

*INTRODUCING REDEMPTORIS MISSIO,
AN ENCYCLICAL LETTER
OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
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The Society for
THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH
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worldwide mission of Jesus*

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From the beginning of his Pontificate, John Paul II has made his concern for the worldwide mission of the Church very plain by traveling personally “to the ends of the earth.” His repeated contact with peoples throughout the world who do not know Christ has convinced him “even more” of the great urgency of missionary activity. The Holy Father speaks of those who “do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church.” He says, “When we consider this immense portion of humanity which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of the Church’s mission is obvious.”

The Pope has now expressed his concern and conviction in the form of an encyclical letter on the Church’s world mission. It is entitled Redemptoris Missio, The Mission of the Redeemer.

Every chapter, every paragraph, of the encyclical breathes with the missionary urgency of one who has personally seen and heard what the mission is all about.

Here are his opening words: *“THE MISSION OF CHRIST the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second Millennium after Christ’s coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.”*

Here are the closing words of the encyclical’s introduction: *“I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ad gentes. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”*

The Pope’s message is clear. The Church’s world mission must be placed at the top of her agenda and be given first priority.

The encyclical includes eight chapters, besides an introduction and conclusion. Even from the chapter titles, one can see that it treats every aspect of mission that is vitally important for the Church today:

- I. Jesus Christ, the Only Savior
- II. The Kingdom of God
- III. The Holy Spirit, the Principal Agent of Mission
- IV. The Vast Horizons of the Mission Ad Gentes
- V. The Paths of Mission
- VI. Leaders and Workers in the Missionary Apostolate
- VII. Cooperation in Missionary Activity
- VIII. Missionary Spirituality

In the introduction (Nos. 1-3), the Holy Father sets out the encyclical’s subject, theme, occasion and aim.

The subject is not just “missionary activity,” but “the urgency of missionary activity” for every Christian and for every institution in the Church. Missionary activity flows from the Church’s missionary nature and belongs to the very nature of Christian life.

The theme of the encyclical is “the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate.” Responding to any tendency to view the Church’s world mission as a thing of the past, the Pope asserts that “missionary evangelization...is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world.”

The Pope calls attention to “an undeniable negative tendency” affecting missionary activity today. The Pope sees that: “Difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church’s missionary thrust towards non-Christians, a fact

which must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ.” Such concern is very well grounded: “In the Church’s history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith.”¹

The purpose of the encyclical is to bring about the interior renewal of the Church. “Missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive.”

The Church cannot do without a strong missionary dimension in all of her activities.

Note: The Latin expression ad gentes, literally “to the nations,” appears frequently in the encyclical. It refers to the Church’s mission to peoples everywhere, with particular attention to those who have not yet been evangelized. The same expression provided the Latin title for Vatican II’s Decree on Missionary Activity.

CHAPTER I

JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY SAVIOR

There is nothing, absolutely nothing, more central for the Church than the person of Jesus Christ.

This is clear from our oldest creeds, from the New Testament, from our liturgical tradition and nearly 2,000 years of Church history. It is also at the heart of Pope John Paul II’s teaching in his encyclical on world mission.

The Church and every aspect of her life are based on the person and life of Jesus Christ.

What is true of the internal life of the Church is also true of her mission. Since Jesus Christ is not just our Lord but the Lord of all, the Church has no choice but to proclaim the Good News of his life and mission to all human beings.

As Lord of all, Jesus is absolutely unique. He is the one person sent by God as his Son to be the Savior of the whole human race.

Christ, the One Savior of All

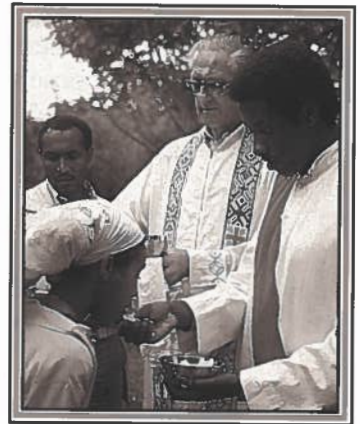
In Redemptoris Missio, Pope John Paul II insists on the unique and essential role of Jesus Christ, the only Savior, for the life and mission of the Church.

