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Evangelization in the Contemporary Roman Catholic Thought

*De. John Romus**

Introduction

A few decades ago, it would have been unusual to come across the concept "EVANGELIZATION" in the Roman Catholic sense of mission. For centuries in the past, beginning from the great missionary movements of the sixteenth century onwards, Catholics spoke of "missions" in the plural with a specific meaning as Church-extension-territories carried out by countries of the Christendom in the non-Christian world where Christianity had not yet been firmly rooted. Attention was focused, in mission discourses, on the transplantation process of the Church in the mission lands by a select group of Church personnel.

Not long ago, the term "mission" in the singular made a strong come back in the vocabulary of missiology and ecclesiology to underscore a renewed awareness that the Church is essentially missionary in all circumstances and in all countries of the world, whether or not these countries are traditionally Christian. But the purpose of mission remained, rather, to establish the Church throughout the world as the universal means intended by God for the salvation of humankind.¹

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) ushered in a paradigm shift in the theology of mission. Its emphasis moved from "missions" to "mission" and then toward "evangelization". The Council interpreted the universal mission of the Church in terms of evangelization and made it one of its central themes, but did not maintain it always with an exact meaning. In AG 6, for example, it is used for missionary preaching ; whereas in AG 23 and 27 it meant the entire missionary activity of the Church. Elsewhere in LG 35; CD 6; GS 44; and AA 2, it is referred to the entire ministry of the Word.²

A sequel to the conciliar vision of mission, the concept "evangelization" attained rich and inclusive meaning in the post-conciliar documents covering in its ambit all activities ecclesial, even those activities which might sound, perhaps, strange to the traditional Catholic sensibility.

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EVANGELIZATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY ROMAN CATHOLIC THOUGH

After presenting a review of the re-entry of the concept “evangelization” in missiology and ecclesiology, this article presents a study of the contemporary Catholic approach to Church’s evangelizing mission as seen in three significant mission documents, namely *Ad Gentes*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*. At a time when questions are being raised on missionary motives from some quarters, we highlight some of its salient features - its methods and evangelical programmes - which are aimed to place Church’s mission at the service of all people by revealing the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ.

Re-entry of Evangelization

The concept “evangelization” is biblical and its origin goes back to the Old Testament. In the Greek Bible, the verb “evangelize” (*euaggelizesthai*) means to bring or to publish good tidings. Its Hebrew equivalent “*baser*” means the public announcement of Yahweh’s deed which is of a special significance to people to whom the announcement is made³. In the Septuagint the term occurs in the historical books, the Psalms and specially in Deutero-Isaiah⁴. In Isaiah 52:7, we have, for example, an image of the herald who runs ahead of the people on their return from Babylonian exile to Jerusalem, proclaiming that Yahweh is triumphing over all his enemies and establishing his kingdom.

In the New Testament the verb “*euaggelizesthai*” frequently occurs in Luke, Acts and the Pauline writings⁵. Jesus is anointed to proclaim God’s Reign and to evangelize the poor.⁶ After Easter experience the apostles have been sent by the Risen Lord endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit with the objective of “preaching” (*euaggelizomenoi*) the good news of salvation in him⁷. The Catholic Church has been involved in evangelization throughout its long history. The crisis of the use of the term “evangelization” has its roots in the Counter-Reformation, when the terms “gospel” and “evangelical” were taken over by the Protestants and became suspect to Catholic ears.⁸ Catholics laid emphasis not so much on proclamation of the gospel as on teaching catechism, not so much on the good news of salvation as on the moral law, the Church and the sacraments. “Their missionary activity”, says Avery Dulles, “was therefore less evangelical and more ecclesiastical”.⁹ During the centuries that preceded the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church as a whole followed a path of protectionism to safeguard its faithful against forces of schism and modern errors¹⁰. Missionary activity still went on but it came to be regarded as “establishing missions” and “propagation of (Catholic) faith” in foreign lands which was seen as the preserve of apostolic religious orders and societies rather than a concern of the whole Church. Its approach was rather ecclesio-centric than focused on Christ and the gospel¹¹.

The use of the concept “evangelization” in missiology and ecclesiology was once again reclaimed by the Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century. In the first Union Missionary Convention held in New York in 1854, the great missionary, Alexander Duff explained mission, once again, in terms of evangelization. He said:

“(T)he chief means of divine appointment for the evangelization of the world are the faithful teaching and preaching of the pure Gospel of salvation by duly qualified ministers and other holy and consistent disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, accompanied with prayer and savingly applied by the grace of the Holy Spirit...as well as any other instrumentalities fitted to bring the word of God home to men’s souls together with any process which experience may have sanctioned as the most efficient in raising up everywhere indigenous ministers and teachers of the living Gospel”¹².

