for continuing his evangelizing mission in view of the Reign of God. "The

twelve" will become the "Apostles" through the events of Christ's Resurrection and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost[25]. This "movement," initiated by Jesus, which was destined to become the Church and in which he had established the competent authority, did he conceive it as being identical with the Reign of God which he was proclaiming? Or, on the contrary, was the Reign of God for Jesus a broader reality at the service of which he was placing the Church in anticipation?

It is recognized that the historical mission of Jesus was, principally, if not exclusively, directed towards Israel. In Mt 15:24 Jesus states explicitly that he was sent "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." When he sent the "twelve" out on a mission, he charged them not to go "among the Gentiles," nor to enter any "town of the Samaritans," but to "go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:5-6). These data have every chance of being substantially authentic. Jesus, however, showed himself to be full of admiration at the faith of the Roman centurion: "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Mt 8:18). This faith found in a "pagan" in fact provides Jesus with the occasion to announce that many, coming from east and west, will be admitted to the banquet of the Kingdom of heaven (Mt 8:11-12). The entry of "others" into the Kingdom is not purely eschatological; it is brought about first of all in history. Moreover, on the occasion of "excursions" through Samaria and the Syro-Phoenician region, Jesus came into contact with persons who did not belong to the chosen people. Once more he is astonished at the faith of these "pagans," and at their request he performs for them miracles of healing (MK 7:24-30; Mt 15:21-28). There should be no misunderstanding here: the miracles worked on behalf of these "strangers" have the same meaning that Jesus gives to all his miracles. They signify that the Reign of God is already present and at work (cf. Mt 11:4-6; Lk 4:16-22; Mt 12:25-28). The healing miracles and the exorcisms worked for "others" are thus an indication that the Reign of God is present and active among them also; it extends to those who enter into it by means of faith and conversion (cf. Mk 1:15). It cannot be said, then, that Jesus identified the Reign with the "movement" which he was creating, and which was destined to become the Church. Rather must it be recognized that already he was putting the Church at the service of the Reign when he missioned the "twelve," charging them to proclaim that coming of the Kingdom (Mt 10:5-7). The "Good News" that the Church was to proclaim after the Resurrection (cf. Mk 16:15) is the same as that which Jesus proclaimed during his life on earth the coming of the Kingdom (Mk 1:15). The Church is destined to proclaim not herself, but the Reign of God.

Does the theology of the New Testament continue in this perspective,

or, on the contrary, does one find that the Reign is identified with the Church? It is a well-known fact that the "Reign of God," an expression so often found on the lips of Jesus according to the Synoptic Gospels, largely disappears — though not entirely: see, for example, the final verse of Acts which refers to Paul's preaching of the Kingdom of God in Rome (Ac 28:30-31) — in the rest of the New Testament. Yet, it is present under a new form, that of the kingship of the risen Christ which continues it. Now this kingship extends not only to the Church but to the whole world. To give but one example, according to the deutero-pauline letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, the kingship of Christ extends to the Church and to the world: Christ is the head of the world (Col 2:10; Eph 1:10) as he is of the Church; but only the Church is his body (Col 1:18,24; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23). This has been brought out well by O. Cullmann. He explains that the Church and the world cannot be represented by two circles placed simply side by side, not even touching one another or intersecting; it is more a case of "concentric circles whose common center is Christ."[27] In other words, the kingship of Christ, the presence of the Reign of God in history, extends to the whole world, both visible and invisible. Furthermore, the Church plays a privileged role in the growth of the Reign of God in history. R. Schnackenburg states this very clearly:

> "Kingdom of Christ" is, therefore, a more comprehensive term than "Church." In the Christian's present existence on earth his share in Christ's kingdom and his claim to the eschatological kingdom (see also Phil 3:20) find their fulfillment in the Church, the domain in which the graces of the heavenly Christ, are operative (Col 1:18,24). But Christ's rule extends beyond the Church . . . and one day the Church will have completed her earthly task and will be absorbed in the eschatological kingdom of Christ or of God.[28]

Further on he explains:

> This does not . . . imply that Church and cosmos are identical, but the Church gains a cosmic significance. Church and cosmos are not two separate spheres beside or opposed to one another, having nothing in common except their subordination to the exalted Christ. It is in and through the Church the cosmos is grasped by Christ — attracted or compelled. By its very existence the Church has a task in regard to the world.[29]

How then is one to understand the role of the Church in the growth of the Reign in the world and in history?

2. The Church, Sacrament of the Kingdom

According to the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* the Church is "in the nature of (*veluti*) sacrament — a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (LG 1). The Constitution specifies that the Church is "the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48). It adds that the Church is on the earth "the seed and the beginning" of the Kingdom of God (LG 5), or again that she is "the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery" (LG 3) in history. Two questions arise here. Is it possible to identify the reality of salvation with that of the Reign of God, in such a way that all who are saved in Christ through faith, even though they have no explicit knowledge of him, would belong to the Reign? And if this is so, can one, going beyond the Council, interpret the sacramentality of the Church by relating it to the reality of salvation already present and active in the world beyond the boundaries of the Church?

It would seem that the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* would give an indication in this direction. There it is said that the inchoate reality of the Kingdom of God is present beyond the boundaries of the Church, in the whole of humankind, and that one belongs to it through openness to the Spirit and through the practice of the values of the Kingdom of God (RM 20). However, the Church cannot be considered merely "as a sign" (RM 17). She is in fact "the seed, sign and instrument" of the Kingdom of God to which she is ordered (RM 18). Christ has endowed her with "the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation." Consequently, between the Church and the Kingdom there is "a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role" (RM 18).

How is this role to be understood? More specifically, how can it be understood that the Church is in history the sacrament of the Kingdom already present? The sacramental theory can be extremely helpful here. K. Rahner has applied it with great clarity to the relationship between the Church in the world and the Reign of God in history. He writes:

> The Church is not identical with the kingdom of God. It is the sacrament of the kingdom of God in the eschatological phase of sacred history which began with Christ, the phase which brings about the kingdom of God. As long as history lasts, the Church will not be identical with the kingdom of God, for the latter is only definitively present when history ends with the coming of Christ and the last judgment. Yet the kingdom of God is not

> simply something due to come later, which later will replace the world, its history and the outcome of its history. The kingdom of God itself is coming to be in the history of the world (not only in that of the Church) wherever obedience to God occurs in grace as the acceptance of God's self-communication . . . For this kingdom of God in the world, which of course can never simply be identified with any particular objective secular phenomenon, the Church is a part, because of course the Church itself is in the world and in its members makes world history. Above all, however, the Church is precisely its special fundamental sacrament, i.e., the eschatological and efficacious manifestation (sign) in redemptive history that in the unity, activity, fraternity, etc. of the world, the kingdom of God is at hand. Even here, therefore, as in the various individual sacraments sign and thing signified can never be separated or identified.[30]

The classical distinction made in sacramental theology between the sign and the thing signified — more exactly between the *sacramentum tantum*, the *res et sacramentum*, and the *res tantum* — is thus applied to the relationship in history between the Reign of God and the Church, and to the role of the Church in relation to the Reign of God present in history. The Church, in its visible aspect, is the sacrament (*sacramentum tantum*); the reality signified (*res tantum*), which she both contains and confers, is the fact of belonging to the Reign of God; the intermediate reality (the *res et sacramentum*) is the relationship to the Church which is realized in the members of the ecclesial community, by virtue of which they share in the reality of the Reign of God. Nevertheless, as the sacramental theory implies, God is not bound by the sacraments (*Deus non tenetur sacramentis*). That means that one can attain to the reality of the Reign of God without recourse to the sacrament of the Church and without belonging to the body of the Church. The "others" can thus be members of the Kingdom of God without being part of the Church and without recourse to her mediation. The Church, nevertheless, remains the efficacious sign, willed by God, of the presence in the world and in history of the reality of the Reign of God. She must bear witness to it and serve it.