In his first encyclical, Redemptor Hominis, the Pope had developed the role of Christ in the event of redemption. In Redemptoris Missio, he shows how the whole mission of the Church flows from Christ’s work as Redeemer or Savior.

His purpose in the encyclical’s first chapter is to show that missionary work among non-Christians is still relevant and that it must continue as a major effort of the Church.

The encyclical roots the mission of the Church in the Trinitarian faith of the ancient creeds: “I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father... For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”²

It also grounds the Church’s mission in the New Testament, beginning with a major statement in one of Peter’s discourses after Pentecost: “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved” (Acts 4:12, NAB). Jesus Christ is God’s definitive revelation.



Ethiopia

The Holy Father grounds this affirmation in the opening words of the letter to the Hebrews: "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe" (Heb 1:1-2, NAB).

The definitive revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ is the reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. Jesus Christ is also the one mediator between God and the human race.

The Holy Father grounds this further affirmation in an early Christian creed embedded in Paul's first letter to Timothy: "For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5-6, NAB).

While insisting on Christ's unique role as mediator, the Pope does not mean to exclude what he calls "participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees." However, "these acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his."

All of these statements are extremely important. Their purpose is to offset any tendency to present Christ as merely one savior and mediator among others.

The Pope does not deny that there are other mediators. We may consider the outstanding figures in the world's great religions as mediators, but their mediation is derived from the unique mediation of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Father's teaching in this matter reflects the long-standing Christian position and is

grounded in the New Testament. To grasp it, we need to share the New Testament's view of the solidarity that exists among all human beings. The life of each human being affects that of everyone else. The unique life and salvific role of Jesus Christ affects everyone, even those who do not know of it.

The Church, Sacrament of Salvation

The first beneficiary of salvation is the Church in which Christ dwells. It is through the Church that Christ, the one mediator, now carries out his mission.

In this respect, the Pope refers to an important distinction made by Vatican II in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (#48): "The Church believes that God has established Christ as the one mediator and that she herself has been established as the universal sacrament of salvation."

The Church is not a mediator of salvation over and above Christ or alongside of him. Rather, she is the sign and instrument of Christ's unique work of salvation.

This unique role of Christ and his Church does not detract from the belief that God loves all people and offers everyone the possibility of salvation.

Since salvation is meant for all, it must be made available concretely to all. Such is the Church's mission. But in reality, many do not have the opportunity to know or accept the Gospel or enter the Church.

For this, the Pope's message bears very close attention. "For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is

accommodated to their spiritual and material situation.”

Even those who do not know Christ can be saved through him and in relation to his Church. Again, a strong sense of the solidarity of all human beings, both for ill and good, will help us appreciate Pope John Paul II’s teaching. Everyone is affected by the life of Christ and the work of his Church. Those open to salvation are affected for their good.

The Holy Father bases his message on that of Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today (#22): “We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.”

CHAPTER II
THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The purpose of Jesus’ whole life and teaching was to announce the Kingdom of God and bring it about.

This is how Mark’s Gospel summarized all that Jesus said and did: “Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: ‘This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mk 1:14-15, NAB).

In Luke’s Gospel, this is how Jesus spoke of the reason for his coming into the world: “To the other towns also I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent” (Lk 4:43, NAB).

Pope John Paul II says that the Kingdom is “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.”

The purpose of Christ’s salvific mission is to bring about the Kingdom of God. It is fulfilled as human beings accept Christ’s offer of salvation, opening themselves to the love of the Father, manifested and given by Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

The Kingdom of God is realized in the very person of Jesus, the “Good News” in which message and messenger coincide, and saying, doing and being are one.

The Demands of the Kingdom

Pope John Paul II approaches the notion of the Kingdom of God very concretely, avoiding any tendency to abstraction and vagueness.

Very simply, “Jesus gradually reveals the characteristics and demands of the Kingdom through his words, his actions and his own person.”

To understand the meaning of the Kingdom of God, we then have to read the accounts of Jesus’ life and mission in the Gospels. From beginning to end, the Gospels and the entire New Testament show us what the Kingdom of God is.

We see that it calls for a commitment to liberation and salvation and addresses human beings in their spiritual as well as their physical dimensions.

