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Colonial Mission: Retrospect and Prospect

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Keywords: Colonialism, Portuguese, Colonial Mission, Church's mission

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Colonial Mission

Retrospect and Prospect

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The commemoration of the quincentennial of the Portuguese expansion into the East from May 18, 1498 and the beginning of the more organised Latin mission into India provides an occasion to evaluate the mission during the colonial period with its accompanying motives and results, especially from the perspective of the victims of colonialism. Such an exercise can lead to important insights into the development of mission theology, which in turn can influence our missionary practice today.

As Kenneth Latourette has pointed out, Christianity, or for that matter any other religion or ideology, has not seen such a territorial expansion as the expansion of the Faith in the sixteenth century.¹ It was closely associated with geographic discoveries, commerce, conquests and the migrations of European peoples.

The Iberian civilisation was in full swing. The two countries of the Iberian Peninsula, as Enrique Dussel has emphasised, with the generous help of their people, of their military forces, of their noblemen passionate for new titles, of the multitudes of poverty-stricken individuals thirsting for riches, and of religious and priests, among whom there were many saints as well,

initiated the political, economic and spiritual conquest.² What interests us in this paper is the spiritual conquest. However, it is very much mixed up with the political and economic conquest. The story of conquest, colonisation and mission was one. The Church was part and parcel of the state.

Colonial Mission and Crusades

The intimacy between the throne and the altar was a tradition of Europe from the time of Charlemagne. Eleventh century Europe experienced an economic boom as well as a rapid increase in its population. This was accompanied by a revival in monasticism manifested in the Cluny movement, which in turn increased the religious feelings of the Christians. This increased religious zeal coupled with a growing appreciation of pilgrimages to the holy places, especially to the lands hallowed by the life and ministry of the Lord, gave rise to the crusades. The crusades started in the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th and 9th centuries and spread to the East from the 11th century and came to a tragic end in 1453 when Constantinople fell to the Turks.

Though the recovery of the Holy sepulchre was the acclaimed cause of the crusades, they were also an instrument

of political and economic expansion. As Enrique Dussel rightly points out the crusades were motivated equally by the desire to conquer the contemporary world market, Palestine and Egypt, the meeting point of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.³

The modern colonial mission was a continuation of the Crusades. When the rest of Europe was licking the wounds of the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, the Iberian nations managed to push the Muslims in their home soil down south to the island of Granada. Pope Alexander VI, well pleased with these two nations, gave them the right to conquer the lands that they “discovered” and “to bring to Christian faith the peoples who inhabit these islands and the mainland ... and to send to the said islands and the mainland wise, upright, God-fearing, and virtuous men who will be capable of instructing the indigenous peoples in good morals and in the Catholic faith.”⁴ As Teotonio De Souza remarks, the Pope was eager to give his blessings (“*Padroado*” and “*Patronato*”) to the Portuguese and the Spanish colonial forays, in return for the hopes he entertained of being acknowledged as the leader and guide of Christendom. The rulers of Portugal and Spain on the other hand wanted the papal blessings to subject the masses of Portuguese and Spanish people to their interests and to subjugate the conquered peoples.⁵

Though the crusades failed, the crusade mentality persisted. The crusade spirituality was still very much a folk-spirituality which could supply zeal and fanaticism to the ignorant masses. The idea of the Holy land was

extended to the whole universe, especially the newly “discovered” lands. Conquest replaced crusades. The folk-spirituality of pilgrimage was transformed into pilgrimage to pagan lands for conquest. Thus the crusades paved the way for the colonial mission.