It can now be seen how one can understand, by considering in this new light the formulations provided by the Council, how the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom in history. The Council said that in the Church the Reign of Christ is "already present in mystery" (LG 3). According to the sacramental theory, this does not only refer to the inchoate presence in the Church of the Reign of God ordered towards its final completion. Rather, what is implied is the "mysteric" or sacramental (*in mysterio*) presence of the reality of the Reign of God already

present in the world and in history. The Church is "the sacrament of the Reign." This means — to adopt the formulation used in the Final Document of the General Conference of the Latin American Bishops at Puebla (1979) — that in it "we find the visible manifestation of the project that God is silently carrying out throughout the world. The Church is the place where we find the maximum concentration of the Father's activity . . . The Church is also the instrument that ushers in the Kingdom among human beings in order to spur them on to their definitive goal" (n. 227).[31]

The presence of the Church-as-sign in the world bears witness, therefore, that God has established in this world his Reign in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as efficacious sign, the Church contains and effects the reality which she signifies, giving access to the Reign of God through her word and action. Yet the Church still belongs to the sacramental realm, that is, to the realm of the relative. The necessity of the Church is not of such a nature that access to the Reign of God would only be possible through her. The "others" can be part of the Reign of God and of Christ without being members of the Church and without recourse to her mediation. The sacramental presence of the Reign of God in the Church is nevertheless a privileged presence, for she has received from Christ "the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation" (RM 18). She is the "universal sacrament" (LG 48) of this Reign. This is why those who have access to salvation and to the Reign through means other than hers, though they are not incorporated into her as members, are nevertheless "oriented" (*ordinantur*) to her — as is noted in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (n. 16), without adopting the previous teaching of "members by desire."

3. The Reign of God in the Theology of Religions

It has been pointed out that the "others" have access to the Kingdom of God in history through obedience to the God of the Kingdom in faith and by conversion. It has also been said that the Reign is present in the world wherever the "values of the Reign" are lived and promoted. According to the encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, the inchoate reality of the Kingdom is present in the whole of mankind "to the extent that they live 'Gospel values' and are open to the working of the Spirit" (RM 20).

Liberation theology has laid stress on the role which the "Gospel values" — or "values of the Kingdom" — play in the coming of the Reign of God among people. The Kingdom of God, as J. Sobrino has shown, was for Jesus "the truly ultimate reality" which gave meaning to his life, to his action and to his destiny. Now this ultimate reality, to

which all else is subordinated, is at work and comes close to human beings wherever, following Jesus himself, they share the values of the Kingdom — love and justice.[32]

The theology of religions, for its part, must show how, through opening themselves up to the action of the Spirit, the "others" share in the reality of the Reign of God in the world and in history. For this purpose a "kingdom-centered" paradigm will be adopted. This does not mean — as was observed above, following the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* — that the "christocentric" perspective can be dispensed with. In fact, one cannot separate the Reign of God in history from the Jesus of history in whom it was instituted, nor from Christ whose present kingship is its expression. Through sharing in the reality of salvation which the Reign of God is, the "others" are by this very fact subject to the saving action of Jesus Christ in whom the Reign has been established. Far from being mutually exclusive, the "kingdom-centered" and the "christocentric" paradigms are necessarily interconnected.

Any proclamation of the Reign of God which overlooked the christic dimension could not be called Christian. To say that one can proclaim the Kingdom of God without proclaiming Jesus Christ would be tantamount to depriving the Kingdom of that which, according to the Gospels and to New Testament theology, is its most concrete element. Jesus Christ would be reduced to being just one of the prophets who proclaimed the future Reign of God as something distinct from their own persons. The Reign of God without Christ is not the Reign of the New Testament. Just as, in fact, Jesus without the Reign would not be the Jesus of history to which the Gospel tradition, even when critically studied, bears witness.

The Reign of God to which the believers of other religious traditions belong in history is then indeed the Kingdom inaugurated by God in Jesus Christ. It is that Kingdom which God, in raising Jesus from the dead, has put into his hands; under the kingship of Christ God has destined it to grow towards its final plenitude. While the believers of other religious faiths perceive God's call through their own tradition, and respond to it in the sincere practice of this tradition, they become in all truth — even without being formally conscious of it — active members of the Kingdom. In the final analysis then, a theology of religions following the "kingdom-centered" paradigm cannot bypass or avoid the christocentric perspective.

Through sharing in the mystery of salvation, the followers of other religious traditions are thus members of the Kingdom of God

already present as a historical reality. Does it follow from this that the religious traditions themselves contribute to the construction of the Reign of God in the world? To see that this is so, it must be recalled — as has been shown elsewhere[33] — that the personal religious life of the followers of other traditions cannot in fact be separated from the religious tradition to which they belong and by means of which they give concrete expression to their religious life. If, as must be affirmed, their response to the divine invitation takes form in and is upheld by objective elements which are part of these religious traditions, such as their Sacred Scriptures and their "sacramental" practices, then it must also be admitted that these traditions themselves contain "supernatural elements arising out of grace"[34] for the benefit of the followers of these traditions. It is in responding to these elements of grace that they find salvation and become members of the Reign of God in history. It follows that the religious traditions contribute, in a mysterious way, to the building up of the Reign of God among their followers and in the world. While the Church is in the world the "universal sacrament" of the Kingdom, the other traditions, with regard to their own members, do exercise a certain mediation of the Kingdom, doubtlessly different and less complete, even if it is difficult to give a precise theological definition of this mediation.

4. Reign of God and Eschatology

One further question remains: How to understand the relationship between the historical reality of the Reign of God and its eschatological fullness? Is the fullness of salvation to be understood in terms of the fulfillment of the Church at the end of time? Or will the Church in heaven be part of an eschatological Reign which extends beyond her? Or another possibility, will the fulfillment of the eschatological Kingdom bring the time of the Church to a close, its sacramental role now having been completed? Theologians are not unanimous on this point.[35]

Following what Vatican II affirms about the "heavenly Church" (LG 49-53), A. Dulles considers the fullness of the Kingdom as the fulfillment of the mystery of the Church.[36] Others, such as G.B. Mondin, see "the final reality in its perfect and definitive realization" as "embracing at the same time the Church and the world"[37]; this position can lay claim to be based on a combination of the statements on "the heavenly Church" in *Lumen Gentium* (LG 49-53) and those about the eschatological Reign in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS 39). Others, finally, insisting on the Church's sacramental function in history, noted also by the Council (LG 1, 48), come to the conclusion that it is provisional by nature and that it is due to disappear when the fullness

of the Kingdom is achieved, since, as a sacramental reality, it was subordinated to the Kingdom.[38] When the perfect reality has been achieved, the sign loses its raison d'être. On this K. Rahner writes:

> The Church, if only she be rightly understood, is living always on the proclamation of her own provisional status and of her historically advancing elimination in the coming kingdom of God towards which she is expectantly travelling as a pilgrim, because God for his own part is coming to meet her in the Parousia and her own pilgrimage, too, is taking place in the power of Christ's coming. The essential nature of the Church consists in pilgrimage towards the promised future. [39]

In the context of the relationship between the Reign of God and the other religious traditions of the world, this last opinion is to be preferred. This is because it makes it possible to show how the followers of other religious traditions, who have belonged to the Kingdom of God in history without being members of the Church, can at the end of time share in the fullness of the Kingdom without having been linked at the very last stage to an "eschatological Church." This is, moreover, in agreement with the statement of R. Schnackenburg, quoted above: "Christ's rule extends beyond the Church . . . and one day the Church will have completed her earthly task and will be absorbed into the eschatological Kingdom of Christ and of God."[40] It is no doubt in this sense that P. Teilhard de Chardin understood the fullness at the end of time as the "universal christification"; for him the earthly Church represented on earth the "already reflexively christified portion of the world."[41]

III. Pastoral Implications for the Church's Mission: Dialogue and Proclamation

1. The Holy Spirit and Evangelization

From all that has been said there follow important pastoral implications for the Church's mission. Writing on "The Holy Spirit and Evangelization," I noted that "if the fact is taken seriously that the Holy Spirit of God is at work in the living traditions of the world, this recognition is bound to have deep repercussions on the Church's understanding of her evangelizing mission."[42]

First of all, the Church's evangelizing mission will not be limited to the proclamation of the Good News, but will find as well an authentic expression on interreligious dialogue. For the same Spirit of Christ is present and operative in Christians and the "others" alike.