Its characteristic gestures are those of healing and forgiving, both of which were expressions of Jesus’ compassion. Jesus reached out to those who were suffering physically and spiritually. His purpose was to invite them to faith and lead them to salvation.

From Jesus’ life we see that the Kingdom “aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another.”

The Kingdom is nothing else than the fulfillment of the commandment of love. It consists in “communion among all human beings—with one another and with God.”

To understand the Kingdom in all its breadth, we need to consider Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection. It is in these events that God “definitively inaugurated the Kingdom” and revealed the universal scope of Christ’s message, actions and whole mission.

Earthly kingdoms may be limited to a particular people, but in the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, shares in God’s dominion over the whole world. The Kingdom is not fulfilled until it embraces the entire human race. That is why the Church’s mission must reach out to the ends of the earth.



Ethiopia

The Passion and Resurrection of Christ are therefore part of the proclamation of the Kingdom. During his life and ministry, Jesus proclaimed among the Kingdom and its coming. After his death and Resurrection, the Apostles continued to proclaim what Jesus had proclaimed among them. But they now proclaimed his death and Resurrection as well. Jesus’ person and message are inseparable in the Church’s proclamation of the Kingdom.

Kingdom and Church

From the above considerations of the demands of the Kingdom and their scope, it is clear

that the Kingdom cannot be approached in a purely human and secular way. It cannot be reduced to a set of programs and struggles for liberation that are closed to the transcendent.

The Kingdom of which we read in the Gospels is the Kingdom of God, not a purely human kingdom. We must be careful not to reduce it to “one more ideology of purely earthly progress.”

Nor can the Kingdom be approached independently of Christ and the Church. The danger is to divorce the Kingdom from the person of Christ and from the Church, as though Christ and the Church were merely at the service of the Kingdom.

Christ was surely at the service of the Kingdom, but it is also true that the Kingdom became present and was fulfilled in Christ. The Kingdom is not just a concept or a doctrine. It “is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God.”³

The Church also is surely at the service of the Kingdom, but not as a body independent of it. The Church is “distinct from Christ and the Kingdom,” but at the same time she is “indissolubly united to both.”

Christ “endowed the Church, his Body, with the fulness of the benefits and means of salvation.” This does not exclude “the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church’s visible boundaries,” but it does confer on her the very special mission of announcing and inaugurating the Kingdom of God and of Christ among all peoples.

The Church is at the service of the Kingdom, first of all by preaching and then by establishing communities and particular Churches and guiding them to mature faith and charity.

The Church also serves the Kingdom by spreading the Gospel values expressed in the life of Jesus. "The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all mankind, and her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message." The Church's mission is to all human beings.

Finally, the Church serves the Kingdom by her prayerful intercession. The Kingdom is God's gift and work. That is why the Church prays, "Our Father ...Thy Kingdom come."

CHAPTER III
THE HOLY SPIRIT,
THE PRINCIPAL AGENT OF MISSION

In Chapter I, the Holy Father showed how the person of Jesus was and is absolutely central for the life and mission of the Church.

In Chapter II, he showed how the Kingdom of God is intimately bound up with the person of Jesus Christ as well as with the Church, which was given a unique mission in the service of the Kingdom of God.

Now in Chapter III, he shows how the Holy Spirit is "the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission."

From the New Testament, and especially from the Acts of the Apostles, we see how the Holy Spirit was active in the Apostles, in the whole apostolic community and in those who heard their proclamation of the Kingdom and benefitted from their ministry.

It is not just Peter and the other Apostles who were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also descended on all those who gathered to hear their message.

Without the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of the Church would be but a human word and her efforts in behalf of the kingdom would be fruitless.

A Mission to the Ends of the Earth

Our Holy Father stresses the importance of the missionary mandate given the Apostles after meeting the Risen Christ. This mandate, which appears in every Gospel (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-23) is "a sending forth in the Spirit," as we see most especially from John's Gospel.

The Gospels complement one another in their presentation of the mandate. Each one is different, but at the same time all have two elements in common: the universal dimension of the mission given to the Apostles, and the assurance that they will receive the strength and the means to carry out their mission.

The Apostles would be accompanied by the Lord and filled with the Spirit as they went out on their mission to all nations, to the ends of the earth.

