

# One Lord and one Church for one World

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.

Archbishop of Chicago

*A conference given at the Symposium for the*

*Commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Redemptoris missio*

*Sponsored by the Pontifical Urbaniana University 19-20 January 2001*

Two thousand years since the world first heard the name of its redeemer, we look at an encyclical letter which tells us that the mission entrusted to the Church by this redeemer “is still only beginning”. “The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the center of the universe and of history,”[1] are the opening words of another letter, *Redemptor hominis*, the encyclical with which Pope John Paul II began to call the Church’s attention to the approach of the third millennium at the beginning of his service as Bishop of Rome. From that beginning in 1978, the Holy Father saw the potential of this great anniversary of God’s mercy to reawaken faith in Christ. At that time, the Pope proclaimed a season of expectation, a “new Advent”; and he has continued to hold the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation before the Church and the world from the beginning of his pontificate until today.

He has urged us to expect a great outpouring of grace on the occasion of the Great Jubilee and to anticipate a “new springtime” of Christianity.[2] His confidence in the power of the Good News to address the concerns of every human person, every generation, and every culture remains unshaken. His conviction that missionary evangelization is “the primary service which the church can render to every individual and to humanity”[3] appears to increase, in fact, in proportion to the difficulties proposed against it.

The Pope’s witness to Christ the Redeemer has, if possible, grown more intense over the course of his pontificate. In his first encyclical, he laid out his commitment to the course set by the Second Vatican Council. He recapitulates the Christological teaching of *Gaudium et spes* and examines its implications for human dignity and human rights. In a particular way, *Redemptor hominis* challenges the Catholic people to witness to the truth of Christ by taking up their mission to transform the social order. In recent years, the Pope’s focus on Christ the Redeemer appears to be motivated by a growing concern that the waning commitment to mission *ad gentes* reflects a crisis of faith[4]—faith in the central mysteries of our religion: the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the Holy Trinity. This motive becomes explicit in *Redemptoris missio*, the encyclical letter whose tenth anniversary brings us together. I would like to review, first, how *Redemptor hominis* and the earlier apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, prepared the way for *Redemptoris missio*; secondly, the Christological and the Trinitarian foundations of mission in this encyclical’s argument; and, thirdly, the challenges *Redemptoris missio* continues to put to the Church today.

## A. Preparations in *Redemptor hominis* and *Evangelii nuntiandi*

### 1. *Redemptor hominis*.

“The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the center of the universe and of history.”

Drawing on the Sacred Scriptures and on the Christology expressed in *Gaudium et spes*, article 22, the Pope in *Redemptor hominis* asserts that the revelation of God in the Word made flesh is not of special interest only to Christians. On the contrary, it expresses the final truth about God—a truth all have a right to know. And it expresses the final truth about the dignity and destiny of humanity—a truth all people yearn to discover. Jesus Christ provides an answer to the fundamental human questions.[5] In fact, the mystery and vocation of the human person can be discovered only in Christ, for he is the

“new Adam”—the new “head” or source of the human race—who, “in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.”[6]

The Pope does not tire of repeating the Christocentric teaching of *Gaudium et spes*: that the Son of God has, by his Incarnation, united himself in a certain fashion with every human being; that he has, by his paschal mystery, restored to humankind the divine likeness lost by the first Adam; that in him, humankind has been raised to an incomparable dignity.[7] That Christ the Redeemer has fully revealed what it means to be human he calls the “human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption.” The “divine dimension” of this mystery is the revelation of the Father’s eternal love. It is the Father who sends Christ to reconcile humanity to himself through his Cross. On the Cross, Christ reveals that God is “love.” Apart from an encounter with love, human life is incomprehensible. The Good News is that God’s forgiving love—a love stronger than death, always ready to forgive, coming in search of the lost—is also mercy. And the revelation of divine love and mercy in human history, he affirms, “has taken a form and a name: that of Jesus Christ.”[8]

But knowing the truth about God and about the human vocation imposes a grave obligation on believers. We are obliged to bear witness to Christ everywhere because he belongs to everyone. “Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church,” and every single human being—because he is united with Christ—is also “the way for the Church.”[9] Throughout this encyclical, when the Holy Father speaks of mission he has in view all that threatens human dignity and robs human life of meaning in the concrete historical situation of the modern world.