The Christian entering into dialogue knows that the Spirit has been at work not only in his own experience of God in Jesus Christ, but also in the religious experience of his partner. The same Spirit of God and of Christ has been offered to both, responded to and experienced by both, even though only the Christian partner is able, being guided by the Christian revelation, to identify him explicitly and to call him by his name. The persuasion of having shared with the other in the same Spirit commands the Christian's attitude towards him. Not only will he be convinced that the religious experience of the other is worthy of the highest esteem; he will also believe that, by coming into personal contact with it through personal sharing, he himself is made to discover touches of the Spirit of God which till then had remained unfamilar to him. In inter-religious dialogue the Christian is not only on the giving end but on the receiving end as well. While he desires to share with the other his own experience of Jesus Christ and of his Spirit, he is also disposed for the unveiling which is made to him through the experience of the other of new facets of the Christic mystery.

Interreligious dialogue is a privileged expression of evangelization insofar as both partners evangelize each other; better still, because the Holy Spirit, main agent of evangelization, is evangelizing each through the other. Both know that through their mutual exchange they are being called to a deeper conversion to God, even though the Christian partner alone is explicitly aware that God's call comes to them through Jesus Christ in his Spirit. The Spirit operates in each the change of heart always implied in religious conversion; this action belongs to him alone, but it is adduced in each partner through his contact with the other. The "seeds of the Word" present in other religious experiences and traditions are touches of the Spirit of God, "a sort of secret divine presence" (AG 9); this in the last analysis is why members of the Church are exhorted by her to "acknowledge, preserve, and promote" (NA 2) through dialogue the spiritual values found among them.

Second, announcing Jesus Christ to the "others" needs to be done, as St. Paul teaches, in the power of the Spirit (1Cor 2:1-5). But, as every form of evangelization, it presupposes the prevenient action of the Spirit of God in the hearers and his presence in their life. It builds on this presence and action of the Spirit which it identifies and declares. Christian proclamation is not done, therefore, and cannot be done, in a vacuum. In order that it may be intelligible to the hearers, it needs to address itself to their own experience; in order that it be credible, it must explicitate something that was already felt by the heart, even though it remained inarticulate and perhaps without a name. Proclamation cannot dispense with appealing to the touches of the

Spirit in the hearts of the hearers; those touches constitute stepping-stones for the acceptance of Jesus Christ in the obedience of faith. This act of faith itself is only made possible by the Spirit; for, in the words of St. Paul, "no one can say 'Jesus is the Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1Cor 12:3).

The Holy Spirit is, therefore, everywhere present in the proclamation of the Gospel message and its acceptance in faith. He inspires and accompanies the proclamation of the mystery of Jesus Christ by the believer; he also arouses and leads to fruition the obedience of faith of the hearer. In proclamation, both the evangeliser and the evangelised need to be acted upon by the Spirit. More fundamentally still, what the believer proclaims out of his faith-experience is not altogether new to the hearer; rather, it finds an echo in him because it elucidates for him something he already experienced, though implicitly. At the root of proclamation and hearing is the experience of the Spirit of Christ, explicit on one side, implicit on the other.

To introduce a person into the Christian faith — the mystagoge of which the Fathers spoke — consists, therefore, in leading him through a process of education to the explicit recognition of Jesus Christ and of his Spirit, already present and operative in him, though hiddenly and anonymously. Proclamation is not of something entirely new; rather it brings out (*educere*) what was already there, leads it to explicit awareness and calls it by its name. At the same time, introduction to the faith cannot be reduced to education in that sense only. It is also education in the sense of leading from (*educere*) something to something else; namely, from one regime of mediation of salvation to another. The mystery of Christ can be attained through various mediations, but differently. To become a Christian believer does not only mean to acknowledge that the Spirit of Christ has in some manner given testimony to himself in one's own life; it also implies embracing the mystery as it is mediated in and to the Christian community through the New Testament and the sacraments of the Church. Jesus Christ is in his person and his life the fullness of God's revelation to humankind; his Paschal mystery, death and glorification, is God's decisive intervention in history by which he shares himself with humankind in unremitting acceptance. The self-manifestation and self-gift of God through Christ in his Spirit are mediated in and to the Church, through word and sacrament, in a manner that surpasses all other mediations. To lead a person to the Christian faith through the proclamation of the Gospel is to introduce him or her into that order of the mediation of the Christic mystery which Jesus himself has established in the power of his Spirit; the mystery is the same, but here

it enters the field of explicit awareness, and contact with it is established through the signs and symbols entrusted by Jesus to his Church. The end to which in its form of proclamation evangelization is tending is to lead a person to the explicit knowledge of his Savior which is obtained by sharing the faith and life of the Christian community.

Evangelization, then, or equivalently the Christian mission, takes on different expressions and forms as the Christian witness meets different situations. In its different forms evangelization needs to be prompted and inspired by the Spirit of Christ, as it also needs to be done in his power. But in all spheres the action of the Spirit precedes the witness of the Church, for it is to his prevenient influence in the world and among people that the Christian community is called to bear witness. The Church is ordained to signify and to declare that Jesus Christ, the Lord of history, is alive today and that through the action of his Spirit, "principal agent of evangelization," he is leading the world and people to their appointed goal. Whether in witness of service, dialogue or proclamation, the Church's mission of evangelization is subordinate to the all-pervading influence of "the Spirit of God who, in his wonderful providence, directs the course of time and renews the face of the earth" (GS 26, 4).

2. The Reign of God and Evangelization

Similar implications for the Church's evangelizing mission flow from the recognition of the universal reality of the Kingdom of God, shared by Christians and the "others" alike, to which the Church is subservient and at whose service she is placed. This recognition too has deep repercussions for both interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of the Good News.

Interreligious dialogue takes place between persons who already belong together to the Reign of God, inaugurated in history in Jesus Christ. In spite of their different religious allegiances, such persons are already in communion in the reality (*res*) of the mystery of salvation, even while there remains between them a distinction at the level of the sacrament (*sacramentum*), i.e., at the level of the mediation of the mystery. Communion in the *res* is, however, more fundamental and is of more consequence than the differences at the level of the sign. This explains the deep communion in the Spirit which interreligious dialogue, if it is sincere and authentic, can establish between Christians and other believers.[43] This shows also why interreligious dialogue is a form of sharing, both receiving and giving, in a word, that it is not a one-way process, not a monologue but a "dialogue." The reason for

this is that the reality of the Reign of God is anticipated in this mutual exchange between Christians and the others. Dialogue makes explicit this already-existing communion in the reality of salvation which is the Reign of God that has come for all in Jesus.

Again, as has been said above, it explains how Christians and "others" are called to build together the Reign of God in the world down the ages. This Reign, in which they already share, they can and must build together, through conversion to God and through the promotion of Gospel values, until it achieves, beyond history, its eschatological fullness (cf. GS 39).

Building the Reign of God extends, moreover, to the different dimensions of the Reign of God, which can be called the horizontal and the vertical. Christians and others build together the Reign of God each time they commit themselves to common accord in the cause of human rights, each time they work for the integral liberation of each and every human person, but especially of the poor and the oppressed. They also build the Reign of God by promoting religious and spiritual values. In the building of the Kingdom the two dimensions, human and religious, are inseparable. In point of fact, the first is a sign of the second. There is, perhaps, nothing which provides interreligious dialogue with such a deep theological basis, and such true motivation, as the conviction that in spite of the differences by which they are distinguished, the members of distinct religious traditions, co-members of the Kingdom of God in history, are travelling together towards the fullness of the Reign, towards the new humanity willed by God for the end of time, of which they are called to be co-creators with God.