In its presentation of the mandate, Mark's Gospel emphasized the mission to preach, to proclaim the Gospel (16:15) and profess one's faith in Jesus as the Christ (8:29) and the Son of God (15:39).

Matthew emphasized the foundation of the Church and her teaching (28:19-20), stressing the ecclesial and sacramental dimension of the Church's mission.

Luke stressed the importance of witness (24:48; Acts 1:8). Missionaries must believe in the power of the Gospel to transform both them and those to whom they are sent.

John's Gospel speaks "explicitly of a 'mandate,' a word equivalent to 'mission.'" Its presentation of the mandate is found in the Gospel's Resurrection narrative, when the Lord Jesus tells the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (20:21, NAB).

The Johannine mandate is also found in Jesus' great priestly prayer after the Last Supper, when Jesus prays for unity among the disciples. They are to remain in the Father and the Son that the world might believe that Jesus had truly been sent by the Father.

Jesus' priestly prayer is especially important because "it makes us understand that we are missionaries above all because of what we are as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries in word and deed."

The Whole Church Missionary

Turning to the Acts of the Apostles, Pope John Paul II shows how the whole Church is missionary because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gathers the company of believers into a community of witnesses, to be the Church. as we see from the life of the primitive community in Jerusalem, all that the early Christians did had a missionary dimension. Their witness was such that they enjoyed favor with everyone, "and every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47, NAB).

While the whole Church was missionary, not everyone exercised the mission in the same way:

- The group of the Twelve proclaimed the Good News as a body, led by Peter.
- The whole community of believers witnessed to the Lord by its way of life and its activity.
- There were special envoys set apart to proclaim

the Gospel to other peoples and places as representatives of the community to which they belonged.

From the Acts of the Apostles, we see therefore that although there were members of the Church set apart for the mission ad gentes, that is missionaries with a special vocation, the whole Church and every believer was committed to the mission ad gentes.

The Holy Spirit is also active beyond the boundaries of the visible Church, affecting individuals in every time and place as well as society, history, peoples, cultures and religions. The "presence and activity of the Spirit are universal, limited neither by space nor time."⁴

As we read in Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God" (#22).

This role of the Holy Spirit indicates how the Church is to relate to other religions. Besides respecting human beings in their quest for answers to the deepest questions of life, the Church must have respect for the action of the Holy Spirit in human beings.

The Spirit at work in all human beings is the same Spirit "who was at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church." The universal activity of the Holy Spirit must be understood in reference to Christ and his Body, the Church.

As the Church faces new challenges and pushes forward to new frontiers, "both in the initial mission ad gentes and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed," she does so out of trust in the Spirit, "the principal agent of mission."

CHAPTER IV

THE VAST HORIZON OF THE MISSION AD GENTES

In the encyclical's first three chapters, Pope John Paul II focused on the theological foundations of the Church's missionary activity. This meant reflecting on three areas: the salvific mission of Jesus Christ, its relationship to the Kingdom of God, and the role of the Holy Spirit in its fulfillment. Each of these also had to be seen in relation to the life and mission of the Church.

Beginning with Chapter IV, the Holy Father reflects on the mission itself and how it should be carried out.

In Chapter IV, he turns his attention to the scope, "the vast horizons," of the mission to all nations, to the social situation in which the Church must exercise its missionary mandate, and to the ongoing need for a specific mission ad gentes.

A Changing Religious Picture

The Church's mission is to every person, people and place on earth. It knows no boundaries.

The mission is also one and undivided, but it does have different tasks and kinds of activity. Among these the primary activity is the mission ad gentes, "to the multitudes—the millions and millions of men and women—who as yet do not know Christ, the Redeemer of humanity."

The Church pursues her mission in very difficult circumstances. The modern world is characterized by urbanization, mass migration, floods of refugees, the de-christianization of countries with ancient Christian traditions, the proliferation of messianic cults and sects. At the same time we see a growing influence of the Gospel and its values in overwhelmingly non-Christian countries.

We speak of some formerly Christian cities and countries as "mission territories," while some "mission territories" have become well-established Churches. This has led some to question whether we should still speak of specific missionary activity and of missionary areas. They ask if we should not be speaking of a single missionary situation.