## 2. Preparation in *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975)

*Redemptor hominis* was written only a few years after the Synod on Evangelization (1974) and the subsequent apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975), but it speaks less about evangelization in the technical sense and more about the broad theological vision and pastoral program emerging from the new Pope’s sustained reflection on the accomplishments of the Council. It is possible and instructive, however, to compare the perspective of *Evangelii nuntiandi* with that of the encyclical we celebrate today, *Redemptoris missio*. Each was written to mark an anniversary (the tenth and the twenty-fifth, respectively) of the closing of the Council.[10] Each invites an examination of conscience, offers an assessment, and proposes a new challenge to interior renewal and a fresh commitment to mission. They emerge from different contexts, however, and manifest two quite different concerns. *Evangelii nuntiandi* broadens the concept of mission to include all of the Church’s evangelizing activity; in particular, it establishes the profound link between the verbal proclamation of Good News and the work of human promotion and liberation. *Redemptoris missio*, on the other hand, reaffirms the permanent validity of mission in the specific sense of mission to “the nations”; it addresses the question of motivation for mission, and takes up more explicitly the question of the internal obstacles to mission.

Four themes addressed in *Evangelii nuntiandi* are taken up and developed in *Redemptoris missio*: (1) the link between the proclamation of salvation in Christ and the work of human promotion and liberation; (2) the primacy of direct (verbal) proclamation of Christ with the intention of conversion; (3) the problem of a new reluctance to assume this primary task; and (4) the fundamental motivation for mission.

Pope Paul VI, gathering the fruits of the third Synod of Bishops in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, invites the whole Church to meditate on the question the Synod considered: “after the Council and thanks to the Council, . . . does the Church find herself better equipped to proclaim the Gospel and to put it into people’s hearts with conviction, freedom of spirit and effectiveness?”[11] The Church must remain faithful to the message of Christ, on the one hand, and to the people of our time who need to hear it, on the other.[12]

For *Evangelii nuntiandi*, evangelization names a complex and dynamic activity which cannot be equated simply with the first proclamation of the Gospel, preaching, catechesis, and administering baptism and the other sacraments but extends beyond all these to include the transformation of humanity from within. “The Church evangelizes,” Paul VI states, “when she seeks to convert, 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.”[13] According to this broad definition, evangelization is directed not only to the conversion of individuals but also to the conversion of cultures. It aims to plant the Church in order to inaugurate the kingdom of God—a social order transformed by the values of the Gospel, a civilization of love. It describes the salvation offered by Jesus Christ as “liberation from everything that oppresses man but . . . 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.”[14] The salvation the Church announces certainly cannot be reduced to material well-being, but concern for human promotion is not “foreign” to evangelization. Indeed, there are profound links—anthropological, theological, and evangelical—between evangelization and human liberation.[15] This “broad” definition of evangelization serves in a particular way to address the urgent question of the Church’s own witness to the Gospel in traditionally Catholic countries and cultures. It is introduced in order to respond to the challenges posed by the theory and praxis of Liberation Theology and to various challenges to the concept of mission posed in contemporary debate.[16]

Paul VI explains that, “The Church links human liberation and salvation in Jesus Christ, but she never identifies them.”[17] Evangelization is incomplete without the witness of life (for example, the work of human promotion), but it does not exist at all without the explicit proclamation of who Christ is.[18] The content of the Good News is that “Jesus is Lord,” and that in him, “Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to everyone as a gift of God’s grace and mercy.”[19]