Finally, as the Reign of God was at the center of Jesus' message, so too the Church must announce not herself but the Reign of God present in history, to which she is wholly related and to which she must bear a credible witness. As the sacrament in the world of the universal reality of the Reign of God the Church has the task to announce to others the Good News of the Reign of God which has broken through to history in Jesus Christ. To proclaim this, she needs to be empowered by the Spirit of God. But in announcing the Kingdom, she must remember that this Kingdom extends beyond herself on all sides. She has no monopoly over the Reign of God she is called to announce. Her task is to unveil the hidden but real presence of the Reign of God in and among her hearers, to help them to recognize in Jesus Christ the way in which God has established his Reign upon the earth, to name him and his Spirit as its source and enabler. In proposing her message, the Church will build upon the reality of the Kingdom always present among her hearers in

anticipation of her coming, even as the Spirit of God is already at work in them. Only then will the spoken word of the Church meet in the "others" a chord with which to vibrate; only then will it find in them an echo. To announce the Good News of the Reign of God in Jesus Christ, while going beyond interreligious dialogue, still remains a dialogical process, in which the Church must listen before she declares, discern the divine presence before naming it.

Conclusion

Reference has been made earlier to various documents of the FABC, where the priority of the universal reality of the Reign of God over the Church and the subservient character of the Church in relation to the Kingdom are clearly brought out. A recent theological consultation sponsored by the FABC Office for Evangelization, which was held at Hua Hin, Thailand (November 3-10, 1991), developed the Kingdom-perspective in a more elaborate manner, with its implications for the Church and her mission, for dialogue and proclamation. In conclusion, then, it may be permitted to quote — even at length — from the conclusions of the Hua Hin Consultation on the Kingdom of God, the role of the Church and the evangelizing mission of the Churches in Asia.[44]

The Kingdom of God

> The Kingdom of God is . . . universally present and at work. Wherever men and women open themselves to the transcendent divine mystery which impinges upon them, and go out of themselves in love and service of fellow humans, there the Reign of God is at work. As BIRA IV/2 puts it: "where God is accepted, where Gospel values are lived, where man is respected . . . there is the Kingdom" (II, 1, FABC II, 423). In all such cases people respond to God's offer of grace through Christ in the Spirit and enter into the Kingdom through an act of faith. The document "Dialogue and Proclamation" (DP) explains that "concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their savior (cf. AG 3,9,11; DP 29). Thus, they become sharers in the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ unknowingly.
>
> This goes to show that the Reign of God is a universal reality, extending far beyond the boundaries of the Church. It is the

reality of salvation in Jesus Christ in which Christians and others share together; it is the fundamental "mystery of unity" which unites us more deeply than differences in religious allegiance are able to keep us apart. Seen in this manner, a "regnocentric" approach to mission theology does not in any way threaten the Christocentric perspective of our faith; on the contrary, "regnocentrism" calls for "Christocentrism," and vice versa, for it is in Jesus Christ and through the Christ-event that God has established his Kingdom upon the earth and in human history (cf. RM 17-18).

The Role of the Church

In this universal reality of the Reign of God the Church has a unique and irreplaceable role to play. This has been well indicated by the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of FABC in its "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue" (1987), when it said: "The focus of the Church's mission of evangelization is building up the Kingdom of God and building up the Church to be at the service of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is, therefore, wider than the Church. The Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, making it visible, ordained to it, promoting it, but not equating itself to it" (6.3; *FABC Papers*, No. 48, p.16; cf. also BIRA IV/2 II, 1: FAPA ii, 423).

The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) explains the reason for this unique and irreplaceable role of the Church in relation to the Reign of God at whose service she is placed: "It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God, of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both. Christ endowed the Church, his Body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in her with his gifts and charisms, sanctifies, guides and constantly renews her (LG 4). The result is a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside of the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role" (RM 18).

Thus, it is seen that if the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, the reason is that she is the sacrament of Jesus Christ himself who is the mystery of salvation, to whom she is called to bear witness and whom she is called to announce. To be at the service of the Kingdom means for the Church to announce Jesus Christ.

For this task she is endowed with special gifts and charisms and guided by the Spirit. Due to such endowments the Reign of God is sacramentally present in the Church in a special manner; "she is the seed, sign and instrument" of the Reign of God to which she is ordained (RM 18).

Servant Churches

Nevertheless, the Church as a pilgrim in history belongs to the order of signs, and as such needs to be conformed to Jesus and his Reign, lest the quality of her witness be impaired and her signifying power obscured. This is why the Church must reproduce in herself the model of her Master who became poor that we might become rich. The "self-emptying" of the Son of God in Jesus Christ is the decisive theological reason why the Church must be a poor Church; his identification with the figure of the "servant of God" is the reason why she in turn must be a servant. The preferential option for the poor which the Asian context demands from all local Churches, is in deep harmony with the nature of the Church herself as the sacrament of Jesus Christ, who for us became poor and made himself a servant. In order to be an effective sign and bear a convincing witness, the pilgrim Church, not only in her members but "insofar as she is an institution of men on earth," is constantly in need of renewal and reform (cf. UR 6; DP 36).

Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue is of special importance in Asia where the great religious traditions continue to inspire and influence the lives of millions of people. The religious traditions of Asia command our respect because of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them. These are expressions of the presence of God's word and of the universal action of the Spirit in them. For the Churches in Asia, therefore, to establish positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of these religious traditions is an integral part of their evangelizing mission. Such a dialogue with other religions will also prepare the ground for interreligious and common actions for justice and peace, which will enable the local Churches of Asia to fulfill their prophetic role more effectively.

Proclamation

> The Holy Spirit, in ways known to God, gives to all human persons the opportunity of coming into contact with the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, and thus to obtain salvation (cf. GS 22). The Church, as the visible sign and sacrament of the mystery of salvation, is in a unique position to offer them the opportunity of sharing in the mystery in a fully human way. She alone can convey to them the explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ their Savior and Lord, and invite them to celebrate in joy and thanksgiving the mystery of his passover at the eucharistic table. Only in the life of the Church is found the full visibility of the mystery of salvation. Only there do the children of God come to the full realization of what it means to share in the Sonship of the Son. Thereby, the Church's proclamation meets the deepest longings and aspirations of the human heart for liberation and wholeness of life. There the seeds of the Word contained in the religious traditions of the world grow to maturity and come to fulfillment. In this manner the Church shares with others "the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation" (RM 18) which she has received from her Lord and Master.
>
> Motivation behind the Church's proclamation of Jesus Christ flows indeed from obedience to the mandate received from the Risen Lord. However, a clearer perception of the Church's mission in the context of the Asian reality helps us discover even deeper motivations. Members of other religious traditions already in some way share with us in the mystery of salvation. If the Church is in love with her Lord, she will feel the urge of sharing with them what she alone can offer: the Good News that the human face of God and his gift of salvation are found in Jesus of Nazareth. "Here we are at the heart of the mystery of love" (DP 83).

The Hua Hin Consultation dreams in the last analysis of a "servant Church." This dream is expressed as follows:

> We dream of a servant Church: servant of God, servant of Christ, servant of the plan of salvation, servant also of the Asian peoples, of their deep hopes, longings and aspirations; servant of the followers of other religions, of all women and men, simply and totally "for others." A servant Church has no pretensions and no exigencies. A servant Church does not insist upon her rights; she offers her services, without getting offended when

they are not accepted. A servant Church keeps silent when bypassed, forgotten or unfairly treated.

In a servant Church the structures of the Church herself are at the service of the Gospel and of the people . . . She is a pilgrim Church on the way to the Kingdom. She is primarily a faith community, expressing and proclaiming Kingdom values. She does not place herself at the center. Thus, in theology she is not centered upon herself but on Christ. In her teaching she clearly distinguishes between the Gospel and her own doctrinal understanding of it. In daily life she puts doing the truth before formulations of doctrine, reflecting the values of the Kingdom rather than those of the local elite. There is no split between public role and personal faith, no social division between ordained leadership and the Church community.

