

# Pavelig encyklika om misjon

## Romersk-katolske misjonsvisjoner

NOTTO R. THELLE

I desember 1990 sendte Pave Johannes Paul II ut en encyklika (pavelig rundskriv) som på mange måter samler de siste tiårenes erfaringer og innsikter om misjon. Den heter *Redemptoris missio* (Forløserens sendelse), og er preget av forventning og optimisme omkring kirkens kallelse til misjon. Dokumentet begynner med å slå fast at det misjonsoppdrag som Kristus har betrodd kirken, fremdeles er langt fra fullført. Nå som det annet årtusen går mot slutten, viser et totalutsyn over menneskeheten at misjonen fremdeles bare er ved sin begynnelse, og at vi må gi oss selv helhjertet i dens tjeneste. Pavens verdensomspennende reiser og hans kontakt med mennesker som ikke kjenner Kristus, har overbevist ham at misjonsarbeidet har hast (the urgency of missionary activity), og dette vil han så gjøre til hovedtema i sin encyklika.

*Redemptoris missio* er et stort dokument, nesten 60 tette sider i den engelske oversettelsen. En god del av dokumentet er først og fremst aktuelt for romerskkatolsk misjon, og vil ikke ha særlig interesse for protestantiske kristne. Men mye vil vekke gjenkjennelse og sympati, og noe vil kanskje provosere. Det meste av denne artikkelen består av klipp fra sentrale deler av encyklikaen, da med vekt på stoff som er særlig aktuelt også ut fra norsk misjonsperspektiv.

### Encyklikaens kontekst

Forat ikke utdragene av pavens encyklika skal bli stående som isolerte tanker og påstander, er det naturlig å innlede med noen kommentarer omkring den teologiske tradisjon dette dokumentet står i, og deretter en kort oversikt over dokumentet som helhet.

Ved å utsende *Redemptoris missio* 7. desember 1990, satte paven dokumentet inn i en tydelig historisk sammenheng. Nøyaktig 25 år tidligere, 7. desember 1965, ble grunndokumentet i moderne romersk-

katolsk misjonstenkning utsendt. Det var Vatikankonsilets dekret om kirkens misjonsarbeid, som fikk den programmatisk tittelen *Ad gentes* (Til folkeslagene). Det var en redegjørelse om kirkens misjonsoppdrag, som samlet noen av de viktigste perspektivene på kirkens misjon. Selv om dokumentet ikke markerte noen radikale forandringer, åpnet det for nye holdninger. Det spør om ikke den korte deklarasjonen om kirkens forhold til ikke-kristne religioner, *Nostra aetate* (I vår tid), likevel har hatt større innflytelse på romerkirkens misjonstenkning. I all sin knapphet markerte den at kirken ikke forkaster noe av det som er sant og hellig i religionene.

Ti år etter *Ad gentes*, i desember 1975, kom så *Evangelii nuntiandi*, pave Paul VI's apostolske ekshortasjon om evangelisering i den moderne verden. Johannes Paul II har også tidligere skrevet om misjon, ikke minst i sin første encyklika fra 1979, *Redemptor hominis* (Menneskenes frelser), der han proklamerer sin visjon av Kristus som verdens frelser. Han understreker der at Kristus er den eneste formidler, men legger samtidig vekt på budskapets universalitet og taler i sterke ordelag om at ethvert menneske, i kirken eller utenfor kirken, er berørt av Kristus.

Selve tidspunktet markerer altså at paven plasserer seg i sammenhengen fra Vatikankonsilet og fra sin forgjenger. Samtidig spør man seg hva han vil med å komme med enda en encyklika om misjon. Var det ikke allerede klart nok hva katolsk misjon står for? Mange fryktet en konservativ reaksjon. Ville paven ta avstand fra den åpenhet som har preget kirkens forhold til andre religioner og kulturer? Ville han advare mot eller vanskeliggjøre det dialogarbeid som gjennom mange år var bygget opp? Eller hva med oppbruddet i den tredje verdens teologi? Ville han i offisiell form gjøre opp med frigjøringssteologien og latin-amerikanske basismenigheter, som i stor grad har stått i opposisjon til Vatikanets restriktive linje?