Pope Paul VI expresses concern about a certain reluctance to announce the Gospel that has emerged among Catholics in the years since the Council. [20] What is especially disturbing is the attempt to justify such reservations by citing the Council’s teachings. These “excuses,” according to the Pope, are entirely without foundation. What are these excuses? One is that direct evangelization constitutes a violation of religious liberty. In response to this objection, the Pope agrees that it is wrong to “impose” the Gospel on anyone, but it is not wrong to “propose” the truth of the Gospel and of salvation in Jesus Christ to the consciences of those who do not know it. On the contrary, to make this presentation is to respect their liberty by offering them the possibility of accepting the Good News which, by God’s mercy, we have received. A second objection to announcing Christ as Lord states that conversion to Christ and membership in the Church are unnecessary, since “uprightness of heart” suffices for personal salvation. In response to the second objection, Paul VI agrees that God can bring the unevangelized to salvation by means known to him alone, but he does not concede that this excuses Christians from bearing witness to the revelation of God and his way of salvation in Jesus Christ. If God sent his Son, he argues, “it was precisely in order to reveal to us, by his word and by his life, the ordinary paths of salvation.”[21] We have been commanded to bear witness to this revelation and must consider whether we place our own salvation in jeopardy by failing to preach it to others. The proclamation of the Gospel, Pope Paul VI writes, “...is a question of people’s salvation. . . .”[22]

This reference to “people’s *salvation*” points again to the question of motivation for mission. Clearly, the objection regarding the possibility of being saved by “uprightness of heart” arises from the Council’s new optimism about the salvation of non-believers. This teaching, found in *Gaudium et spes*, article 22, appeared to some to eliminate the traditional reason for mission: the “salvation of souls.” The problem of coordinating the new optimism with the missionary mandate is recognized in *Ad gentes*, article 7: “So, although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, though no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (Heb. 11:6), the Church, nevertheless, still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize.” Pope Paul VI highlights two motives for mission: the confession of the truth and the love of neighbor.[23] *Evangelii nuntiandi* exhorts all evangelizers to proclaim the Good News with joy, as a service of love, in a spirit of grateful obedience to God.

### 3. Development of These Four Themes in *Redemptoris missio*

In *Redemptoris missio*, Pope John Paul II repeats the message of his first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*; the Church’s vocation is to proclaim Christ as the universal Mediator and only Savior of

humankind. In the twenty-five years since the Council closed, the number of those who have not heard the Gospel and joined the Church has almost doubled.

Pope John Paul II candidly acknowledges the present experience of crisis in mission, and asks whether it may not reveal a crisis in faith.<sup>[24]</sup> Today, on account of the many changes that have taken place in the modern world, and on account of new theological theories which attempt to account for the salvation of those who have not heard the Gospel, some members of the faithful raise the following questions with all seriousness:

*Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant? Has it not been replaced by interreligious 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?*<sup>[25]</sup>

These questions, which echo and add to the “excuses” mentioned in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, are generated by a new self-criticism on the part of missionaries and missiologists, by the “de-stabilizing” effects of interreligious dialogue, and by a new optimism regarding the value of non-Christian religions as the means of salvation for their adherents. More dramatically, they reflect the “paradigm shift” that characterizes a modern attempt to come to terms with religious pluralism by denying that any religion has the right to make universal claims about its own belief, its image of God, and its normative character.<sup>[26]</sup> Before examining the unique contribution of *Redemptoris missio* in responding to these questions, let us note how it reinforces and develops the four themes set out in *Evangelii nuntiandi*.

First, *Redemptoris missio* reasserts the profound link that exists between the explicit proclamation of the Gospel and the work of human promotion by employing the expression “integral salvation” (or liberation). Jesus came to deliver us from all that enslaves us.