There is no doubt that there have been real changes, and that these have sparked positive theological reflection and fresh missionary activity. But we must also be careful not to view every situation on the same level.

On this the Pope writes very clearly: "To say that the whole Church is missionary does not preclude the existence of a specific mission ad gentes, just as saying that all Catholics must be missionaries not only does not exclude, but actually requires that there be persons who have a specific vocation to be 'life-long missionaries ad gentes.'"

The mission to non-Christians must not "become an indistinguishable part of the overall mission of the whole People of God and as a result become neglected or forgotten."

The difficulties are many, but the most serious is that of widespread indifferentism. Some of this indifferentism is based on a religious relativism, viewing one religion as good as another.

Parameters of the Mission

Still the Church must pursue its universal mandate to a mission that knows no boundaries.

First, the Church does not limit her mission to specific territories. She "refuses to allow her missionary presence to be hindered by geographical boundaries or political barriers."

Second, the Church must go out on mission to new worlds and new social phenomena. She cannot ignore the fact that so much is in social flux. The growth of cities must be her concern. "Efforts should be concentrated on the big cities, where new customs and styles of living arise together with new forms of culture and communication, which then influence the wider population."

Third, there are important new cultural sectors to be addressed. These include primarily the world of communications, commitment to peace, the integral development and liberation of peoples, human rights, particularly those of minorities, women and children, and safeguarding the created world. Important also are the worlds of culture, scientific research and international relations. All of these must be attended to as part of the Church's mission.

In all of these areas, missionary activity must be aware of its need to further human freedom by proclaiming Jesus Christ.

The Church's mission is never-ending. At present, it is still in its infancy. New peoples constantly appear on the scene. "They too have a right to receive the proclamation of salvation."

We need "to direct our missionary attention to those geographical areas and cultural settings which still remain uninfluenced by the Gospel."



India

After reflecting on the scope of the Christian mission and showing that it must be without boundaries, the Holy Father focuses on the various ways of pursuing mission.

Witness and Proclamation

Evangelization begins with witness, "the first and irreplaceable form of mission." Above all, this witness consists in "the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community."

Witness takes place when missionaries live a simple life in imitation of Christ. Living simply they become a sign of God and transcendent realities.

Witness is also expressed in someone's concern for people and charity towards the poor, the weak and all who suffer. Such generosity contrasts with human selfishness and "raises questions that lead to God and to the Gospel."

Witness can also take the form of "courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power." Imitating Christ, the Church must serve the poorest of the poor and not seek her own glory and material wealth.

After witness, there is the initial proclamation of Christ the Savior: "Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate nor deprive men and women of the 'Good News' about their being loved and saved by God."

The subject of this proclamation is Christ, the fact that he was crucified, died and rose, and that through him "is accomplished our full and

authentic liberation from evil, sin and death,” and that through him we receive “new life.”

The proclamation of Christ is made within the context of the lives of those who receive it and with an attitude of love and esteem for them.

It is also made in union with the entire ecclesial community. The missionary’s first proclamation of the Gospel is consequently never a merely personal act.

The proclamation is made with the conviction that people already have “an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death.”

The supreme test of witness and the proclamation of the Gospel is the giving of one’s life, as so many have done throughout the course of Christian history.

The proclamation of God’s word aims at Christian conversion. At the outset, “conversion is expressed in faith which is total and radical, and which neither limits nor hinders God’s gift.” It then flows into a life-long process of conversion to Christ.

As the Pope puts it, “Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple.” The call to conversion is not the same as “proselytizing,” that is, bringing undue and inappropriate pressure which restricts a free response. People have a right to hear the Good News.

The proclamation of God’s word aims at Christian conversion which is joined to Baptism, “because of the intrinsic need to receive the fullness of new life in Christ.”

Baptism is not just a seal of conversion. It is the “Sacrament which signifies and effects rebirth from the Spirit, establishes real and unbreakable bonds with the Blessed Trinity, and makes us members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church.”

Every convert is both a gift to the Church and a responsibility for her. Converts have to be prepared for Baptism and guided by religious instruction. They bring with them the gift of “new energy, an enthusiasm for the faith, and a desire to see the Gospel lived out in the Church.”