Evangelization re-entered in the Catholic theology of mission toward the middle of the twentieth century. It was, in part, due to the influence of kerygmatic theology developed by Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth. From 1930s through 1950s, Catholic theologians promoted a new style of kerygmatic theology in which evangelization was taken to mean, states A. Dulles, “a confident proclamation of the basic message of God’s offer of salvation through Jesus Christ”.¹³ The kerygmatic sermons of Peter and Paul as reported in the Book of Acts of the Apostles, were taken as models to renew Christian life in dechristianized sections of European society.

John XXIII, the charismatic Pope who opened the Second Vatican Council was exposed to the new kerygmatic theology which was spreading in Europe. In the Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis*, officially convoking the Council, he expressed his hope that the Council would “bring the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the gospel”.¹⁴ Following the apostolic directives,¹⁵ Vatican II interpreted the universal mission of the Church mandated by Christ in terms of evangelization and made it one of its central themes. The Council affirmed in the very first sentence of its Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, that Christ had sent the Church to preach the gospel to every creature.¹⁶ Since the Church is missionary by its very nature, said the Council, the task of evangelization is incumbent on every Christian.¹⁷ The bishops in union with the pope, are charged with leading the process.¹⁸ The pastors are to stir up the zeal for evangelization as part of their pastoral ministry.¹⁹ The laity are expected to cooperate in this perennial ecclesial effort, especially in the context of their work in the secular society and family life.²⁰ In this way, the Church keeps on doing its evangelizing mission not alone but in solidarity and dialogue with other Churches, religions, secular movements and organizations sharing with them the hopes and longing of the people of our time for human dignity, equality and solidarity.²¹

Commenting about the Church in terms of its missionary nature, the Council maintained that Church was not an end in itself, but has for its only purpose to make Christ and his work visibly present in the world. The Council explained:

“By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. For this reason... this Council wishes to set forth more precisely to the faithful and to the entire world the nature and encompassing mission of the Church. The conditions of this age lend special urgency to the Church’s task of bringing all men to full union with Christ, since mankind today is joined together more closely than ever before by social, technical, and cultural bonds.”²²

The Church’s sacramentality has got a twofold significance: it is the light of Christ as well as a sign and instrument of the grace which unites humankind to God and to one another. Hence, as presence of and witness to Christ, Church is, at all times and everywhere, with a deep sense of evangelizing mission offering its service in multifarious forms to all strata of society. These theological insights and missiological methods have been spelt out in the following documents.

Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes* (1965)

The Second Vatican Council’s Decree *Ad Gentes* on the Church’s Missionary Activity reflects the Church’s new understanding of its mystery, its new openness to all that is good and its

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attitude and approach towards the religions of the world. The Decree starts with the mystery of the Church in the divine plan of salvation: The Father, the fountain of love freely creates and graciously calls the whole human race to receive his gifts of life and glory. The Father sends the Son to unite the entire human family and his Spirit to complete the work of salvation. And this work of the Father bestowed by the Son in the Spirit continues in the Church for the world.²³ The Decree is divided into six chapters, dealing respectively with the doctrinal principles, missionary activity, particular Churches, missionaries, organization of missionary activity, and cooperation.

Chapters one and two, which give the doctrinal principles of evangelization, start with a Trinitarian preamble and traces the evangelizing mission of the Church to the Father's calling to human family through the Son incarnate and the Holy Spirit.²⁴ Hence, the Church born of the Spirit at Pentecost to continue Christ's mission, is essentially missionary. *Ad Gentes* states:

"The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father".

"This decree flows from "that fountain of love" or charity within God the Father. From Him, who is "the origin without origin", the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son. Freely creating us out of His surpassing and merciful kindness, and graciously calling us moreover to communicate in life and glory with Himself, He has generously poured out His divine goodness and does not cease to do so. Thus He who made all things may at last be "all in all"(1 Cor. 15:28), procuring at once and the same time His own glory and our happiness"²⁵

It is this missionary nature which compels the Church to become present to all nations to make Christ known according to divine purpose, irrespective of what God can do to those whom the Gospel does not reach. The Decree says:

"Therefore, though God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him (Heb.11:6) yet, a necessity lies upon the Church (cf. 1 Cor.9:16)... to preach the Gospel"²⁶

Ad Gentes stresses that evangelization involves working for the renewal of human family which upholds values truly human; for Christ is the principle of the new humanity. The Decree emphasizes:

"Missionary activity is closely bound up with human nature itself and its aspirations. By manifesting Christ, the Church reveals to men the real truth about their condition and their total vocation. For Christ is the source and model of that renewed humanity, penetrated with brotherly love, sincerity, and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire...