Second, like *Evangelii nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris missio* insists that proclamation of the Good News is the “permanent priority of mission,”<sup>[27]</sup> towards which all other forms of missionary activity are directed. Faith is the response to preaching, and the content of Christian preaching is the mystery of God's love and mercy made visible in Jesus Christ, crucified, died, and risen from the dead. The proclamation of God's Word, inspired by faith, “has *Christian* conversion as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith.”<sup>[28]</sup> Conversion leads to repentance, Baptism, and entry into Christ's Body, the Church.

Third, Pope John Paul II gives this theme a sharp definition by making the mission *ad gentes* the direct focus of his encyclical. “The mission *ad gentes*,” he writes, “has this objective: to found Christian communities and develop churches to their full maturity.”<sup>[29]</sup> Whereas *Evangelii nuntiandi* adopted the concept “evangelization” in order to encompass the totality of the Church's activity, *Redemptoris missio* gives renewed attention to “missionary activity proper,” that is, the specific mission directed to non-Christian peoples whose lives are not touched by the presence of the Church and whose culture has not felt the influence of the Gospel.<sup>[30]</sup> This new emphasis is not exclusive, for the Holy Father clearly identifies the needs of other situations addressed by the Church's missionary activity, namely, the pastoral care of established Christian communities and the “new evangelization” of formerly Christian countries and sectors where a living sense of the faith has been lost.<sup>[31]</sup> In addition, he acknowledges the positive aspects of the newer expressions of Missiology which prefer to speak of all the Church's activities as part of her “mission.”<sup>[32]</sup> The emphasis on mission *ad gentes*, however, is vitally necessary, for today some question the value of this kind of missionary activity and the Church's right to engage in it. They ask whether the goal of conversion is appropriate, and whether it is necessary. The Pope replies by pointing out the vast areas of the world—especially in Asia, Africa, and Oceania—which have not been evangelized. He reaffirms the value of the geographical conception of mission that has come under criticism since the Council, and argues that the situation of the majority of humankind which, in fact, has not yet been reached by the Gospel, demands special attention and missionary zeal.<sup>[33]</sup>

The problem of the new reluctance to undertake the mission *ad gentes*, mentioned first in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, is openly addressed in *Redemptoris missio*. The two “excuses” mentioned by Pope Paul VI

were that respect for religious freedom forbids direct proclamation and that it is, in any case, unnecessary since “uprightness” of heart suffices for salvation. In response to the first, Pope John Paul II repeats the argument that the Church “proposes”—and does not “impose”—the Gospel to persons who are free to accept or reject it. The Church’s mission, in fact, promotes human freedom.[34] The Church rejects the view that the call to conversion addressed to non-Christians is “proselytism,” for every single person has the right to hear the truth of the Gospel. It is not enough, as some would suggest, to limit one’s missionary service to promoting human development and helping people preserve their own religious traditions. Confident proclamation of salvation in Christ flows from conviction that he truly holds the answer to the deepest human longings. In response to the second “excuse,” the Pope reaffirms that salvation in Christ is concretely offered to every person, and that it is accessible by virtue of the grace won by the sacrifice of Christ and communicated by the Holy Spirit, which relates a person mysteriously to the Church. The person in whose heart grace is secretly at work must cooperate freely with this grace in order to attain salvation. This assurance that grace is offered to all does not dispense Christians from the missionary mandate, for the grace has a name which all should come to know and love. The faith we have received lays upon us an obligation and stirs up a desire to bear witness to God and to Jesus Christ, without whom no one is saved. The Pope charges that lack of interest in the missionary task results in large part from an indifferentism and a religious relativism (“one religion is as good as another”) based on incorrect theological perspectives. Lack of missionary fervor may, in fact, reveal a deeper problem, a crisis of faith in Jesus Christ.[35]