### **Innhold og struktur**

Som man vil se av utdragene av *Redemptoris missio*, er det et avbalansert dokument. Det advarer mot utvannet teologi og relativisme, og understreker lojaliteten mot kirkens læreembete. Hovedtendensen går nok i retning av en forsiktig konservativ tilstramning. Men samtidig tales det i tydelige ordelag om nødvendigheten av åpenhet i forhold til andre kulturer og religioner. Evangeliet må inkarneres i de lokale kulturene. Dialogen med andre religioner står ikke nødvendigvis i motsetning til kirkens misjon. Den tredje verdens basismenigheter er et håpsteget i kirken, hevdes det. Økumenisk samarbeid er en nødvendig side av

kirkens misjon, ikke minst må kirkene søke sammen for å møte forvirringen fra sekteriske bevegelser.

Det som først og fremst preger dokumentet, er dens entusiasme og optimisme når det gjelder kirkens misjon. Misjon er alle kristnes sak, heter det. Kirken står foran en ny vår, med kallet til å bringe budskapet til alle folkeslag. Misjonen fornyer kirken. Troen styrkes når den blir gitt til andre. «Ingen som tror på Kristus, ingen institusjon i kirken kan unngå denne høyeste plikt: å proklamere Kristus for alle folkeslag» (Innledningen).

Etter innledende oppmuntringer følger første kapittel: «Jesus Kristus, den eneste frelser», som taler om Kristus som frelsens grunn, og om innholdet i misjonen. Annet kapittel, «Guds rike», beskriver kirken som en tjener for det gudsrrike Kristus proklamerte. Tredje kapittel dreier seg om Helligånden som utgangspunktet for sendelsen. Ånden følger misjonen og leder misjonen. Ånden er «the principal agent of mission».

Så tegnes i kapittel fire den verdensomspennende horisonten for misjonsarbeidet: den vanskelige og stadig skiftende religiøse situasjon, vanskene i misjonen møter både utenfra og innenfra, de geografiske begrensningene, sosiale og politiske problemer, kulturbarrierer, osv. Kirken skal ikke tvinge seg på noen, men alltid være klar til å gå når dørene åpner seg. De områdene som særlig utpekes som kirkens utfordring, er Syd og Øst.

Et viktig perspektiv tegnes opp i kapittel fem, «Misjonens veier», hvor de fleste av utdragene nedenfor er hentet. Her tales det om vitnesbyrdet som evangeliseringens fremste skikkelse, med vekt på proklamasjon, omvendelse og dåp, og dannelse av lokale kirker. Det er i denne forbindelse basismenigheter omtales som en spesiell vitalisering av evangeliseringen. I samme sammenheng behandles spørsmålet om kirkens forhold til lokalkulturene, og diskusjonen om forholdet mellom evangelisering og dialog, utviklingsarbeid og kirkens arbeid med de fattige.

De avsluttende kapitlene handler om misjonens ledere og arbeidere, om samarbeid i misjonen, og om den spiritualitet som er nødvendig i misjonen.

De følgende utdragene gir seg ikke ut for å være representative for helheten i pavens encyklika, men de kan være vel verd å studere også for protestanter som er engasjert i disse spørsmålene. På mange punkter vil leseren forbauses over mange uttrykksmåter som ligger nær opp til tradisjonell protestantisk misjonsengasjement. På andre punkter vil mange føle at tenkningen tross alt er preget av en annen kirketenkning. I begge tilfeller kan leseren få stimulans til å tenke videre.

## Introduction

1. 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. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God: "For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

In the name of the whole Church, I sense an urgent duty to repeat this cry of Saint Paul. From the beginning of my Pontificate I have chosen to travel to the ends of the earth in order to show this missionary concern. My direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the *urgency of missionary activity*, a subject to which I am devoting the present Encyclical.

The Second Vatican Council sought to renew the Church's life and activity in the light of the needs of the contemporary world. The Council emphasized the Church's "missionary nature", basing it in a dynamic way on the Trinitarian mission itself. The missionary thrust therefore belongs to the very nature of the Christian life, and is also the inspiration behind ecumenism: "that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21).

2. The Council has already borne much fruit in the realm of missionary activity. There has been an increase of local Churches with their own Bishops, clergy and workers in the apostolate. The presence of Christian communities is more evident in the life of nations, and communion between the Churches has led to a lively exchange of spiritual benefits and gifts. The commitment of the laity to the work of evangelization is changing ecclesial life, while particular Churches are more willing to meet with the members of other Christian Churches and other religions, and to enter into dialogue and cooperation with them. Above all, there is a new awareness that *missionary activity is a matter for all Christians*, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations.