Spiritual Conquest with Political Conquest

Mission was a by-product of political expansion and parallel to it in its expression. Often mission was the justification for the military conquest. Heinzguenter Frohnes writes: “In 1501-1502 Spain had to look for some other way of justifying the occupation of the New World. This justification was found in the missionary mandate, something wholly new in the history of discovery.”⁶ The Roman Pontiffs of the time, busy with family aggrandisement, with European politics, with the Turkish menace and with the rising tide of Protestantism, were only too happy to approve this.⁷

A ritual proclamation (“*requerimiento*”) worked out by Palacios Rubios in 1513 that was read out by the Spanish ‘Conquistadores’ whenever they acquired new territories justified the conquest saying that God made a whole continent emerge from the ocean for Spain, and over this continent Spain’s power directly represented God’s power, the Church’s power, and the power of the “*senora y superiora del universo mundo*”.⁸ The Spaniards demanded the Indians to recognise the Church as the ruler of the whole world and to accept the right order of faith and the world, willed by God, from the Spanish monarch who acted on a direct

mandate from God. To refuse that summons meant war, a just war, and the proclamation made it clear that in such a case the Indians alone would be guilty of the bloodshed and the disaster that would inevitably overtake them. Thus “making God’s will known to the Indians therefore established Spain’s right to the New World”, comments Frohnes.⁹ Hence, the call to the faith, with the choice of submission or war, was a precondition for the Spanish occupation of territory.

When Vasco da Gama reported his successful voyage to India, Portuguese King Dom Manuel I in 1499 claimed himself to be the Lord of Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and of India. Conquest, Navigation, Commerce and mission were so intertwined that the Cross and crown, throne and altar, Faith and Empire, God and Mammon, were all inseparable.¹⁰

Similarly, speaking about Goa, Fr. Paulo de Trindade wrote in his *CONQUISTA SPIRITUAL D’ORIENTE* in 1638; “The two swords of the civil and the ecclesiastical power were always so close together in the conquest of the East, that we seldom find one being used without the other. For the weapons only conquered through the right that the preaching of the Gospel gave them, and the preaching was only of some use when it was accompanied and protected by the weapons.”¹¹ How mission and conquest went hand in glove in many places, can be seen from the complaint of the Africans: “At first we had the land and the white men the Gospel. Then the mis-

sionaries came and taught us to close our eyes and say our prayers while the white men were stealing our land from us. And now we have the Gospel and they have the land.”¹² Enrique Dussel concurs: “The religious or missionary aims of the Spanish rulers are easily understood. They were an integral and necessary part of the effort to expand and thus were mixed essentially with the political aims of Spain as a Christian kingdom. Freed from any admixture or ambiguity, the missionary aim would not be a part of the expansion of a Christian kingdom, but it would be only that of the Roman Catholic Church. The history of Christian missions in Hispanic America, however, is the account of a continual crisis between the state which included the aims of the Church as a means of expansion – a position clearly accepted by many members of the Church but certainly not by everyone....”¹³

The biblical justification of Joshua’s conquering and raping the indigenous populations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites (Dt 7:1-11), the Amorites, the Perizzites and the Jebusites (Gen 12:6-7; 15:8-21; Jos 9:1-2) has been used to justify the colonial conquest of the indigenous populations by the “superior” peoples of the West. Thus, the renowned Biblical scholar W.F. Albright writes: “From the impartial standpoint of a philosopher of history, it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type should vanish before a people of superior potentialities, since there is a point beyond which racial mixture cannot go without disaster.”¹⁴ Michael Prior underlines how “virtually every colonial enterprise

emanating from the West had the right to exploit, and in some cases exterminate the “inferior” indigents, usually designated by the uncomplimentary term, “the natives”.¹⁵

Some missionaries in fact saw the colonial powers in the light of the Eusebian Imperial Theology. Thus, a Jesuit missionary wrote to Portugal from Goa in 1637: “God’s purpose in inspiring the Portuguese seaborne-trade with India was to increase the harvest of souls.”¹⁶ Similarly, Fr. Antonio Vieira S.J. assured King Affonso VI on April 20, 1657, that Portugal had been created by God for the express purpose of spreading the Roman Catholic faith around the world. “The more Portugal acts in keeping with this purpose, the more sure and certain is its preservation.”¹⁷

However, in the later period of the colonial era, especially after the founding of the British East India Company, the relation between the colonizers and the missionary was not always that smooth. There were cases, as in India, outside the Portuguese sway, where not only were the missionaries and the colonial government not hand in glove, but they were more often than not at considerable odds with each other. “The commercial companies frequently stood in the way of the missionaries, and the missionaries, with few exceptions, decried the life-style of the traders and colonists. Rarely was the association harmonious”, observes Tucker Ruth.¹⁸