Church and Community

Conversion and Baptism introduce someone into a Christian community. The mission ad gentes must therefore “found Christian communities and develop Churches to their full maturity.” Such communities are “a sign of the presence of God in the world,” as we read in the Council’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (15). The implanting of the Church is a responsibility for the whole Church.

Once the Church has been planted, “Missionary personnel coming from other Churches and countries must work in communion with their local counterparts for the development of the Christian community.”

The importance of the Church and Christian communities in missionary witness and proclamation calls for “a renewed commitment to ecumenism.”

Division is a deterrent to the effective proclamation of the Gospel. However, since the different Churches and ecclesial communities do have a measure of communion with one another, however imperfect, it is urgent that they work together. This is especially important “at this time

when Christian and para-Christian sects are sowing confusion by their activity.”

A rapidly growing phenomenon in the young Churches is that of “ecclesial basic communities,” groups of Christians who gather together at the level of the family or in some similar setting to pray, read Scripture and discuss human and ecclesial situations in view of arriving at a common commitment. These “are proving to be good centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach.” The “ecclesial basic communities” also provide a setting for catechesis.

These communities, says Pope John Paul II, “are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a ‘civilization of love.’”

Church and Culture

Inculturation is one theme with which the Holy Father has repeatedly dealt on his Pastoral Visits to the young Churches throughout the world.

As the Church brings her missionary activity to the nations of the world, she meets different cultures and embarks on the long process of inserting herself in those cultures. The process is called inculturation.

It is a very difficult process. It requires the “transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various cultures.”⁵ While doing this, it has to avoid compromising the distinctiveness of the Christian faith.

Through inculturation, the Church enriches the cultures in which she makes the Gospel incarnate. At the same time, she becomes “a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.”

Through inculturation, the Church herself is enriched in areas such as evangelization, worship, theology and charitable works. She even comes to know and express better the mystery of Christ.

Throughout the process of inculturation, missionaries and local Churches must be guided by two principles: “compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church.”⁶

Dialogue with Other Religions

Inter-religious dialogue is not in opposition to the mission ad gentes but one of its expressions. The Church sees “no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in inter-religious dialogue.”

The Holy Father quotes from a letter that he wrote to the Bishops of Asia in 1990: “The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.” He then adds: “Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fulness of the means of salvation.”⁷

Dialogue can be of great benefit to the Church. Other religions stimulate the Church “to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit as well as to examine more deeply her own identity.”

The Church conducts her mission in many parts of the world where development is urgently needed. Her role in this is not to work directly on the economic, technical or political levels.

The Church’s mission consists “essentially in offering people an opportunity not to ‘have

more' but to 'be more,' by awakening their consciences through the Gospel."

The work of mission is thus very complex and it is expressed in many different ways, mainly because of the circumstances in which it takes place. In every case, however, the source of mission must be charity, and that is also the criterion for determining its quality. "Love, which has been and remains the driving force of mission," is also "the sole criterion for judging what is to be done or not done, changed or not changed." Love "is the principle which must direct every action, and the end to which that action must be directed."⁸

CHAPTER VI
LEADERS AND WORKERS
IN THE MISSIONARY APOSTOLATE

After dealing with the scope of the mission ad gentes (Chapter IV) and treating the various ways of pursuing it today (Chapter V), Pope John Paul II turns his attention to those who are responsible for carrying out the mission.

In order to witness, the Church needs witnesses. To engage in missionary activity, she needs missionaries.

The Pope begins his reflection with the New Testament, where we see that the Twelve were the first "to work in the Church's universal mission." Among the Twelve, some were especially prominent, namely James, John and above all, Peter.

Peter was responsible for opening up the horizons of the Church's mission and preparing the way for "the outstanding missionary work of Paul."

We also see in the New Testament how communities such as the local Church of Antioch,

after being evangelized, became an evangelizing community for others. The young Churches must do the same today. They should "share as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the Church."⁹

The primary responsibility for world mission now rests with the College of Bishops, headed by the Successor of Peter.

The Pope is very aware of his responsibility as a missionary, and he witnesses to it in his letter: "Conscious of this responsibility, I feel the duty to give expression to it in my meetings with the Bishops, both with regard to new evangelization and the universal mission."