It will be apparent that, though not coinciding entirely with the Kingdom of God perspective proposed in this paper, that described in the Hua Hin consultation goes in the same direction. Such, it may be thought, is the rightful perspective for a renewal of the theology of religions and mission, of interreligious dialogue and proclamation.

II. Other Religions in the Catechism of the Catholic Church

by Michael L. Fitzgerald

Introduction

"No salvation outside the Church." This is the heading to paragraph 846 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC).[1] The statement has often been repeated by the Fathers of the Church, but the question can be asked as to how it is to be understood.[2] Understood in a positive sense, says the Catechism, it means that all salvation comes from Christ, the Head, through the Church, his Body. There follows a long quotation from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, one of the most important documents of Vatican II, to show that the Church is necessary for salvation:

> The one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through baptism as through a door. Hence, they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse to enter it, or to remain in it (LG 14).

This seemingly uncompromising statement is immediately qualified. It is pointed out that it is not directed at those who, without fault of their own, do not know Christ or the Church (847). This is supported by a quotation from the same document:

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> Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience — those too may achieve eternal salvation (LG 16).

The following paragraph quotes from the Vatican II document on the missionary activity of the Church to say that, by ways known to him alone, God can bring people to that faith which is necessary for salvation. Nevertheless, the Church "still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize" (AG 7) all people (848).

The CCC, in these three short paragraphs, appears both to affirm the necessity of the Church for salvation, and to suggest that it can be by-passed. It does not explain what constitutes the absence of fault, nor what to "know" the Gospel and the Church really implies. Nor does it mention other religions. These are in fact treated in the preceding paragraphs. Before examining these, it may be well to situate them in the context of the whole Catechism. After analysing what the CCC says about other religions in this section, mention will be made of references to them or statements which may be seen to concern other religions in the rest of the CCC. Though observations will be made from time to time, the main purpose will be to indicate what the CCC actually says, no attempt being made to go into to what it does not say or might have said.

The Overall Context

After a prologue explaining the importance of handing on the faith, and explaining the nature of this catechism and the way it is to be used, the CCC is divided into four parts. Part One covers the profession of faith, an explanation of the beliefs of Christians according to the Catholic tradition. Part Two deals with the celebration of the Christian mystery, and so with liturgy and sacraments. Part Three outlines what it means to live in Christ, the moral consequences of Christian belief. Finally, Part Four treats of Christian prayer.

It is in Part One that the relations of the Church to other religions are examined. This comes in the section on the Church, for the whole of this Part One is based on the Apostles' Creed, "so called because it is rightly considered to be a faithful résumé of what the apostles believed" (194). This creed is composed of twelve 'articles,' the ninth of which is "I believe in the holy catholic Church."

The CCC expounds first the place of the Church in the divine

plan. It explains some of the names given to the Church in the Scriptures — sheepfold, field, house, temple, the Jerusalem on high — all indicating different aspects of the Church (751-757). It then looks at the origins, foundation and mission of the Church. Here, the teaching of Vatican II is recalled: the Church was already present in figure at the beginning of the world; it was prepared in the history of the people of Israel; established in Christ; made manifest by the Spirit; and destined to be brought to completion at the end of time (cf.LG 2) (759-769). Next, the Church is presented as "a mystery." Although it exists in history, it nevertheless transcends history. It, therefore, has to be seen with "the eyes of faith" (770).

The following paragraphs deal with the Church as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit (781-810); with the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic (811-870) — and it is here that the relations of the Church with other religions are touched upon; with the members of the Church and its structure (871-945). Attention is then turned to the communion of saints (946-961) and to Mary, mother of Christ and mother of the Church (963-975).

The Church and Religions

I believe in the catholic Church, states the creed. But what does the word catholic mean? Two meanings are indicated. The Church is catholic because "in it Christ is present," and thus the Church receives from him "the fullness of the means of salvation" (AG 6) (830). But the Church is catholic also because it has been given a mission by Christ for the whole of the human race:

> All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This People, therefore, whilst remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God's will may be fulfilled" (LG 13) (831).

This means that wherever the Church is to be found, in whatever corner of the earth, it is catholic because it is in communion, and insofar as it is in communion, with the Church in all other parts of the earth, under the Church in Rome which presides in charity (832-835).

Who then belongs to the Catholic Church? To this question, put by the CCC itself as a heading to par.836, an answer is given from the same document on the Church:

> All men are called to this catholic unity (of the People of God) . . . and in different ways to it belong, or are related,[3] the

> Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation (LG 13) (836).

The next heading, before par. 839, reads "The Church and non-Christians."[4] The CCC first quotes another passage from the Constitution on the Church in which the same idea of "ordination" occurs:

> Those who have not yet, received the Gospel are related (or ordained) to the People of God in various ways (LG 16) (839).

Two paragraphs treat of the relationship of the Church to the Jewish people. It is stated that "as distinct from the other non-Christian religions, the Jewish faith is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant" (839). Thus, Judaism is set apart as having a special role in the history of salvation, Although the Old Covenant has been followed by the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, the Jewish people still continues to enjoy a special status. Paul's letter to the Romans is quoted: "to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rom 9:4-5), for "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29) (839-840).

The following paragraph, on the relations of the Church with Muslims, confines itself to a quotation from the Constitution on the Church:

> The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day (LG 16) (841).

A reference is given in a note to par. 3 of *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council's decree on the relation of the Church with other religions. This, in fact, says much more about Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, but perhaps does not add anything of great theological relevance.

Finally, the CCC, passing over in silence Buddhism and Hinduism, which are both mentioned in the decree *Nostra Aetate*, underlines the bond between the Church and other religions. This is seen to be the common origin and destiny of the human race (cf. NA 1) (842). The Church recognizes the search for God in the various religions, because

God is the source of life, and because God desires the salvation of all. The Church also recognizes all that is good and true in these religions, considering this as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may have life" (LG 16) (843). Yet, there is an awareness too that in religious behavior limitations and errors can be present. Thus the Church is seen to be the place where humanity is to recover its unity and salvation (844-845).

This leads the CCC, after the paragraphs on the adage *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* which have already been examined, to insist on "Mission — a requirement of the Church's catholicity" (heading to par. 849). Here, it is worthwhile drawing attention to the motivation for this mission:

> Those who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already on the way to salvation; but the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go to meet their desire to bring them the truth. It is because it believes in the universal plan of salvation that it must be missionary.

The real motivation behind the Church's missionary drive is the love of God for the whole of humanity (851). This means that, in fulfilling this mission, the Church:

> Travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world: it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of the human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God (GS 40,2) (854).

Thus the missionary activity of the Church implies *respectful dialogue* (underlined in the text) with those who have not yet accepted the Gospel. Believers (it is obviously Christians who are designated by this term) can themselves derive benefit from this dialogue through coming to know better "those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God" (AG 9) (856).

The attention which the CCC gives explicitly to other religions is quite limited. To complete the picture references to religions in the rest of the Catechism will now be given.

Faith in God

The CCC opens with a presentation of what is meant by faith. There comes first a chapter on man as having a capacity for the

divine. The Latin for this would be *homo capax Dei*. It is said that the desire for God is imbedded in the human heart, for the human person has been created by God and for God. Therefore, God unceasingly draws the human person towards him.[27] It must be underlined that the CCC is speaking in general here, about all humans, and not just about Christians. This desire for God, this quest for God, finds expression, both in history and today, in people's beliefs and religious behavior (prayers, sacrifices, forms of worship, meditation, etc.). Though these may carry with them certain ambiguities, they show clearly that the human person is a *religious being* (underlined in the text).[28]

Thus God never ceases to invite all to seek him.[30] This implies a positive view of the capacity of the human mind to know God:

> In defending the capacity of human reason to know God, the Church expresses confidence in the possibility of speaking about God to all and with all. This conviction is the starting point for its dialogue with other religions, with philosophy and science, and also with unbelievers and atheists.[39]

It is perhaps strange that religions should be put together with philosophy and science, and more particularly with atheism, but the CCC does not say that the dialogue in each case is the same.