The gospel has truly been a leaven of liberty and progress in human history, even in its temporal sphere, and always proves itself a leaven of brotherhood, of unity and of peace"²⁷

The Decree *Ad Gentes* proposes a holistic approach to evangelization which involves Christian witness through interreligious dialogue,²⁸ commitment to socio-economic and cultural development of the people²⁹ and direct proclamation of the gospel³⁰. Following the economy

of incarnation, evangelization also includes the process of building up of the Local Churches and inculturation so that the Church may be fully at home in the traditions of the land³¹ It also proposes a missionary spirituality in harmony with the religious tradition of the nations. Ad Gentes suggests :

“Working to plant the Church, and thoroughly enriched with the treasures of mysticism adorning the Church’s religious tradition, religious communities should strive to give expression to these treasures and to hand them on in a manner harmonious with the nature and genius of each nation. Let them reflect attentively on how Christian religious life may be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions whose seeds were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the gospel”³²

The decree asserts that evangelization is the work of all faithful and, therefore, each according to his/her calling in the mission of the Church, needs sound theological and missiological training which is not adverse to moral and spiritual values found in the plurality of cultures and religions of the people among whom they are called to be evangelizers.³³

Evangelii Nuntiandi (1974)

Evangelii Nuntiandi is an Apostolic Exhortation on the evangelizing mission of the Church in the modern world written by Pope Paul VI to resume the work of the Synod of Bishops on “Evangelization of the Modern World”³⁴ held in Rome, 1974. The Synod proposed that evangelization must be responsive to the social, political, cultural, economic and religious concerns of our time; and accordingly suggested inculturation, liberation, commitment to social justice and building up of Local Churches as part of evangelizing activity.³⁵ In consonance with the thinking of the Synod, the entire text of EN is divided into seven parts : From Christ the Evangelizer to the Evangelizing Church; What is Evangelization ? ; The Content of Evangelization; The Methods of Evangelization; The Beneficiaries of Evangelization; The Workers of Evangelization; The Spirit of Evangelization.

Pope Paul VI affirms in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that Jesus Christ is the first evangelizer because to “proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God”³⁶ sums up the entire mission Jesus received from the Father. All the aspects of his mystery were components of his evangelizing activity. EN states that Jesus proclaims a salvation that liberates one from every form of oppression:

“At the kernel and center of His Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by Him, of seeing Him, and of being given over to Him. All of this is begun during the life of Christ and definitively accomplished by His death and resurrection. But it must be patiently carried on during the course of history, in order to be realized fully on the day of the final coming of Christ, whose date is known to no one except the Father”³⁷

The Church is linked to evangelization in its most intimate being because the Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Christ and sent, in its turn, by Christ to continue his own

evangelizing activity. Hence, EN states:

“She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gifts of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the mass, which is the memorial of his death and resurrection”³⁸

In EN, Paul VI sees evangelization as renewal of humanity by the transforming power of the gospel and defines:

“(E)vanglizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new...But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism...The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and, if it had to be expressed in one sentence, the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert(cf. Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18,2:4) solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs”³⁹

To transform all the strata of humanity means more than merely a geographical expansion of the proclamation but also of “affecting and as it were upsetting through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgment,... ways of thinking, source of inspiration and models of life, which are in conflict with the Word of God and the plan of salvation”.⁴⁰ Hence, although evangelization can not be reduced to temporal projects alone, yet it is essentially linked up with working for justice, liberation and human advancement. The Pope asserted in the Apostolic Exhortation, “The Church...has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings - many of whom are her own children – the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization”.⁴¹

Evangelization is not complete without inculturation because the gospel permeates human culture and should be at home with every culture. Strictly speaking inculturation is part of the manner of realizing the process of proclamation, specially regarding establishment of the Local Churches. EN says:

“Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life”.⁴²

Probably the greatest merit of EN is precisely in the way it understands evangelization as a multi-dimensional task, made up of varied elements which are complementary and mutually enriching. It expresses, at the same time, without bias the essential mission of the Church, in a manner relevant to the time; and does not contradict basic considerations traditionally employed in describing Church’s mission.