Fourth and finally, *Redemptoris missio* confirms the teaching of *Evangelii nuntiandi* that love is “the soul of all missionary activity” and “the driving force of mission.”[36] It also endorses the idea that mission is motivated by the desire to confess the truth revealed by Jesus Christ. Both encyclicals presuppose the missionary mandate given to believers by the Lord himself. But the question continues to be urged today, and so the Holy Father probes still more profoundly, “Why mission?”[37] Why, indeed? Christianity’s contemporary confrontation with the great religions of the world has not only generated a need for new theories to account for the activity of the Holy Spirit outside the “boundaries” of the Church, it has also generated serious doubts about the validity of Christianity’s own truth claims. Taken together, the new self-criticism which acknowledges errors and flaws in past mission theory and practice and the new experience of interreligious dialogue lead some to conclude that direct proclamation with the intention to convert is ethically irresponsible. They regard mission *ad gentes* as morally unacceptable in principle on the grounds that it presumes Christians are allowed to judge other belief systems as deficient. Religious truth claims, it is alleged, inevitably lead to intolerance, violence, and religious “imperialism.” Again, some who survey the evidence of religious pluralism conclude that mission *ad gentes* is not only ethically-dubious but also epistemologically indefensible. It is preposterous, they think, to imagine that Christians have the resources to persuade non-Christians of the truth that they profess. But if they cannot expect to do this, they are not justified in holding that the large majority of humankind lacks the truth about God and about humankind. On these grounds, too, they demand that Christians surrender their “truth claims” and concede that Christianity is only one of many, equally authentic religious traditions.[38]

As the recent controversy surrounding the declaration *Dominus Iesus*, which made extensive use of *Redemptoris missio*, bears witness, these doubts are widespread; they trouble simple believers and theologians alike. They confront believers with a most daunting challenge, for it appears to those who stand outside the faith that Catholic Christians are impossibly arrogant and intolerant! At the same time, for those within the Church, the truths we profess represent a most precious treasure we desire to share with humankind. To deny them would be to betray the gift we, apart from any merits of our own, have received from God’s mercy. It is this “new” situation that prompted Pope John Paul II, ten years ago, to proclaim: “Mission is an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us.”[39]

Why mission? Our faith compels us to affirm the truth of what we believe. Concern for “evangelization,” considered as identical with the totality of the Church’s activity, does not require us to face directly the issue of Christianity’s truth claims; concern for mission *ad gentes* does. It puts us face-to-face not only with alternative belief systems but also with a theory of religious pluralism that demands the surrender of those truth claims. This leads us to consider the special contribution of *Redemptoris missio*—its specific attention to the Christological and Trinitarian foundations of mission.

## B. The Christological and Trinitarian Foundations of Mission in *Redemptoris missio*

“The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the center of the universe and of history.”<sup>[40]</sup> We have observed that the present Holy Father began his first encyclical with the confession of this key truth claim. Today, more than two decades later, we celebrate his decision to focus on the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ. It has prepared us—as he intended—to commemorate the date on which “God entered the history of humanity and, as a man, became an actor in that history.”<sup>[41]</sup> It has also served as a clarion call to faith in the face of new challenges and the crisis of mission accompanying a crisis of faith. In *Redemptor hominis*, the Holy Father asked what path the Church should take. He answered that the only direction for heart, intellect, and will was towards Christ. Faith in Christ the Redeemer and in the salvation he alone offers to humanity emerges again as the reference-point and anchor for the teaching of *Redemptoris missio*. “The Church’s universal mission is born of faith in Jesus Christ,” he writes.<sup>[42]</sup>

The Christology of this encyclical on mission is found in its first three chapters, “Jesus Christ, the Only Savior,” “The Kingdom of God,” and “The Holy Spirit: The Principal Agent of Mission.” Here the Pope offers a very concise response, based in the New Testament, to the theories which give rise to doubts about Christianity’s truth claims and the validity of its mission *ad gentes*. Three Christological points are identified in the first chapter: (1) salvation comes only from Jesus Christ, the one Mediator for the whole world and the full revelation of God; (2) Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh and there is only one “economy of salvation”—that given in him; and (3) the new life offered in Christ is the gift of God’s love. Let us consider each of these in turn as it relates to the question, “Why mission?”