Nevertheless, in this "new springtime" of Christianity there is an undeniable negative tendency, and the present Document is meant to help overcome it. Missionary activity specifically directed "to the nations" (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium. 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. For 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.

Twenty-five years after the conclusion of the Council and the publication of the Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, fifteen years after the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* issued by Pope Paul VI, and in continuity with the magisterial teaching of my predecessors, I wish to invite the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*. The present Document has as its goal an interior renewal of faith and Christian life. For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!* It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support.

But what moves me even more strongly to proclaim the urgency of missionary evangelization is the fact that it is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvellous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself. "Christ the Redeemer", I wrote in my first Encyclical, "fully reveals man to himself . . . The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly . . . must . . . draw near to Christ . . . The Redemption that took place through the Cross has definitively restored to man his dignity and given back meaning to his life in the world".

I also have other reasons and aims: to respond to the many requests for a document of this kind; to clear up doubts and ambiguities regarding missionary activity *ad gentes*, and to confirm in their commitment those exemplary brothers and sisters dedicated to missionary activity and all those who assist them; to foster missionary vocations; to encourage theologians to explore and expound systematically the various aspects of missionary activity; to give a fresh impulse to missionary activity by fostering the commitment of the particular Churches—especially those of recent origin—to send forth and receive missionaries; and to assure non-Christians and particularly the authorities of countries to which missionary activity is being directed that all of this has but one purpose: to serve man by revealing to him the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ.

*3. Peoples everywhere, open the doors to Christ!* His Gospel in no way detracts from man's freedom, from the respect that is owed to every culture and to whatever is good in each religion. By accepting Christ, you open yourselves to the definitive Word of God, to the One in whom God has made himself fully known and has shown us the path to himself.

The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. Indeed, since the end of the Council it has almost doubled. 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.

On the other hand, our own times offer the Church new opportunities in this field: we have witnessed the collapse of oppressive ideologies and political systems; the opening of frontiers and the formation of a more united world due to an increase in communications; the affirmation among peoples of the Gospel values which Jesus made incarnate in his own life (peace, justice, brotherhood, concern for the needy); and a kind of soulless economic and technical development which only stimulates the search for the truth about God, about man and about the meaning of life itself.

God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. 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.

## **Chapter I**

### **Jesus Christ, the only saviour**

4. In my first Encyclical, in which I set forth the programme of my Pontificate, I said that "the Church's fundamental function in every age, and particularly in ours, is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of Christ".

The Church's universal mission is born of faith in Jesus Christ, as is stated in our Trinitarian profession of faith: "I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father . . . For us men 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". The Redemption event brings salvation to all, "for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself for ever through this mystery". It is only in faith that the Church's mission can be understood and only in faith that it find its basis.

Nevertheless, also as a result of the changes which have taken place in modern times and the spread of new theological ideas, some people wonder: "*Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant? Has*

it not been replaced by inter-religious dialogue? Is not human development an adequate goal of the Church's mission? Does not respect for conscience and for freedom exclude all efforts at conversion? Is it not possible to attain salvation in any religion? *Why then should there be missionary activity?*

*"No one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6)*

5. If we go back to the beginnings of the Church, we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one Saviour of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God. In reply to the Jewish religious authorities who question the Apostles about the healing of the lame man, Peter says: "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well . . . And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4:10, 12). This statement, which was made to the Sanhedrin, has a universal value, since for all people—Jews and Gentiles alike—salvation can only come from Jesus Christ.

The universality of this salvation in Christ is asserted throughout the New Testament. Saint Paul acknowledges the Risen Christ as the Lord. He writes: "Although there may be co-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (*1. Cor* 8:5–6). One God and one Lord are asserted by way of contrast to the multitude of "gods" and "lords" commonly accepted. Paul reacts against the polytheism of the religious environment of his time and emphasizes what is characteristic of the Christian faith: belief in one God and in one Lord sent by God.