Redemptoris Missio (1990)

Redemptoris Missio, reportedly the result of almost five years of work, written by Pope John Paul II in 1990 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Vatican II, s Decree *Ad Gentes*. It is an important document on the necessity and permanent validity of Church’s mission to

the world. The encyclical is divided into seven parts: Jesus Christ, The Only Saviour; The Kingdom of God; The Holy Spirit, The Principal Agent of Mission; The Vast Horizons Of The Mission Ad Gentes; Leaders And Workers In The Missionary Apostolate; Cooperation In Missionary Activity; Missionary Spirituality. The immediate reason for writing the commemorative encyclical was that the Holy Father sensed an apparent decrease in missionary interest in the Church. He alludes to various difficulties causing disenchantment and compromise in the work of evangelization. Some of these are religious, cultural and even political hostility against missionaries in some countries;⁴³ inter-Church divisions and hostility, the phenomenon of de-christianization within Christian countries; counter-witness of Christian communities to their calling; and the most serious obstacle seems to be a sense of widespread religious indifference and relativism among Christians caused by incorrect theological perspectives on mission and religious pluralism “which leads to the belief that “one religion is as good as another””.⁴⁴

Surely, RM wants to respond to the crisis caused by pluralistic theologies of religion and to assure missionaries that their frontier task of evangelization specially in the non-Christian world is a necessity laid on the Church on account of its missionary mandate.⁴⁵ Hence, RM starts, rather forthrightly in the first chapter itself, with an affirmation of the centrality of Jesus Christ in the divine plan of salvation. The Pope asserts:

“The universality of this salvation in Christ is asserted throughout the New Testament...Christ is the one mediator between God and mankind...No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit...Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ’s own mediation, as they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to him”.⁴⁶

RM nevertheless, assures immediately that salvation is offered not only to those who believe in Christ and entered to Church but also, by God’s grace, to others as well. However, RM says, “This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. It enables each person to attain salvation through his or her free cooperation”.⁴⁷ This approach held in the encyclical is based on the growing conviction of the unity of human race in God’s one plan of creation, redemption in Christ and for all people one final destiny, God.

The Pope, therefore, acknowledges that “(God) does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches”.⁴⁸ He asserts further: “In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in inter-religious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission ad gentes”.⁴⁹ Commenting on the aim and objectives of inter-religious dialogue, the Pope says:

“Dialogue does not originate from tactical concern or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills. Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the “seeds of the Word”, a “ray of that truth which enlightens all men;” these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind. Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the Spirit”.⁵⁰

The most striking part of the RM seems to be the fourth chapter where John Paul II presents a comprehensive picture of what does evangelization mean today? He says that the one mission of Church takes diverse forms arising from a variety of circumstances in which evangelization is carried out. First, there is “mission *Ad Gentes*”, i.e., proclamation for conversion and establishment of the Church in the non-Christian world where the Christian communities are not sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and to proclaim it to others. Secondly, there is evangelization carried out in terms of “pastoral care” in those places where the Church flourishes with adequate ecclesial structures and bear witness to gospel values. Thirdly, there is “new evangelization” or “re-evangelization” in those ancient Christian countries where the Christian majority have “lost a living sense of the faith”.⁵¹

The Pope also indicates certain new sectors of evangelization, namely cultural centers like the world of mass media communicates, the world of science and technology, the universities and the world organizations like the UN and its worldwide networks. The Pope refers all this to “the modern equivalent of the Areopagus”. These centers and sectors condition, control and inspire people in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large”. Hence, these are to be illumined by the light of Christ.⁵² Protection of fundamental rights,⁵³ formation of Local Church and inculturation⁵⁴ and promotion of social justice and development of the people⁵⁵ are also treated as part of evangelization.

Some Salient Features of Evangelization

The mission documents, *Ad Gentes*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio* and insights of the Vatican II, enable us to trace certain important characteristics in terms of theology, content, method and programmes of evangelization as we understand it today. We spell them out here below:

1. Evangelizing Rooted in Mystery

Founded on Trinitarian theology and renewed ecclesiology, *Ad Gentes* opens an universal and inclusive horizon for missiology. The Decree emphasizes that the pilgrim Church is missionary by its very nature not only because of Christ’s mission mandate, but even more so because “it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father”.⁵⁶ The “decree of God the Father” as referred in *Ad Gentes* is the saving mystery for human history hidden in the heart of God, “the fountain of love”,⁵⁷ which has been gradually shared with the human family in various ways and, finally, once and for all spelt out in the Son incarnate⁵⁸ so that humans may enjoy life in abundance.⁵⁹ Hence, the Church’s evangelizing mission is nothing else and nothing less than the continuation of the epiphany of God’s plan in action in the world as entrusted by Christ, “the very first and the greatest evangelizer”⁶⁰ of the Father’s plan.

2. Evangelization Centered on Christ

Jesus Christ is that mystery of God who, through his life, death and resurrection, shared with us the Father – the source of all life. He is the norm and criterion of evangelization. Our experience of him is what we share with others.⁶¹ The Church is the privileged bearer of this mystery as well as its servant whose self-identity consists in being the sacrament of this mystery.⁶² Hence, the whole Church is on evangelizing mission every where and at all time though the concrete method and programmes might vary according to circumstances of time, place and people.