Ideological and Theological Presuppositions

A remarkable account of the theological motivation of the spiritual con-

quest can be seen from a letter the Franciscan General Fr. Francisco de los Angelos wrote to his friars in New Spain (Mexico) in 1523. Referring to Mexico he writes: “Since its vintage is being gathered by the devil and the flesh, Christ does not enjoy the possession of the souls which he purchased with his blood, it seems to me that, if Christ lacks for no insults there, neither was there reason for me to lack any feeling concerning them; for I have as great, and even greater reason, than the prophet David to feel and say with him: The zeal of thy house has eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me (Ps 68:10).”¹⁹

Thus the major theological motivation of mission was the salvation of souls for whom Christ died. These souls were considered to be engaged in devil worship and thus subjects of satan. By baptism these souls were snatched away from the devil and sent to heaven.

As David Bosch has shown, the colonial period precipitated an unparalleled era of mission. “Christendom discovered with shock that, fifteen centuries after the Christian church was founded, there were still millions of people who knew nothing about salvation and who, since they were not baptized, were all headed for eternal punishment.”²⁰ They were sheer devil worshippers who lacked any sense of a true God. Though later enlightened anthropologist-missionaries like Wilhelm Schmidt would show how even among the primitives there is faith in a Supreme Being,²¹ for the earlier missionaries they were heathens, idolaters, sitting in the shadow of death and darkness of sin.

The notion of sin divided the world into two camps: Christian Europe and the colonial world. Led by this false presumption, there was a systematic destruction of national values and religions, inculcating Western values camouflaged as Christian values.²²

The sense of religious superiority was compounded with the sense of racial and cultural superiority. As Jon Sobrino has written, anthropologically the human inferiority of the peoples of the conquered places was established. Ethically the evil and perverse customs of these peoples were condemned.²³ Hence mission was based on a distorted idea about the peoples of the newly discovered places.

The mission and the missionary operated from a false anthropology that reduced the Africans and other peoples to savages, barbarians and primitives. This pseudo-scholarship in Anthropology was often reinforced by the reports of some missionaries, based on their own world-views and values. European superiority and ethnocentrism was so high that all those who were outside the pale of European culture were considered savages and primitives. The missionaries, soaked as they were in this pseudo-scholarship, went out not only to spread the true faith but also to civilize the savage "natives". Pope Alexander VI, who divided the world between Portugal and Spain in 1493 with a demarcation bull, "Inter Caetera Divinae", asked them to send missionaries to bring the natives to faith as well as to civilize them.²⁴

According to this understanding the use of force was justified in mis-

sion, and it was often presumed that the persons involved were incapable of deciding what is good for them. The Gospel injunction, "compel them to come in" (Lk 14:16-24), was used to justify forced conversions. The force used assumed different forms such as the suppression or the banishment of the indigenous priesthood; destruction of "heathen" temples, the burning and banning of all indigenous sacred texts; the prohibition of any form of religious procession, rites, and services, save those of the Church and compulsory attendance at catechism classes.²⁵

One of the theologians, Gracia de Toledo, wrote in 1571 to justify the conquest and the accompanying evangelization. "And so I say of these Indians, that one of the instruments of their predestination and salvation was mines, treasures and riches. Because we can see that where these exist, we find the Gospel has arrived and, where they do not exist, it is a form of condemnation. In lands where there is no gift of gold and silver, there is no soldiers or captain who will go there, nor any minister of the Gospel. Thus, these mines are good for the barbarians, for God provided them so that faith and Christianity might be taken to them and keep them for their salvation."²⁶

Another sad effect of this racial prejudice was the extermination of millions of indigenous people in the name of conquest and mission. It is estimated that during the first 80 years of colonization some 45 million indigenous people were killed in Latin America.²⁷

Similarly, slave trade was justified by the same distorted anthropology. The

Pope authorised the opening of a slave market in Lisbon, where up to twelve thousand Africans were sold annually for transportation to the West Indies.²⁸ It is estimated that over forty million Africans were sold to European colonies.