In the Gospel of Saint John, this salvific universality of Christ embraces all the aspects of his mission of grace, truth and revelation: the Word is "the true light that enlightens every man" (*Jn* 1:9). And again, "no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (*Jn* 1:18; cf. *Mt* 11:27). God's revelation becomes definitive and complete through his only-begotten Son: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world" (*Heb* 1:1–2; cf. *Jn* 14:6). In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way. He has revealed to mankind *who he is*. This definitive self-revelation of God is

the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself.

Christ is the one mediator between God and mankind: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (*1 Tim 2:5-7*; cf. *Heb 4:14-16*). No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ's one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey towards God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.

## Chapter V

### The paths of mission

41. "Missionary activity is nothing other and nothing less than the manifestation or epiphany of God's plan and its fulfilment in the world and in history; in this history God, by means of missions, clearly accomplishes the history of salvation". What paths does the Church follow in order to achieve this goal?

Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways. Among these ways, some have particular importance in the present situation of the Church and the world.

50. This solicitude will serve as a motivation and stimulus for a renewed commitment to ecumenism. The relationship between *ecumenical activity* and *missionary activity* makes it necessary to consider two closely associated factors. On the one hand, we must recognize that "the division among Christians damages the holy work of preaching the Gospel to every creature and is a barrier for many in their approach to the faith". The fact that the Good News of reconciliation is preached by Christians who are divided among themselves weakens their witness. It is thus urgent to work for the unity of Christians, so that missionary activity can be more effective. At the same time we must not forget that efforts towards unity are themselves a sign of the work of reconciliation which God is bringing about in our midst.



On the other hand, it is true that some kind of communion, though imperfect, exists among all those who have received Baptism in Christ. On this basis the Council established the principle that “while all appearance of indifferentism and confusion is ruled out, as well as any appearance of unhealthy rivalry, Catholics should collaborate in a spirit of fellowship with their separated brothers and sisters in accordance with the norms of the Decree on Ecumenism: by a common profession of faith in God and in Jesus Christ before the nations—to the extent that this is possible—and by their cooperation in social and technical as well as in cultural and religious matters”.

Ecumenical activity and harmonious witness to Jesus Christ by Christians who belong to different Churches and Ecclesial Communities has already borne abundant fruit. But it is ever more urgent that they work and bear witness together at this time when Christian and para-Christian sects are sowing confusion by their activity. The expansion of these sects represents a threat for the Catholic Church and for all the Ecclesial Communities with which she is engaged in dialogue. Wherever possible, and in the light of local circumstances, the response of Christians can itself be an ecumenical one.

### **“Ecclesial Basic Communities” as a Force for Evangelization**

51. A rapidly growing phenomenon in the young Churches—one sometimes fostered by the Bishops and their Conferences as a pastoral priority—is that of “ecclesial basic communities” (also known by other names) which are proving to be good centres for Christian formation and missionary outreach. These are groups of Christians who, at the level of the family or in a similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, Scripture reading, catechesis, and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment. These communities 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”.

These communities decentralize and organize the parish community, to which they always remain united. They take root in less privileged and rural areas, and become a leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and neglected, and of commitment to the transformation of society. Within them, the individual Christian experiences community and therefore senses that he or she is playing an active role and is encouraged to share in the common task. Thus, these communities become a means of evangelization and of the initial proclamation of the Gospel, and a source

of new ministries. At the same time, by being imbued with Christ's love, they also show how divisions, tribalism and racism can be overcome.

Every community, if it is to be Christian, must be founded on Christ and live in him, as it listens to the word of God, focuses its prayer on the Eucharist, lives in a communion marked by oneness of heart and soul, and shares according to the needs of its members (cf. *Acts* 2:42–47). As Pope Paul VI recalled, every community must live in union with the particular and the universal Church, in heartfelt communion with the Church's Pastors and the Magisterium, with a commitment to missionary outreach and without yielding to isolationism or ideological exploitation. And the Synod of Bishops stated: "Because the Church is communion, the new 'basic communities', if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church".

### **Incarnating the Gospel in Peoples' Cultures**

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.

Thanks to this action within the local Churches, the universal Church herself is enriched with forms of expression and values in the various

sectors of Christian life, such as evangelization, worship, theology and charitable works. She comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ, all the while being motivated to continual renewal. During my Pastoral Visits to the young Churches I have repeatedly dealt with these themes, which are present in the Council and the subsequent Magisterium.