Paul VI spoke often of the centrality of Christ. "There can be no true evangelization", he said, "if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God, are not proclaimed".⁶³ John Paul II said that all missionary proclamation must have its center in Christ.⁶⁴ Similarly speaking at the *Ad Limina* visit of Bishops of Southern Germany, he said, "Only from a personal relationship with Jesus can an effective evangelization develop".⁶⁵

3. *Evangelization Led by the Holy Spirit*

One might get the impression from the earlier approach to "missions", specially in the time of colonialism that the human effort stood in the forefront of missionary work. Avoiding any such tendency towards "crypto-Pelagianism"⁶⁶, Vatican II lays emphasis on the continuing role of the Holy Spirit. In its Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, it make it clear that there is an unceasing collaboration between the Holy Spirit who initiated the Church's evangelizing mission on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and the evangelizer.⁶⁷ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* carried this pneumatological theme forward in missiology. "The holy Spirit", it said, "is the principal agent of evangelization: it is he who impels each individual to proclaim the gospel".⁶⁸

John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* devoted an entire chapter on the pneumatological dimension in missiology.⁶⁹ Elsewhere in another context he said, "Missionary dynamism is not born of the will of those who decide to become propagators of their faith. It is born of the Spirit, who moves the Church to expand, and it progresses through faith in God's love".⁷⁰ On the part of evangelizers it involves a way of life that remains attuned to the ceaseless voice of the Holy Spirit, the Prime Mover, who unceasingly accompanies and directs the work of evangelization.

4. *Evangelization, an Inclusive Concept*

Prior to Vatican II, mission was understood as proclamation of the gospel to non-Christian world and planting of the Church there. Today, evangelizing mission includes not only proclamation but also catechesis, pastoral care, sacramental life and giving witness to gospel values in all sectors/strata of society by way of word and deed.⁷¹

5. *Evangelization Involves All Christians*

In the past evangelization was seen as the special work of apostolic association of priests and members of missionary orders. While acknowledging the special responsibility of the religious orders, Vatican II held that the whole Church is missionary and that "the work of evangelization is the basic duty of the People of God".⁷² The laity, incorporated in Christ by baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist, are in duty bound to cooperate in the work of the Church.⁷³

Paul VI pointed out that "it is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize"⁷⁴ in which the pope, the bishops, priests, religious and laity have their respective responsibilities. The laity are particularly called to evangelize the world of politics, economics, culture, science and arts.⁷⁵ In his Apostolic Exhortation on the Family, John Paul II emphasizes that family is an evangelizing community in which the members evangelize one another as well as other families. Parents are the first evangelizers of their children.⁷⁶

6. *Evangelization and Promotion of Human Freedom*

It was not seldom that in the past moral and physical force have been used for conversion. But Vatican II has emphatically stated that such coercions go against the dignity of human person as a moral subject. For, faith must be a free and conscientious decision made under the leading of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷ John Paul II asserts that the Church addresses people with full respect for their freedom. Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. "The Church proposes; she imposes nothing. She respects individuals and cultures, and she honours the sanctuary of conscience"⁷⁸ .

7. *Evangelization and Inculturation*

Unlike in the past centuries evangelization pays due cognizance to the cultural heritage of the people to whom the gospel is addressed. Paul VI recognized that the gospel must encounter and permeate a variety of cultures and cultures themselves need to be "regenerated by an encounter with the gospel...and the building of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing of elements of human culture or cultures".⁷⁹ John Paul II holds that every nation, every culture has its own part to play in the universal plan of salvation. Hence, inculturation is integral part of evangelization because *Redemptoris Missio* asserts "through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community".⁸⁰

8. *Evangelization Ushers in Social Transformation*

Since Vatican II, there has been a growing realization that integral evangelization involves concern for transformation of the society towards a just and humane social order. Paul VI and John Paul II were emphatic in this regard. Paul VI took up the socio-economic dimensions of evangelization in an important section of *EN* and wrote, "The Church has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings...the duty of assisting the birth of liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete".⁸¹

"Authentic human development", wrote John Paul II in *RM*, "must be rooted in an ever deeper evangelization".⁸² With the resurrection of Christ, God has already created the new humanity and has set the goal of history. Therefore, transformation of history and journey towards it to be the work of evangelization. As of the prophets of old, the Church is endowed with the Spirit in order to collaborate with God in the creation of this new world order. To the bishops of Puerto Rico at their *Ad Limina* visit, John Paul II stressed that evangelization must include determined efforts to build a civilization of peace, solidarity, and love. An integral evangelization will inevitably "penetrate deeply into social and cultural reality, including the economic and political order".⁸³