Colour prejudice was responsible for keeping the indigenous clergy subordinate to the European clergy, or even barring the former altogether from the higher ranks of the clergy. Mateo de Castro, a convert from Goa who was consecrated as bishop of Chrysopolis in 1637 by the Propaganda, was described by the Jesuit Patriarch of Ethiopia Dom Affonso Mendes as “the bare-bottomed Nigger”²⁹ and was denied entry into India by the Portuguese. The deeply ingrained Eurocentric colonial prejudice characterized virtually every form of discipline and historiography.

The mission from this cultural superiority was experienced as the beginning of their Good Friday by the indigenous people. Thus, Chilam Balam de Chumayel from the Maya of Mesoamerica, in the “Libro de los Linages” wrote:

In the Eleventh Ahau there begins the counting of the time ... It was only because of the mad time, the mad priests, that sadness came among us, that Christianity came among us; for the great Christians came with the true God; but that was the beginning of our distress, the beginning of the tribute, the beginning of the alms, what made the hidden discord appear, the beginning of the fighting with fire-arms, the beginning of the outrages, the beginning of being stripped of everything,

the beginning of slavery for debts, the beginning of the debts bound to the shoulders, the beginning of the constant quarrelling, the beginning of the suffering. It was the beginning of the work of the Spaniards and the priests....³⁰

It was this sad plight they inherited with the Bible and the Christian Faith that made the Andean and American Indians return the Bible to Pope John Paul II with an open letter, during his visit to Peru in 1990. The letter said:

John Paul II, we, Andean and American Indians, have decided to take advantage of your visit to return to you your Bible, since in five centuries it has not given us love, peace or justice. Please take back your Bible and give it back to our oppressors, because they need its moral teachings more than we do. Ever since the arrival of Christopher Columbus a culture, a language, religion and values which belong to Europe have been imposed on Latin America by force. The Bible came to us as part of the imposed colonial transformation. It was the ideological weapon of this colonial assault. The Spanish sword which attacked and murdered the bodies of Indians by day and night became the cross which attacked the Indian soul.³¹

The US Bishops in their pastoral letter on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the Church in Americas laments the cultural oppression and the destruction of the native American civilisation. They speak of “the violent usurpation of Indian lands and the brutalisation of their habitats”.³² The pastoral letter acknowledges and deplores the terrible injustices done to African and American indigenous peoples.

Unlike the spread of the Church in the “new world”, mission in Asia in the wake of the colonial period witnessed the courageous attempts of some of the best creative minds in mission history. What is later known as the “Chinese Rites” and the “Malabar Rites” were endeavours to insert the Faith in the given culture. St. Francis Xavier showed the way already in 1549 when he presented himself to the Japanese daimyo, clothed in silk, escorted by an array of men in similar dress and bearing rich presents.³³ Later Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) had access to the Chinese emperor as a scholar, a learned mathematician from the West, desirous of establishing relations with his peers in the Far East, while making no secret of the fact that he was a Catholic priest. Ricci made use of Chinese expressions like T’IEN CHU (Lord of Heaven), SHANG-TI (God) and T’IEN (heaven) to express the Christian Faith and also integrated several Chinese customs, like the veneration (“*sheng*”) of the ancestors and Confucius, into Christian practice.

Rome, though initially in favour of these adaptations, under the enthusiastic support of the Propaganda, due to the rivalries between the political powers and religious Congregations, later forbade these attempts by the bull EX QUO SINGULARI in 1752.³⁴

Taking inspiration from Ricci, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) tried to penetrate Hinduism from within by adopting Indian social customs which “allowed Indians to enter the Mystical Body without renouncing all their titles and traditions, in a word without incurring the shameful name of renegade”³⁵

However, the Indian attempt too met with the same fate as that of the Chinese Rites by the papal bull of OMNIUM SOLICITUDINEM (1754) of Benedict XIV. The two papal bulls together suppressed any attempt at ‘accommodation’ in the missions. Henceforth the Roman practices were to be transported everywhere exactly as they were in Rome. This decision was rescinded only in 1939 by Pope Pius XII. However, it must be emphasized that the Propaganda through its Instruction of 1659 asked the missionaries not to export Europe to the mission fields, and to respect other cultures and local customs.