The following chapter deals with the way God goes to meet humans. This entails a discussion of the idea of revelation. It is noted first that God reveals himself gradually, according to a divine pedagogy (53, cf.199). Various stages of this revelation are mentioned. Already, in creating through the Word, God gave witness to himself. From the beginning he manifested himself to our first parents (54). He made a covenant with Noah, as a response to the fragmentation which had been brought about by sin. This Noachic covenant is an expression of the divine economy towards the "nations," that is, to all human groupings "in their lands, each with its own language, by their families" (Gen 10:5) (56). Because of sin, this covenant with the one God comes under threat from polytheism and idolatry (57), yet the Noachic convenant remains in force as long as the "nations" endure, that is, until the Gospel has been universally proclaimed (58). The CCC does not explain what is meant by the universal proclamation of the Gospel. The Catechism goes on to speak about the call of Abraham, the covenant with the people of Israel, and then the coming of Christ, "the unique, perfect and unsurpassable Word of the Father" (65).

Though the CCC does not explicitly state this, it can be said that since the Noachic covenant is not done away with by succeeding covenants, neither is the revelation contained in it disqualified. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ is "The Mediator and the Fullness of all Revelation" (title of section III, 63-67). Consequently, there can be no new public revelation. Yet, although Revelation has been completed, it has not yet been fully explicated. The Christian must therefore grow in his knowledge and appreciation of this Revelation (66). A word of caution is introduced here:

> Christian faith cannot accept, however, revelations claiming to go beyond or correct Revelation which finds it fulfillment in Christ. This is the case of certain non-Christian religions and also of some recent sects that are founded on such "revelations" (67).

In the sections that follow on the transmission of divine Revelation (74-100) and Holy Scripture (101-141) no mention is made of other religions and their holy books. This is presumably because true Revelation, with a capital R, is restricted to that which finds its fulfillment in Christ. Similarly, when dealing with the human response to God, attention is wholly concentrated on the faith of the Christian. Yet, the statement that "for a Christian, to believe in God means necessarily to believe in the One whom he has sent" (151) could possibly imply that other types of faith are possible.

The Creator

One of the "articles" of the creed is concerned with God as Creator. Here it is said that creation is the foundation of God's plan of salvation, the beginning of the history of salvation (280). Reference is made to the numerous myths concerning the origins of the world found in religions and ancient cultures. Christian faith has been confronted with these views right from the beginning (285). Therefore, although human beings can discover the answer to the question about the origin of the universe, God has revealed this (286-287). Despite this, the mystery remains:

> We firmly believe that God is the Master of the world and of history. But the ways of his providence are often unknown to us. It is only at the end, when our partial knowledge will pass away . . . that will be fully known to us the ways in which . . . God has brought his creation to the repose of the final *Sabbath* (underlined in the text) (314).

There is no mention here of the religions, but the statement certainly leaves open the possibility of their playing a role in God's plan for his creation.

Similarly, with regard to the human person, created in God's image, the terms the CCC uses are universal in import. The human person is called by grace to a covenant with the Creator, to offer a response in faith and love which no one else can give (357). There is an insistence on the oneness of the human race, because of its common origin (360). Therefore, the law of solidarity and charity implies that, without denying the rich variety of persons, cultures and peoples, all are truly brothers (361). Here again, differences of religion are not explicitly noted, but surely religion enters in as an element of culture.

Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God

It is not to be expected that other religions will be touched upon, or kept in mind, when more explicitly Christian articles of the creed are explained. Yet in speaking of Jesus Christ the CCC refers to the preaching of the Kingdom of God:

All are called to enter the Kingdom. Proclaimed first to the children of Israel, this messianic Kingdom is destined to incorporate (*accueillir*) people of all nations (543).

The Kingdom belongs particularly to the poor, to the little ones (544). It must be admitted, though the CCC does not point this out, that these are not found only among those who profess belief in Jesus Christ.

The question of the Kingdom returns in the explanation of belief in the Church.[5] The Church is the People of God. But the coming together of this People of God starts immediately after the disruption brought about by sin. The reunification is being prepared secretly in the midst of all peoples, "in every nation any one who fears him (God) and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Ac 10:35) (761). This would surely apply to those who belong to different religions. "All the just, from the time of Adam, 'from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,' will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church" (LG 2) (769).

Jesus preaches the coming of God's Kingdom (763). His disciples, who form a "little flock," are the seed and beginning of the Kingdom. They form a community which will remain as a structure until the complete fulfillment of the Kingdom (765). This is the Church. So the Church is seen as a "sacrament," "a sign and instru-

ment, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (LG 1) (775). It is thus a sign of something which goes beyond itself and which is still to be achieved.

There is a principle of Catholic theology which could be brought in here, beyond what the CCC affirms. It is that "God is not bound by his sacraments." In other words, though God has chosen to communicate his life to human beings through the sacraments, he is free to communicate with them in other ways too. So if the Church is considered as a sacrament, this principle would apply to it also. The CCC quotes Vatican II's document on ecumenism:

> It is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help to salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained (UR 3) (816).

For "universal help to salvation" the French has here *moyen général de salut*, translating the Latin *generale auxilium salutis*. This could give rise to the supposition that there are other means of salvation. A later paragraph may confirm this. It states that:

> Many elements of sanctification and of truth exist outside the visible limits of the Catholic Church (819).

These words apply directly to other Christian Churches and communities, but they could be extended more widely to other religions.

The Sacraments

Part Two of the CCC, which deals at length with the sacraments, touches again on "elements of grace" found in other religions. It states that according to divine pedagogy signs and symbols, used in the celebration of the sacraments, are rooted in the work of creation and in human culture; they are made more precise in the Old Covenant, and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ (1145). For human beings need signs and symbols to communicate with one another, and also with God (1146). Then comes a further reference to religions:

> The great religions of humanity bear witness, often in an impressive manner, to the cosmic and symbolic meaning of religious rites. The Church's liturgy presupposes, takes up and makes holy elements of creation and of human culture, conferring on them the dignity of signs of grace, of the new creation in Jesus Christ (1149).

What is expressed here is the idea of completion and fulfillment brought about by Christianity, but it is done in a respectful way. As is said later:

> The mystery of Christ . . . is to be proclaimed, celebrated and lived out in all cultures, so that these are not abolished, but redeemed and fulfilled by this mystery (1204).

One of the sacraments recognized by the Catholic Church is matrimony, the sanctification of marriage. The CCC affirms:

> Marriage is not a purely human institution, despite numerous variations down the ages in different cultures, social structures and spiritual attitudes (1603).

The choice of the term "spiritual attitudes" is strange. Perhaps it covers not only other religions but also the positions of Christians who do not agree with the Catholic tradition. The paragraph continues:

> There exists nevertheless in all cultures a certain sense of the greatness of the marriage bond (1603).

The question of marriages between Christians of different traditions (*mixed marriages*), and of marriages between a Christian and someone who does not belong to the Christian faith (*disparity of cult*), is addressed. While mixed marriages require special attention on the part of the spouses and their pastors, cases of disparity of cult require even greater circumspection (1633). With regard to the latter it is pointed out:

> Disparity of cult can increase these difficulties. Differences about faith, about the very concept of marriage, but also differing religious mentalities, can be a source of tension in the marriage, principally insofar as the children's education is concerned. A temptation can then arise: religious indifference (1634).

Yet such marriages are not forbidden. Only the Catholic partner is reminded of a special duty: to contribute to the sanctification of the partner who does not share the same faith. If this leads to the free conversion of the partner to the Christian faith, this will be a great joy for the Christian partner and for the Church (1637).

Moral Obligations

Part Three of the CCC is concerned with "Life in Christ," but it starts by presenting the vocation of the human person in general. Here, there are many statements which have great importance for contemporary society marked, in so many places, by religious plurality.

> Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free responsible being. This is an inseparable requirement of the dignity of the human person, especially in moral and religious matters (1738),

Thus attention is called to the primacy of conscience:

> Deep within his conscience, man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey . . . For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God (GS 16) (1776).