9. *Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue*

After Vatican II, a healthy relationship between evangelization and interreligious dialogue has been encouraged. Some missionaries are suspicious of dialogue because it seems to impede missionary activity, specially conversion to Christianity. However, Vatican II, while strongly emphasizing the mission mandate, encouraged dialogue and collaboration with believers of other religions.⁸⁴

Stressing on the common vocation of all to salvation, the Council sees religions in the Trinitarian mystery. While commenting on the Paschal mystery of Christ, the Son of God,

the Council said:

“All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is, in fact, one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery”⁸⁵

Paul VI and John Paul II find no conflict between authentic dialogue and proclamation of the gospel. Paul VI, who stressed on the importance of dialogue and mutual respect to religions in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, warned at the same time that esteem for other religions should not lead us to abstain from proclamation.⁸⁶ John Paul II insisted that “interreligious dialogue is part of the Church’s evangelizing mission” and, therefore, proclamation itself must be carried on in a dialogue friendly manner “because dialogue is a path towards the Kingdom”⁸⁷

10. *Evangelization and Ecumenism:*

Unlike most of the Catholic missionary activity since the Reformation, the cultivation of inter-Church relationship is treated an important activity of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Vatican II in its decree on Ecumenism called upon all Christians to bear witness to their common hope without falling into false conciliatory approaches. It also noted that the Christian disunity seriously damages proclamation and its witness value.⁸⁸ The recent popes have frequently repeated this important observation. They are seriously committed to promoting ecumenical unity in accordance with the high-priestly prayer of Jesus (Jn. 17:20-25).

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI called upon all Christians to give greater common witness to Christ before the world when they engage in missionary proclamation.⁸⁹ Similarly, John Paul II says that the proclamation of the gospel of reconciliation requires that Christians need to involve themselves in concerted effort for ecumenical unity. In the context of evangelizing mission, the spread of “Para-Christian sects” who are “sowing confusion by their activity” makes it more urgent than ever, says the present pope, for different Churches and Ecclesial communities to bear harmonious witness to Christ⁹⁰. But in the recent Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* he insists that the existing differences must be honestly faced because “the obligation to respect the truth is absolute”.⁹¹

Conclusion

The conciliar insights and mission documents have marked a notable advance in the way the “evangelizing mission” is grasped today in the Catholic thought. The Church has only one mission given by Christ. It is to “evangelize” the world in which consists its ecclesial identity.⁹² It is to be realized in a variety of ways and among all peoples, whether they are non-Christians, post-Christians, practicing Christians who need pastoral care, non-believers or atheists.⁹³

Evangelization is to be directed to the many cultures, religious traditions, political and social structures, and international organizations which make up the actual world of our day. It is also to be addressed to the world of universities, centers of science and technology, the mass media communications and the subaltern world of the poor, dalits, tribals and marginalized people of any kind. It is in these worlds that we encounter the collective consciousness of the people in multifarious forms carrying in them their joys and hopes, the

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griefs and the anxieties which unite people into communities and catalyze individuals and communities to shape life. Each of them is an Areopagus of our time.⁹⁴ awaiting for evangelizers with a variety of charism.

In this context, the task of evangelization demands, on the part of the Church, a comprehensive and plural approach towards these realities in the form of Christian witness, service to humanity, proclamation, dialogue and cooperation with others, and prophetic critique so that the values of God's Reign proclaimed by Jesus, the evangelizer of the Father, continues to be in word and deed the leaven – a relevant agent – in the world for the emergence of the new creation in which life begins to flourish (cf. Jn. 10:10) in communion with God and one another.⁹⁵

Surely, evangelization under current conditions is an awesomely complex mission. It is no easy task to proclaim the gospel in ways that not only respect the freedom and dignity of every person but also protect them. Evangelization committed to the integral liberation of the people⁹⁶ implies, on the part of evangelizers, involvement to create a better world order in accord with the values of God's Reign. This task is not as simple as one would think, specially in those parts of the world and sectors of society where organized crimes against humanity prevails as the order of the day. It is equally important to note that it requires lots of courage and endurance to sustain our evangelizing efforts through inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues at a time when missionary initiatives are viewed with suspicion. Nor is it as simple to evangelize the immense Areopagus of our time⁹⁷ as proclaiming the gospel to the rural flocks or offering humanitarian service in the slums.