Expansion of the Institutional Church

Apart from saving the souls through conversion, the colonial mission was aimed at expanding the institutional Church as it existed in Europe. Though it was only in the late middle ages and with the counter-reformation that we come across the strong emphasis of the institutional Church, it has its beginning already in the new religio-political system introduced by Constantine. This received further justification by Augustine’s monumental work THE CITY OF GOD. In the context of the Donatists and the Pelagians Augustine stressed the visible unity of the Church and held that salvation was only within the Church. This in turn laid the remote foundation for the later mission theology of the Catholic church. St. Thomas Aquinas too played a role in the understanding of the mission as founding the church. He wrote that proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ can

be understood either as the activity of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ or the preaching the Gospel with the full effect, i.e., founding the church among the peoples (S.T., I-II, 106, 4.4; cf also 1 Sent. 16.1.2.2).

A leading theologian of the colonial times, Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) affirmed that the Church is a Perfect Society “as visible and palpable as the assembly of the people of Rome, or the Kingdom of Gaul, or the republic of Venice” (Controversies IV, III, 10). As a Perfect Society the Church was absolute, unchangeable, having in itself every perfection. The Church alone possessed Truth and Salvation. Mission was one of its qualities. Mission meant the activities by which the Western ecclesiastical system was extended to the rest of the world.³⁶ The entire missionary enterprise could be defined in terms of a dogmatic-institutional arrangement, i.e., ensuring that the faith is spread, sacraments are administered and a hierarchy is established.³⁷

Looking ahead

As John Paul II exhorts, our reading of the colonial mission must be done “with the humility of truth, looking only at the truth in order to give thanks to God for successes and learning from mistakes in order to be renewed in its approach to the future”.³⁸ Our reflection is not in order to condemn the past but to learn from the past so that we can be faithful witnesses of the Gospel today.

We have seen how mission in the colonial period had its axis on the conversion of the ‘heathen’ and the

implantation of the Church. It operated from a position of power, superiority and paternalism leading to marginalization of peoples and their cultures. Naturally mission today must be free from the burden of this dehumanising anthropology.

If the mission of the past in many cases led to an experience of oppression and exploitation today mission has to lead to an experience of liberation and humanisation. Conversion is no more a one-way traffic. The evangelizer too goes through a process of conversion: a conversion to the context of the people, especially to that of the poor. This type of conversion we see in the lives of many missionaries today such as Mother Theresa, Dom Helder Camara, Rani Maria, Thomas.A.T., et al. In this the evangelizer also goes through a process of evangelization.

Concern for the institutional Church must give way to the involvement in the actual sufferings and aspirations of humankind. This in turn gives expression to the message of the coming of God into this human world. In this form of evangelization, the Church rather than coming from outside becomes a new presence among the oppressed and the poor so that it really becomes a church of the poor, a church on the edges, a church at the periphery. Only then will the Church be recognized as the incarnation of divine love, even as the Risen Lord was recognized on the road to Emmaus in his fraternal sharing. This renders its credibility. Its face is its solidarity with the poor. Gospel is no more an agent of resignation or consolation, but the inspiration to transform unjust and exploitative situations.

As Gustavo Gutierrez has spelt out, the urgent question for us today is "how to say to the poor: God loves you?".³⁹ The daily experience of poor, insignificant, oppressed persons is the absence of love. Injustice is the expression of the absence of love in their daily life. With a globalized economy, the poor are marginalized as they have neither any merchandise to sell nor the money to buy the necessities of their life. The option for the poor in the real world is not easy. How are we to be part of this world and yet avoid complicity with institutions of exploitation and oppression? How can we avoid complicity with injustice and at the same time live in this world? We can denounce major injustices by our words, actions and attitudes as we try to be Christians.

In the context of a globalized and unipolar economic system the Church must join in movements for the abolition of international debts at various levels and in campaigns against money-laundering. It can oppose the "structural adjustment" programmes which eventually works against the poor of the countries concerned.