So:

> When listening to the moral conscience, the prudent person can hear God speaking (1777).

This of course applies to all human beings, to whatever religious tradition they belong.

This primacy of conscience has important consequences for society:

> In the name of the common good, public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person . . . So, "the right to act according to the dictates of conscience and to safeguard his privacy, and rightful freedom even in matters of religion" (GS 26,2) (1907).

Consequently:

> All forms of discrimination in matters concerning the fundamental rights of the person, whether on the basis of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be overcome as incompatible with God's design (cf. GS 29,2) (1935).

Religious Liberty

For the Christian, life in Christ means first of all following the Ten Commandments. The first of these concerns the worship of God. Here again, the question of freedom of worship is addressed:

All are obliged to seek the truth, above all as regards God and his Church, and follow it faithfully once they have dis-covered it (DH 1) . . . Yet this is not in contradiction with a "sincere respect" for different religions which illumines all men" (NA 2) (2104).

The duty to offer God authentic worship concerns the human being individually and socially. Therefore:

The social duty of Christians is to respect and awaken in each person love of truth and goodness. It demands of them that they make known the worship of the only true religion which subsists in the catholic and apostolic Church (cf. DH 1) (2105).[6]

The consequences of this position are drawn out. It means that:

Within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in associations with others (DH 2) (2106).

The State must take this into account:

If because of the circumstance of a particular people special civil recognition is given to one religious community in the constitutional organization of a State, the right of all citizens and religious communities to religious freedom must be recognized and respected as well (DH 6) (2107).

Later, in explaining the Fourth Commandment, the duty to respect one's parents which is extended to include respect for authority, the CCC takes up the question of religious plurality from another angle. The more affluent countries, it says, should, insofar as it is possible, welcome the stranger in need of security or vital material well-being (2241). Nothing is said here about the duties of the citizens of these countries to allow the stranger to worship according to his own tradition. What is affirmed is that the immigrant must respect with gratitude the material and spiritual patrimony of the welcoming country (2241).

Prayer

The CCC ends with a very fine presentation of Christian prayer. Here again, it progresses from the general to the particular. So it emphasizes that just as all human beings desire God, so this desire is naturally expressed in prayer. All religions bear witness to this

essential quest on the part of human beings (2566). Yet, the initiative really comes from God's side:

> The living and true God calls each person to a mysterious encounter in prayer. This loving initiative of the faithful God is always first in prayer. The initiative is always by way of response (2567).

Creation, it is pointed out, provides inspiration for prayers, for example the offering of first fruits. Reference is made to Noah's sacrifice, found acceptable by God because it comes from a heart that is just and true. The CCC states:

This quality of prayer is lived out by a multitude of just people in all religions (2569).

Conclusion

When Pope John Paul II ordered the publication of the CCC, which he had previously approved, he stated that it is to be accepted as

> an exposition of the faith of the Church and of catholic doctrine, as found in or enlightened by Holy Scripture, the apostolic Tradition and the ecclesial magisterium (that is, the teaching authority in the Church).

He recognized it as a "sure guide for the teaching of the faith."[7]

The CCC, though a large volume, does not say everything. It does not dwell much on the question of religious plurality and what this means to the Church. Nevertheless, it fully reflects the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the right to religious liberty, and so can serve as a practical guide to relations between people of different religious persuasions.

Nor is the CCC necessarily the last word. As the Pope has recalled, it is based not only on Scripture and Tradition, but also on the magisterium. This is always evolving, as new circumstances arise, and as the Church achieves a fuller consciousness of its own nature and its mission. It may well be that a later catechism will have more to say about the relations of the Church with other religions.

FOOTNOTES I: The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"

1. International Theological Commission, *Texts and Documents 1969-1985*, Ed. M. Sharkey, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1989, pp.271-273.

2. *Ibid.* p.273.

3. See J. Dupont, "Note sur le 'Peuple de Dieu' dans *les Actes des Apôtres*," in Pontifical Biblical Commission, *unité et diversite dans l'Eglise*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1989, pp.209-222. The author takes account of "a widespread reaction making itself felt in recent times against an abuse of language which would speak of a 'new' people of God as opposed to the 'old'" (p.221 n.30). He refers to G. Betori, D.P. Moessner, X. Léon-Dufour. He explains that in the New Testament it is not a question "of the constitution of a new people of God, but of the fulfillment of the universal vocation to which Israel had been called by its God who, being unique, wished also to be the God of all human beings" (p.221); the one people of God henceforth extends by way of the Church to the nations. See also Ph.-H.Menoud, "Le Peuple de Dieu dans le christianisme primitif," *Foi et vie* 63 (1964), p.390: "The people of God, after the coming of Christ, extends beyond . . . the limits of the Church, because it still includes the whole of Israel; the Jews, who cannot be part of the Church through belief in Jesus the Messiah, remain the people of God as sons of Abraham according to the flesh. Moreover, the Church, in virtue of the christological faith which constitutes it, gathers together faithful 'of every race, nation, people and language,' and extends beyond the narrow limits of the Jewish people."

4. See N. Lohfink, T*he Covenant Never Revoked*, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah 1991.

5. A first document on this subject after Vatican II is "Orientations pastorales du comité épiscopal français pour les relations avec le Judaïsme" (1973) (*Documentation Catholique* 70 (1973) pp.419-422). This document states: "Contrary to what has been held by a very ancient but unreliable exegesis, it is not possible to deduce from the New Testament that the Jewish people has been deprived of its election. On the contrary, Scripture as a whole encourages us to recognize in the preoccupation of the Jewish people to remain faithful to the Law and the Covenant the sign of God's fidelity to his people" (p.240). "The first Covenant, in point of fact, has not been rendered null and void by the New one. It is its root and source, its foundation and promise" (*ibid.*). Two pontifical documents also reflect a positive attitude with regard to the permanence of the "Old" Covenant. The first is "Orientations and Recommendations for the Application of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* n. 4," published by the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism (January 4, 1975) (Origins 4 (1974-1975) 463-464); the second is "Notes for a Correct Presentation of Jews and Judaism in the Preaching and Catechesis of the Catholic Church," published by the same Commission (June 24, 1985) (*Origins* 15 (1985-1986) 102-107). Referring to the Constitution *Dei Verbum* 14-15 the "Orientations" state: "An effort will be made to acquire a better understanding of whatever in the Old Testament retains its own perpetual value, since that has not been cancelled by the later interpretation of the New Testament. Rather, the New Testament brings out the full meaning of the Old, while both Old and New illumine and explain each other" (p.463). The "Notes" take up an expression used by John Paul II when speaking of "The People of God of the Covenant which has never been revoked." Then addressing the question of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, they explain that the expression "Old Testament" does not imply "invalid" or "out of date." They underline the "permanent value of the Old Testament as a source of Christian

revelation": "Our aim should be to show the unity of biblical revelation (Old Testament and New Testament) and of the divine plan, before speaking of each historical event, so as to stress that particular events have meaning when seen in history as a whole — from creation to fulfillment" (p.104).

6. Following the title of a book by W. Bühlmann, *The Chosen Peoples,* St. Paul Publications, Slough 1982.

7. The remark comes from Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda).

8. AAS 35(1943), p.199; cf. J. Neuner-J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, Harper-Collins, London, 1992, n.847.

9. "Integra ecclesiologia posset exhiberi et ordinari sequenti quadrilatero: regnum Dei = ecclesia Christi = ecclesia romana catholica = corpus Christi mysticum in terris." T. Zappalena, *De Ecclesia Christi,* pars apologetica, editio 6a, 1955, p.41.

10. See *Schemata Constitutionum et Decretorum*, series secunda, Vatican City 1962, chapter 1, nos. 7,12.

11. See E. Schillebeeckx, *Church. The Human Story of God,* SCM Press, London 1990, pp.189-195.

12. "Loco est dicitur subsistit in, ut expressio melius concordet cum affirmatione de elementis ecclesialibus quae alibi adsunt," in *Relationes de singulis numeris,* Relation in N. 8, 25. Relatio super caput primum textus emendati Schematis Constitutionis de Ecclesia, Vatican City 1964.