Inculturation is a slow journey, which accompanies the whole of missionary life. It involves those working in the Church's mission *ad gentes*, the Christian communities as they develop, and the Bishops, who have the task of providing discernment and encouragement for its implementation.

53. Missionaries, who come from other Churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations. Hence they must learn the language of the place in which they work, become familiar with the most important expressions of the local culture, and discover its values through direct experience. Only if they have this kind of awareness will they be able to bring to people the knowledge of the hidden mystery (cf *Rom* 16:25–27; *Eph* 3:5) in a credible and fruitful way. It is not of course a matter of missionaries renouncing their own cultural identity, but of understanding, appreciating, fostering and evangelizing the culture of the environment in which they are working, and therefore of equipping themselves to communicate effectively with it, adopting a manner of living which is a sign of Gospel witness and of solidarity with the people.

Developing ecclesial communities, inspired by the Gospel, will gradually be able to express their Christian experience in original ways and forms that are consonant with their own cultural traditions, provided that those traditions are in harmony with the objective requirements of the faith itself. To this end, especially in the more delicate areas of inculturation, particular Churches of the same region should work in communion with each other and with the whole Church, convinced that only through attention both to the universal Church and to the particular Churches will they be capable of translating the treasure of faith into a legitimate variety of expressions. Groups which have been evangelized will thus provide the elements for a "translation" of the Gospel message, keeping in mind the positive elements acquired down the centuries from Christianity's contact with different cultures and not forgetting the dangers of alterations which have sometimes occurred.

54. In this regard, certain guidelines remain basic. Properly applied,

inculturation must be guided by two principles: “compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church”. Bishops, as guardians of the “deposit of faith”, will take care to ensure fidelity and, in particular, to provide discernment, for which a deeply balanced approach is required. In fact there is a risk of passing uncritically from a form of alienation from culture to an overestimation of culture. Since culture is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be “healed, ennobled and perfected”.

This kind of process needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community’s Christian experience. As Pope Paul VI said in Kampala: “it will require an incubation of the Christian ‘mystery’ in the genius of your people in order that its native voice, more clearly and frankly, may then be raised harmoniously in the chorus of other voices in the universal Church”. In effect, inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic “sensus fidei” which must never be lost sight of. Inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community’s life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research. The safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith.

### **Dialogue with our Brothers and Sisters of other Religions**

55. 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. This mission, in fact, is addressed to those who do not know Christ and his Gospel, and who belong for the most part to other religions. In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fulness of his revelation and love. He does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain “gaps, insufficiencies and errors”. All of this has been given ample emphasis by the Council and the subsequent Magisterium, without detracting in any way from the fact that *salvation comes from Christ and that dialogue does not dispense from evangelization*.

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*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.

I recently wrote to the Bishops of Asia: "Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all men, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is 'the way, and the truth and the life' . . . 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". Indeed Christ himself "while expressly insisting on the need for faith and baptism, at the same time confirmed *the need for the Church*, into which people enter through Baptism as through a door". 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.

56. 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 fulness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.

This gives rise to the spirit which must enliven dialogue in the context of mission. Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretence or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. There must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings. Dialogue

leads to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful.

57. A vast field lies open to dialogue, which can assume many forms and expressions: from exchanges between experts in religious traditions or official representatives of those traditions to cooperation for integral development and the safeguarding of religious values; and from a sharing of their respective spiritual experiences to the so-called “dialogue of life”, through which believers of different religions bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society.

Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practise dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way. The contribution of the laity is indispensable in this area, for they “can favour the relations which ought to be established with the followers of various religions through their example in the situations in which they live and in their activities”. Some of them also will be able to make a contribution through research and study.

I am well aware that many missionaries and Christian communities find in the difficult and often misunderstood path of dialogue their only way of bearing sincere witness to Christ and offering generous service to others. I wish to encourage them to persevere with faith and love, even in places where their efforts are not well received. Dialogue is a path towards the Kingdom and will certainly bear fruit, even if the times and seasons are known only to the Father (cf. *Acts* 1:7).

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### ***Papal encyclical on mission***

The article includes introductory comments on *Redemptoris missio*, Pope John Paul II’s encyclical letter on the permanent validity of the church’s missionary mandate. The historical context of the encyclical is sketched, followed by a brief review of the entire document. The major part consists of excerpts of central issues of the encyclical.