Christians can join hands with other forces in giving shape to alternative agricultural projects which would promote bio-diversity and meet the real needs of the local people. The Church can be a powerful agent of net-working pressure groups and movements that can check the profit oriented multi-national companies and projects operating with vested interests.

Keeping in mind the cultural violence done to the indigenous people, especially in Latin America, today's

mission must be sensitive to the cause of the tribal peoples everywhere and respect and promote indigenous cultures. When we are threatened with ecological disaster and shrinking bio-diversity, we can learn from their culture which maintains a balance between human needs and the ecosystem. At the onslaught of modern development and industrialization the tribal people are the worst sufferers as they are displaced and dispossessed of their land. The Church can come forward to find response to their degradation. It is not that the tribals are to be kept as museum pieces. They too have a right to change. But the changes must preserve their basic values of equity and renewability.⁴⁰

Today the concept of the poor is not confined to the economically deprived alone. It would include all those who suffer discrimination and dehumanization of any sort as well as those who have to depend on others for their existence. The poor are the disenfranchised – women, children, unorganised daily labourers, the Dalits, the indigenous, the minjung. In the present context, the Church's mission cannot be blind to anthropological poverty as it inflicts even more suffering than economic poverty.

As opposed to a triumphalistic Church with claims of absoluteness, the Church of post-colonial era realizes that the infinite and many-sided riches of the reality of God cannot adequately be expressed or contained by it or any religion as such. Even the Bible does not use "the Absolute" as a name for God, rather it uses relational terms such as Lord, Creator, Redeemer, etc. The emphasis is on the relationship between

God who is active in human history and human beings.

Alexander Ganoczy has shown how the idea of the absolute claim of Christianity is philosophical in origin.⁴¹ It goes back to Hegel according to whom Christianity was the only religion that would rightly be termed as 'absolute', because it had raised the essential element of all religion, the union of God and man, to its highest level by professing Jesus Christ as God-man. The Hegelian use is in the sense that Christianity is the bearer of what is the highest revelation in itself of the absolute Spirit. This dialectical Philosophy of religion of Hegel cannot be taken to justify the use of Absolute for Christianity.

In the Gospels we have very little support for this philosophical approach to Absoluteness. In the ministry of Jesus if we could speak of the Absolute, it is the Kingdom of God that is imminent and brought about in the practice of Jesus. Jesus himself is relative to the reign of his Father. He is the herald of the Kingdom. Jesus' evangelizing and kerygmatic way of speaking always points away from himself and towards God and His Reign.⁴² His practical aim was the welfare and salvation of the poor, the captives and sinners (Mk 1:14; Lk 4:18; 8:1, etc.). He was essentially theocentric which in turn was radically anthropocentric in practice, and in no sense do we come across a sublime egocentricity in Jesus. The resurrection was seen as the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ and in him for all people.

The Church, the assembly of the brethren, *ekklesia*, was the sphere of

worship and it was the point of arrival as well as the point of departure as far as mission was concerned. "It was the place where the evangelized were brought together and prepared, although it did not provide an infallible guarantee of their salvation", comments Ganoczy.⁴³

In the early Church there was no room for boasting or of making Christianity absolute, or claiming that the Church was the only mediator of salvation. Christian absoluteness is the absolute demand to live our own Christian faith to the maximum, and thus we should be a total witness of our faith in Jesus Christ. That faith is not for the sake of making claims or for measuring the faith of others. Nor is it for condemning others.

The colonial conversion and implantation of the Church operated from the presumption of the impossibility of salvation outside the Church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), which in turn goes back to St. Cyprian (Ep 73:21). However, Cyprian used the dictum in the context of his argument for the indivisibility of the Church, against the Novatians.⁴⁴

Vatican II has acknowledged the possibility of salvation in other religions (AG 7; GS 16,22; LG 16; NA 2, etc.). All this shows that other religions are not any more to be seen as objects of conquest but as partners in dialogue and in collaboration. This is based on authentic Christian faith in one God who is the Creator of all and the Lord of all history and who reaches out to humanity through his eternal Word in whom all are created and who enlightens all

humans coming into the world (Jn 1:1-4). This dialogue must be extended also to the primal religions.