13. Did the Council restrict itself to recognizing the presence in other Christian communities of "elements" of the mystery of the Church, or, going further, did it admit the ecclesial character of these other communities, and not only of the Orthodox Church, even if the ecclesial character is not fully realized in them? Theologians are not fully agreed on this point. Basing himself not only on *Lumen Gentium* n. 8, but also on *Unitatis Redintegratio* n. 3, F. Sullivan is of the opinion that the Council did recognize the ecclesial character of other Christian communities. See F. Sullivan, "The Significance of the Vatican II Declaration that the Church of Christ 'Subsists in' the Roman Catholic Church," in R. Latourelle, ed. *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, Vol. II, Paulist Press, New York/ Mahwah, 1989, pp.272-287.

14. See O. Cullmann, *Christ* and *Time*, SCM Press, London, 1952. Neuchatel 1947.

15. For example, the "realized" eschatology associated with the name of C.H. Dodd, and the "consequent" eschatology associated with that of A. Schweitzer.

16. It would seem that the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* has gone beyond the position of *Lumen Gentium*. For GS 39 speaks of the growth of the Reign of Christ and God in history (39.2) and of its eschatological fulfillment (39.3), without reference to the Church but including the whole of humanity. The text concludes: "Here on earth the kingdom is mysteriously (*in mysterio*) present; when the Lord comes it will enter into its perfection" (39.3). Moreover, *Gaudium et Spes* affirms also that "the Church has but one sole purpose — that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be accomplished" (45.1).

17. Cf. note 1.

18. *loc.cit.*, pp.300-304.

19. The same identification between the Church and the Kingdom of God, both in history and eschatology, occurs again in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* See especially nos. 865, 541, 670-671, 732, 763, 768-769 . . .

20. See the text of the Final Report in *Documentation Catholique* 83 (1985), pp.36-42).

21. Text in *Origins* 20 (1990-1991) 541-568; *Catholic International* 2 (15-31 March 1991) pp. 252-292.

22. With no. 20 of *Redemptoris Missio* can be compared a passage, very similar in content, of a document published jointly, in May 1991, by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The document is entitled: "Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." The passage reads: "To the Church, as the sacrament in which the Kingdom of God is present 'in mystery,' are related or oriented (*ordinantur*) the members of other religious traditions who, inasmuch as they respond to God's calling as perceived by their conscience, are saved in Jesus Christ and thus already share in some way the reality which is signified by the Kingdom. The Church's mission is to foster 'the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ' (Rv.11:15), at whose service she is placed. Part of her role consists in recognizing that the inchoate reality of this Kingdom can be found also beyond the confines of the Church, for example, in the hearts of the followers of other religious traditions, insofar as they live evangelical values and are open to the action of the Spirit. It must be remembered, nevertheless, that this is indeed an inchoate reality, which needs to find completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet realized fully only in the world to come" (n 35). The text has been published in *Bulletin*, Pontificium Concilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones, n. 77 Vol. XXVI (1991/2) pp.210-250; see in particular p.225.

23. See J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991, pp.157-165; see pp.136-140.

24. "Final Statement of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue" (Pattaya, Thailand, November 17-22, 1985), in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, eds. G. Rosales — C.G. Arévalo, Claretian Publications, Diliman, Quezon, 1992, p.252. This text can be compared to another, published by the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC. The "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue" (1987) produced by this Commission state: "The focus of the Church's mission of evangelization is building up the Kingdom of God and building up the Church to be at the service of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is, therefore, wider than the Church. The Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, visibilizing it, ordained to it, promoting it, but not equating itself with it" (6.3). The text can be found in *FABC Papers*, No. 48, FABC, Hong Kong 1987, p.16.

25. See, for example, G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, Paternoster Press, Exeter 1986, especially pp.144-146.

26. See J. Guillet, *Entre Jésus et l'Eglise*, Seuil, Paris 1985.

27. O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time,* p. 187.

28. R.R. Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, Burns and Oates, London 1968, p.301.

29. *op.cit.*, pp.313-314.

30. K. Rahner, "Church and World" in *Sacramentum Mundi. An Encyclopedia of Theology*, vol. I, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore 1975, p.348.

31. J. Eagleson — P. Scharper, *Puebla and Beyond*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. 1979, p.152.

32. See J. Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. pp.81-97.

33. See J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp.125-151; especially 143-144.

34. See K. Rahner, Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, Vol.5, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975, pp.115-134; see p.121.

35. See G.B. Mondin, *La chiesa primizia del Regno*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 1986, p.389-398.

36. See A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1976, pp.97-114.

37. G.B. Mondin, *La chiesa primizia del Regno*, p.395.

38. This should also follow from the analogy established by *Lumen Gentium* n. 8 between the two natures of Christ and the Church's two aspects, divine and human, communion and institution: "The earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element." There are not two Churches, one visible and the other invisible, one which is due to disappear while the other will remain.

39. K. Rahner, "The Church and the Parousia of Christ," *Theological Investigations*, Vol.6, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969, p.298. See also P. McBrien, *Do We Need the Church*?, Harper and Row, New York 1969, p.98; W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, Westminster, Philadelphia 1989, pp.76-77.

40. *Op. cit.*, (note 28), p.301.

41. P. Teilhard de Chardin, "Comment je vois" (1948), n. 24, in *Les directions de l'avenir*, Oeuvres, Vol. 11, Seuil, Paris 1973, p.206.

42. J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit*, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, 1977, pp.245-258; see 246.

43. See Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux), "The Depth-Dimension of Religious Dialogue," *Vidyajyoti* 45 (1981), pp.202-221.

44. The full text is found in *FABC Papers*, No. 64, FABC, Hong Kong, 1993, pp.23-37.

FOOTNOTES II: Other Religions in the Catechism of the Catholic Church

1. Since the Catechism of the Catholic Church has not yet been published in English, all references are to the French edition, *Catéchisme de l'Eglise Catholique*, Mame/Plon, 1992. The numbers in brackets refer to the paragraphs. The translations are my own.

   The documents of the Second Vatican Council are quoted according to Austin P. Flannery (ed.), *Documents of Vatican II,* new revised edition, 1984. Abbreviations used:

   AG – Ad gentes. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity
   DH – Dignitatis humanae. Declaration on Religious Liberty
   GS – Gaudium et spes. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
   LG – Lumen gentium. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
   NA – Nostra aetate. Declaration on the relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions
   UR – Unitatis redintegratio. Decree on Ecumenism.

2. On this question, see Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the history of the Catholic response*, New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1992.

3. The Latin word used here is *ordinantur*. It perhaps means something more organic than "related." It is often translated "*ordained.*"

4. It is a pity that the CCC has not followed the lead given by the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, June 28, 1988, by which Pope John Paul II reformed the Roman Curia. In this document the negative term 'non-Christian' was dropped, so that the Secretariat for Non-Christians became the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

5. On the relationship between the Kingdom and the Church see Jacques Dupuis, "Dialogue and Proclamation in Two Recent Documents," in *Bulletin.* Pontificium Consilium pro dialogo inter Religiones, 80 (1992), pp.165-172, particularly pp.167-168.

6. Much could be said about the term "subsists in" (*subsistit in*) used here, as elsewhere in the documents of Vatican II (cf.LG 8). It avoids complete indentification, while at the same time indicating an inseparable link. Thus, here it does not identify the only true religion with the Church, but it does say that the only true religion is necessarily found in the Church. For a fuller discussion of this term, see F. Sullivan, "The Significance of the Vatican II Declaration that the Church of Christ "*subsists in*" the Roman Catholic Church," in R. Latourelle (ed.), *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-Five years After (1962-1987)*, Vol. II, Paulist Press, New York/ Mahwah, 1989, pp.272-287.

7. Apostolic Constitution *Fidei depositum*, October 11, 1992, printed as the introduction to the CCC, pp.5-9; the quotation is from p.8.

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