Though the difficulties seem insurmountable and could easily lead to discouragement, the present pope reminds, "No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty to proclaim Christ to all peoples".⁹⁸ Certainly, a mere dependence on clergy and religious is not at all enough to carry out an enormous task as evangelization as we understand it today. Nor it is their duty only but one that applied to all Christians, each according to his/her calling in life.⁹⁹

The ecclesial sense of commitment to evangelization should permeate down to the laity and take root there. The Church leaders need to galvanize the massive power of the laity and their charisma in variety which lay hidden untapped for evangelical work.¹⁰⁰ In fact, the contemporary understanding of evangelization opens a vast and panoramic space for the laity¹⁰¹ and, in deed, they have got an enormous service to render to the evangelizing mission of the Church. While the various ways and programmes of evangelization as referred to in the mission documents are admirable and relevant to our time, I believe that the Church evangelizes more by being what it is than by what it does in search of non-Christians. To the extent that the Church, as a communion and fellowship of believers in Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, becomes a community of faith, worship and mutual support,¹⁰² it will draw many as a significant point of reference to life. And then, even without being invited, people will knock on the ecclesial doors which opens to all and interested in helping them on their journey for guidance to a way of life led by the Holy Spirit, the prime mover of evangelization,¹⁰³ which is significant to them.

NOTES

1. Dupuis, J., "Evangelization", in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed., R. Latourelle et al., Middlegreen, U.K/Maynooth ,Ireland/San Antonio, Philippines, St. Paul's Publication,1990,pp.275-276.
2. Abbreviations of documents used in this article are as follows:
 - (I) Documents of Vatican II (Walter M. ABBOTT, ed., London, Dublin, Melbourne, Geoffrey Chapman, 1967):
 - AA - *Apostolicam Actuositatem* : Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity
 - AG - *Ad Gentes* : Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.
 - CD - *Christus Dominus* : Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church.
 - DH - *Dignitatis Humanae* : Declaration on Religious Freedom.
 - 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 Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.
 - PO - *Presbyterorum Ordinis* : Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests.
 - UR - *Unitatis Redintegratio* : Decree on Ecumenism.
 - (II) Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations:
 - CL - *Christifideles Laici* (1988), John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Laity.
 - EN - *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World.
 - ES - *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), Paul VI, Encyclical on The Path of the Church.
 - FC - *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Christian Family.
 - RM - *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), John Paul II, Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate.
 - UUS - *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), John Paul II, Encyclical on Commitment to Ecumenism.
3. O.A. Piper, "Gospel Message", in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol.2,ed.,G.Buttrick,Nashville, Abington Press, 1962,pp.442-444.
4. Is. 40:9, 51:16, 52:7, 60:6, 61:1. See also M.Vellanickal, "Biblical Theology of Evangelization", in *Evangelization, Dialogue and Development*, ed., M.Dhavamony, *Documenta Missionalia*, vol.5, Rome 1975,p.42.
5. G. Friedrich, "Evangelizoma", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. II, ed., G.Kittel, et al., Trans. By G.W.Bromilly, 5th Printing, Ann Arbor, Eerdmans, 1973,pp.727-737.
6. Lk 4:18-19, 7:22.
7. Acts 2-4; 5:42. See also St. Paul's call to evangelize : Rom 15:20; 1 Cor 9:16; 2 Cor 10:16; Gal 1:16; 2:7.
8. On the evolution of the use of the term evangelization in the Church's documents see J.Lopez-Gay, "Evolucion historica de la "Evangelizacion"", in M. Dhavamony,ed., in *Evangelization, Documenta Missionalia*,No.9, Rome, 1975, pp.160-190.
9. A. Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization" in *Studia Missionalia*, vol.48, 1999,p.166.
10. J. Glazik, "The Springtime of the Misssion in the Early Modern Period", in *History of the Church*,vol. V, ed., H.Jedin, Translated by A.Biggs and P.W. Becker, London, Burns & Oates, 1980, pp.585-614; B.Stasiewski, "Progress and Stagnation of the World Mission", in *Ibid.*, vol.Vi,pp.232-269, 279-328.
11. J.Dupuis, "Evangelization", *op.cit.*, pp.275-276.
12. Ecumenical Missionary conference New York, 1900. *Report of the ecumenical conference on foreign missions held in Carnegie Hall and neighbouring churches*, April 21-May 1, New York, 1900,1,20 (*Loc.cit.*, P.Vadakumpadan, *Evangelization Today*, Shillong, Vendrame Missiological Institute,1989,pp.8-9.
13. A.Dulles, *op.cit.*,p.167.
14. John XXIII, "Apostolic Constitution "*Humanae Salutis*""", *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed., W.M. Abbott, New York, American Press, 1966,p.703
15. John XXIII, "Opening Speech", *Ibid.*, pp.710-719, especially p.716.
16. LG 1., cf. Mk 16:15. The evangelizing mission of the Church has been explained by the Council about 30 times in its various documents. See for example: LG 17,35; GS 44; CD 6; AA 6,26; PO 5,19; AG 6,14,17,23,27,29,30,35,36, 38-40 , etc.