The Church as the community of the disciples of Jesus Christ on earth is instituted and assembled for a particular mission even as in the Bible any call is for a particular service, mission. This mission is nothing other than serving human beings by manifesting the love of God made present in Jesus Christ (RM 2). In the words of *Ad Gentes*, "Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God's decree, and its fulfilment in the world and in world history, in the course of which God by means of mission manifestly works out the history of salvation" (AG 9). The characteristic self-description of the Church in the Council decrees is: the mystery of God's presence on earth (LG 1, AG 1).

Our past missiological literature abounded with terms such as conquering, teaching, baptizing, saving, planting, etc. We did not speak of pitching the tent among the people, being with them, beholding them and being moved with sentiments of compassion, admiration, sadness, etc., which are all too vibrant in the Gospels. Jesus was truly with the people and went to meet them where they were and through his presence with them evoked in them admiration, faith, repentance, etc.

Today mission is to be seen as a partnership, God's partnership with humanity. This demands attitudes of communality, humility, service. Mission in the past predominantly was working "for" the people, if not against

them. It was from a position of superiority. We wanted to bring people into our fold and to exercise control over them in the name of salvation.

The greatest enemy of mission today is control, power. This inordinate attachment to control and power makes the Church too susceptible to fear. The Church today suffers from a fear complex. Today's Church experiences various sorts of fears, as Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga of Sao Felix do Araguaia of Brazil has shown. It is afraid of Marxism, of the secular world, of Ecumenism, of collegiality, of local church, of laity, of women, of theologians, of cultures, of youth, of liberation theology, of religions, of sex, of sects, of renewal, of changes ... when all these can be opportunities for mission.⁴⁵

This uncalled for fear may be a sign of our moving on the wrong track. If we are a community of witnesses to the Gospel of the Kingdom, then the objects of all these fears can become opportunities to collaborate with, to witness to, to exercise compassion and thus to carry out the task of genuine mission. The Church has to fear nothing but fear itself, as the resurrected Lord has assured it.

Today we need a greater awareness not only of the indivisibility of the Church but also of humanity itself. Vatican II celebrates the common origin and the common destiny of all people (NA 1). Lack of this awareness is the cause of much violence and suffering. Lack of this awareness breeds insensitivity, claims of superiority, exclusivism, etc., leading to control,

oppression and marginalization. Our sense of community must extend to the whole of creation, especially in the context of the ecological disaster. The earth is our home and justice demands that we do not make it uninhabitable for us and for posterity by our greed.

Contextualized mission will make the Church truly local, but always conscious that where the Church exists it exists as the universal Church, responsible for witnessing to the Gospel in a particular socio-economic, cultural and religious context. It will be in communion with the other local churches in the

spirit of mutual listening, always acknowledging the ministry of unity exercised by the pope.

In summary, mission of the post-colonial period is a true service to the world, by becoming an extroverted presence within it as the light, the salt and the leaven. Its aim is integral salvation which is at once peace, integrity, community, harmony and justice. Its motto will be: there is no salvation, not outside the church, but outside the cosmos. Mission should lead to this cosmotheandric communion.

Notes

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2. Enrique Dussel: *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism ot Liberation*, (Tr. Alan Neely), Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 41.
3. Enrique Dussel: "The Real Motives for the Conquest", *Concilium* 1990/6, p. 32.
4. Stephen Neill: *A History of Christian Missions*, Penguin Books, Aylesbury, 1975, p. 141.
5. Teotonio De Souza: "Spiritual Conquest of the East: Critique of the Church History of Portuguese Asia (16th and 17th Centuries)", *Indian Church History Review* vol xii/ 1, 1985, p.10.
6. Heinzuguenther Frohnes: "Mission in the Light of Critical Historical Analysis", *Concilium*, 1978, 114, pp:8-18.
7. Cf.C.R. Boxer: *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion 1440-1770*, John Hopkins University Press:Baltimore. 1978, p.78.
8. Cf. Frohnes, loc.cit., p.12-13.
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