He also writes eloquently of his travels: "I have traveled all over the world in order 'to proclaim the Gospel, to "strengthen the brothers in the faith," to console the Church, to meet people. They are journeys of faith...they are likewise opportunities for traveling catechesis, for evangelical proclamation in spreading the Gospel and the apostolic Magisterium to the full extent of the world."¹⁰

The Pope's own missionary work is a good example of what he wishes to communicate in his encyclical. As he himself said, missionary work begins with witness.

The Bishops are also responsible for the mission of the Church ad gentes, together with the Pope. For this, he quotes the Council's Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, which says that the Bishops "have been consecrated not only for a particular diocese but for the salvation of the entire world" (#38).

The task of directing and coordinating throughout the world the work of evangelizing peoples and of missionary cooperation is entrusted to the Congregation for the Evangelization of

Peoples, with due regard for the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (for Catholics of non-Latin rites).¹¹ The Holy Father invites Episcopal Conferences and their various bodies, the Major Superiors of Orders, Congregations and Institutes, as well as lay organizations involved in missionary activity to cooperate faithfully with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

In this chapter, the Pope also affirms and encourages missionaries and Religious Institutes dedicated to the mission ad gentes. He places special importance on those missionaries who have a special vocation “for life.”

His concern and encouragement then extends to diocesan priests. He quotes from the Council’s Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: “The spiritual gift that priests have received in ordination prepares them not for any narrow and limited mission, but for the most universal and all-embracing mission of salvation ‘to the end of the earth.’ For every priestly ministry shares in the universal scope of the mission that Christ entrusted to his Apostles” (#10).

After diocesan priests, he turns his attention to the consecrated life and its missionary fruitfulness. Because of their dedication to the service of the Church, deriving from their religious consecration, members of Institutes of Consecrated Life “have an obligation to play a special part in the missionary activity, in a manner appropriate to their Institute.”¹²

He then addresses the laity, all called to be missionary from Baptism. Each Christian shares in the missionary character of the entire People of God. “Lay missionary associations, international Christian volunteer organizations, ecclesial movements, groups and sodalities of different kinds—all these should be involved in the mission ad gentes as cooperators with the local Churches.”

After addressing the laity in general, the Pope’s concern turns to the work of catechists and those engaged in a variety of ministries. Among these, catechists have a place of honor.

“Catechists are specialists, direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers who, as I have often stated and experienced during my missionary journeys, represent the basic strength of Christian communities, especially in the young Churches.”

CHAPTER VII

COOPERATION IN MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

“All Christians share responsibility for missionary activity.” The Holy Father has returned to this theme several times in the course of his encyclical. This responsibility comes from Baptism.

To describe the way Christian communities and individuals share in this responsibility, the Pope uses the term “missionary cooperation.” In this Chapter VII, he presents the various forms of this missionary cooperation.

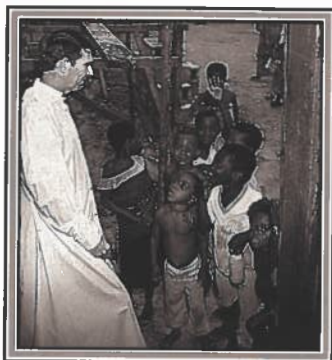
Missionary Cooperation

The first form of sharing is that of prayer, sacrifice and the witness of Christian life. “Prayer should accompany the journey of missionaries so that the proclamation of the word will be effective through God’s grace.” This prayer must be accompanied by sacrifice. “The redemptive value of suffering, accepted and offered to God with love, derives from the sacrifice of Christ himself.”

Missionary cooperation also consists in promoting missionary vocations. The Pope insists “that a full and lifelong commitment to the work of the missions holds pride of place, especially in missionary Institutes and Congregations.

Then there are the material and financial needs of the missions. Those too provide an important avenue for missionary cooperation. Material help must be “enlightened and inspired by faith.”

The Holy Father emphasizes the importance of World Mission Sunday as “an important date in the life of the Church” (*eventus magni ponderis in vita est Ecclesiae*) to raise awareness for the missions and collect funds for them. On World Mission Sunday, we learn the true nature of Christian giving. We make our offering to God, in the context of the Eucharistic celebration, for all the missions of the world.