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17. LG 16-17; AG23,35
18. LG 23; CD 6; AG 29,30.
19. PO 4; AG 39.
20. LG 35; AA 2,3,6; AG 41.
21. GS 4-17, 91-93.
22. LG 1.
23. AG 1,2.
24. *Ibid.*, 2,3,4.
25. *Ibid.*, 2.
26. *Ibid.*, 7.
27. *Ibid.*, 8.
28. *Ibid.*, 11:
29. *Ibid.*, 12.
30. *Ibid.*, 13-14.
31. *Ibid.*, 19-22.
32. *Ibid.*, 18.
33. *Ibid.*, 26.
34. For a detailed report of the synodal deliberations see D.S. Amalorpavadass ,ed., *Evangelization of the Modern world : Synod of Bishops,Rome,1974*, Bangalore, NBCLC,1975. For a missiological critique of Evangelii Nuntiandi see J. Dupuis, "Document: Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi of Pope Paul VI (8th December 1975)", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. XL , no.5 (May 1976), pp.218-230.
35. P. Vadakumpadan, *op.cit.*, pp.41-69:
36. EN 6.
37. *Ibid.*, 9.
38. *Ibid.*, 14.
39. *Ibid.*, 18.
40. *Ibid.*, 19.
41. *Ibid.*, 30.
42. *Ibid.*, 63. See also *ibid.*, nn. 20,62,64,65.
43. RM 35.
44. *Ibid.*, 36.
45. *Ibid.*, 3, 22, 32, 55.
46. *Ibid.*, 5.
47. *Ibid.*, 10.
48. *Ibid.*, 5.
49. *Ibid.*, 55.
50. *Ibid.*, 56.
51. *Ibid.*, 33, 34.
52. *Ibid.*, 37, 38.
53. *Ibid.*, 39.
54. *Ibid.*, 48, 49, 52.
55. *Ibid.*, 58, 59.
56. AG 2; cf. LG 1, 48.
57. Two New Testament texts , namely Eph. 1-3 and Col 1:1-2:6, have played a very significant role in defining the use of the concept "mystery" in Christian theology.
58. Heb. 1: 1-3; Jn. 1:9,14.
59. Jn. 3:16; 10:10.
60. EN 7.
61. RM 7-8.
62. LG 1.

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63. EN 22; cf.27.
64. RM 44.
65. *L'Osservatore Romano* (English Weekly edition), 23/30 December 1992,p.5.
66. A. Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization", *op.cit.*, p.177
67. AG 4; see also J. Lopez-Gay, "Trinitarian, Christ logical and pneumatological Dimensions of Mission" in *AA.VV.*, *Fundamental Correspondence Course For Mission Animators* , Rome, n.d., pp. 21-25.
68. EN 75.
69. RM, Chapter III.
70. John Paul II , "Address to Italian Bishops on Liturgical Course (February 12, 1988)", *L'Osservatore Romano* (English Weekly Edition), 14 March 1988, p.5.
71. EN 51-56; RM 33-38.
72. AG 35.
73. AG 36; cf.LG 16-17; RM 2.
74. EN 15.
75. EN 66-73; RM 69; CL 34.
76. FC 51-54.
77. DH 1-2.
78. RM 39; cf. EN 79-80.
79. EN 20
80. RM 52.
81. EN 31; see also *ibid.*, nn. 32-35.
82. RM 58.
83. *L'Osservatore Romano* (English weekly edition) , 5 December 1988, p.14.
84. AG 41; NA 2.
85. GS 22.
86. ES 81, 82, 112; EN 53.
87. RM 55-57.
88. UR 1, 11, 12.
89. EN 77.
90. RM 50.
91. UUS 79.
92. AG 35, 56, 60.
93. RM 32, 33, 34.
94. RM 37c.
95. Cf. Rom. 8:18-23; 2 Cor. 5:17-20.
96. EN 33; RM 58, 59. The Church does not want to close itself but rather to open up to the basic concerns of the world, specially for the poor and unfortunate sections of the society. See GS 1, 8, 9, 26, 29, 39.
97. RM 37c.
98. *Ibid.*, 3.
99. *Ibid.*, 61-76.
100. EN 70-73; CL 35; RM 71-74.
101. LG 31; EN 70; RM 72.
102. Cf. LG 1.
103. EN 75; RM 22-29.