

# The Path of Mission

## 1. First form is witness (*Redemptoris Missio* 42)

People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ, whose mission we continue, is the “witness” par excellence (Rv 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Church along her way and associates her with the witness he gives to Christ (cf. Jn 15:26-27)

The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living. The missionary who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities. But everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness; in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary.

## 2. Proclamation (*Redemptoris Missio* 44)

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. “Evangelization will always contain-as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism-a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy.” All forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation, which reveals and gives access to the mystery hidden for ages and made known in Christ (cf. Eph 3:3-9; Col 1:25-29), the mystery which lies at the heart of the Church’s mission and life, as the hinge on which all evangelization turns.

## 3. Forming of church communities (*Redemptoris Missio* 48)

Conversion and Baptism give entry into a Church already in existence or require the establishment of new communities which confess Jesus as Saviour and Lord. This is part of God’s plan, for it pleases him “to call human beings to share in his own life not merely as individuals, without any unifying bond

between them, but rather to make them into a people in which his children, who had been widely scattered, might be gathered together in unity.”

The mission *ad gentes* has this objective: to found Christian communities and develop churches to their full maturity. This is a central and determining goal of missionary activity, so much so that the mission is not completed until it succeeds in building a new particular church which functions normally in its local setting. The Decree *Ad Gentes* deals with this subject at length, and since the Council, a line of theological reflection has developed which emphasizes that the whole mystery of the Church is contained in each particular church, provided it does not isolate itself but remains in communion with the universal Church and becomes missionary in its own turn.

#### **4. Incarnating the Gospel in people’s culture (*Redemptoris Missio* 52)**

As she carries out missionary activity among the nations, the Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the Church’s pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent.

The process of the Church’s insertion into peoples’ cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation “means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.” The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church’s reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.

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. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.

#### **5. Inter-religious Dialogue (*Redemptoris Missio* 55, 56)**

Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission ad gentes; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions.

Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns 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. Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both 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 and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.

## **6. Promoting development by forming conscience (Redemptoris Missio 58)**

The mission ad gentes is still being carried out today, for the most part in the southern regions of the world, where action on behalf of integral development and liberation from all forms of oppression is most urgently needed. The Church has always been able to generate among the peoples she evangelizes a drive toward progress. Today, more than in the past, missionaries are being recognized as promoters of development by governments and international experts who are impressed at the remarkable results achieved with scanty means.

The Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla stated that "the best service we can offer to our brother is evangelization, which helps him to live and act as a son of God, sets him free from injustices and assists his overall development." It is not the Church's mission to work directly on the economic, technical or political levels, or to contribute materially to development. Rather, her mission consists essentially in offering people an opportunity not to "have more" but to "be more." by awakening their consciences through the Gospel.

“Authentic human development must be rooted in an ever deeper evangelisation.”

## **7. Charity as a source and criterion of mission (Redemptoris Missio 60)**

The young churches, which for the most part are to be found among peoples suffering from widespread poverty, often give voice to this concern as an integral part of their mission. The Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla, after recalling the example of Jesus, wrote that “the poor deserve preferential attention, whatever their moral or personal situation. They have been made in the image and likeness of God to be his children, but this image has been obscured and even violated. For this reason, God has become their defender and loves them. It follows that the poor are those to whom the mission is first addressed, and their evangelization is par excellence the sign and proof of the mission of Jesus.”

In fidelity to the spirit of the Beatitudes, the Church is called to be on the side of those who are poor and oppressed in any way. I therefore exhort the disciples of Christ and all Christian communities – from families to dioceses, from parishes to religious institutes – to carry out a sincere review of their lives regarding their solidarity with the poor.