Liberia

In modern times, missionary cooperation also comes in the form of direct participation. Opportunities for this are provided by tourism and travel. There are those who go to the missions “to serve and to gain an intense experience of the Christian life.” There are those going to places where Christianity is unknown and at times prohibited or persecuted. They are like the early Christians “traveling to or settling in regions where Christ had not yet been proclaimed.” They have a wonderful opportunity to witness to their faith.

Opportunities for missionary cooperation also come from the need to welcome the followers of non-Christian religions settling in other nations for reasons of study or work or from political or economic situations in their own country.

Finally, missionary cooperation can involve leaders in various fields such as politics and journalism, and experts from international bodies.

Missionary Promotion and Formation

Missionary promotion and formation are central to the Christian life. Its specific goals are “informing and forming the People of God to share in the Church’s universal mission, promoting vocations ad gentes and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelization.”

Missionary promotion and formation are the responsibility of every Christian. The leading role in fostering a universal missionary spirit among the People of God belongs to four societies of the Universal Church: the Propagation of the Faith, Saint Peter Apostle, Holy Childhood and the Missionary Union. These are the Pontifical Missionary Societies.

It is through these societies that Catholics are imbued from their very infancy with a genuinely universal and missionary spirit. They are also the means for ensuring an effective collection of resources for the good of all missions according to each one’s needs.¹³

Pope John Paul II asks these societies more and more to direct their efforts to the fostering of life-long vocations ad gentes.

The Holy Father ends this chapter with an exhortation to be open to the missionary activity of others. “Cooperating in missionary activity means not just giving but also receiving.” It is a matter of being open to the Church’s universality.

While aware of the problems affecting mission, the Holy Father finds no grounds for pessimism. “As the third Millennium of the Redemption draws near, God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity... As she prepares to celebrate the Jubilee of the year 2000, the whole Church is even more committed to a new missionary advent.”

CHAPTER VIII
MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY

The encyclical's last chapter is devoted to the specific spirituality required for missionary activity. This spirituality applies primarily to those whom God has called to be missionaries.

Elements of that spirituality were developed throughout the encyclical. The Pope now focuses on four major ones: docility to the Holy Spirit, communion with Christ, apostolic charity, holiness.

Docility to the Holy Spirit commits us to be molded by the Spirit in the image of Christ. It also commits us to welcome the gifts of fortitude and discernment. We need fortitude to follow Christ along the path of suffering and humiliation. We need discernment to understand his words and see how we must live and act.

Missionary spirituality includes an intimate communion with Christ precisely as the one who was sent to evangelize. It requires that we live, think and act in Christ Jesus. We continue the mystery of the Incarnation through which Christ emptied himself out of love. So it is that the missionary must "renounce himself and everything that up to this point he considered as his own, and ... make himself everything to everyone" (Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, #24).

Missionary spirituality is also characterized by apostolic charity, "the charity of Christ who came 'to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad' (Jn 11:52)." To proclaim to their brothers and sisters that they are loved by God, missionaries must show love towards all, to the point of giving their lives for their neighbor. That is how they overcome the barriers and divisions of race, caste or ideology.

Missionaries must also love the Church as Christ did. "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25).

Finally, missionaries must be holy. The Holy Father quotes his apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici: "Holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church" (#17).

In sum, the missionary is a person of the Beatitudes. Before sending the Twelve on mission (cf. Mt 10), Jesus taught them the way of mission, the way of the Beatitudes: poverty, meekness, acceptance of suffering and persecution, the desire for justice and peace, and charity (cf. Mt 5:1-12). "By living out the Beatitudes, the missionary experiences and shows concretely that the Kingdom of God has already come and that he has accepted it." Such is the missionary's hope in Christ. That is why he can proclaim the "Good News."

CONCLUSION

In the encyclical's conclusion, the Holy Father writes that he sees "the dawning of a new missionary age...if all Christians, and missionaries and young Churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time."

The Pope also exhorts all of us to turn to Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer.

"Like the Apostles after Christ's Ascension, the Church must gather in the Upper Room 'together with Mary the Mother of Jesus' (Acts 1:14), in order to pray for the Spirit and to gain the strength and courage to carry out the missionary mandate. We too, like the Apostles, need to be transformed and guided by the Spirit."