First, salvation comes only from Jesus Christ the one Mediator for the whole world and the full revelation of God. Christians affirm this as true—true not only for themselves, but for everyone, for “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Ac 4:12). This belief excludes belief in other “gods.” New Testament Christology is *theocentric* and monotheistic: Christ, the “one Lord,” participates in the uniqueness of the “one God” (1 Cor 8:4-6). He, the only Son sent by God, makes God known in the fullest possible way. “This definitive self-revelation of God is “the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature.”<sup>[43]</sup> Her vocation is to bear witness to the truth that Jesus Christ is the one, universal Mediator established by God (1 Tm 2:5-6), and that no one can come to God except through him and in the power of the Holy Spirit. This conviction does not exclude “participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees” but these “acquire meaning and value only from Christ’s own mediation.”<sup>[44]</sup> According to the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, this text does not exclude further theological investigation of whether and how “the historical figures and positive elements” of other religions “may fall within the divine plan of salvation.” It does, however, exclude the theory that revelation in Jesus Christ is “limited, incomplete, or imperfect,” or that it needs to be complemented by revelation found in other religions.<sup>[45]</sup>

Second, Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh and there is only one “economy of salvation,” the one given in him. In the face of contemporary theological proposals adduced in favor of religious pluralism, *Redemptoris missio* asserts the unity of Christ against two errors, one that would separate the Word of God from Jesus Christ, and another that would separate Jesus of Nazareth (or the “Jesus of history”) from the Christ (or the “Christ of faith”). The first error attempts to drive a wedge between the Word of God and Jesus Christ. But the Church teaches that Jesus is the Word—“who was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1)—made flesh, a single, indivisible person. According to *Dominus Iesus*, this affirmation excludes two alternative theories. In the first place, it excludes the theory which proposes that Jesus is “one of many faces which the Logos has assumed” in human history to offer salvation. In the second place, it excludes the theory that “there is an economy of the eternal Word that is valid outside the Church and is unrelated to her, in addition to the economy of the incarnate Word.”<sup>[46]</sup> According to this theory, the Word has a saving influence that is independent of the historical event of the Incarnation and the Cross. But the Church teaches that “one and the same” subject, the person of the Word, exists and operates in two natures. It is he, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us by his death and Resurrection. There is only one “economy of salvation” for the whole world, the one mediated by the Incarnate Word.

The second error attempts to drive a wedge between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ, as if the “Jesus of history” were someone other than the “Christ of faith.” Christology must hold together two truths: the individual, concrete reality of Jesus as an historical figure, and his universal, cosmic, and absolute significance. Contemporary scholarship focuses attention on what historians can know of Jesus apart from his Resurrection, and tends to reserve the title, “the Christ,” for the transcendent reality of the Risen Lord. This new usage, which appears to name the two natures of Christ but does not, represents a paradigm shift that is often the source of considerable confusion.[47] Like the first error, this error also threatens belief in the concrete particularity and permanence of the Incarnation. In the case at hand, it tends to support the erroneous idea that “the Christ” transcends humanity in some “inclusive” divine way. In practice, it is often put in the service of a new “adoptionism” that portrays Jesus as a human person in whom God’s spirit dwelt and who became “the Christ” at his Resurrection. Such a Christology is content to remain agnostic about the personal pre-existence of the Word, and says nothing of the Incarnation.

The Church, in the language of dogma, confesses one Christ who is identical with Jesus of Nazareth and is personally the Word of God incarnate. Just as we say that Jesus Christ is the Word (or Son) of God incarnate, not “someone else,” we also say that Christ the Risen Lord is the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, not “someone else.”[48] The dogmatic tradition holds fast to the unity of Christ by referring every name by which he is known to the one “Person.” The Church is able to confess the unity of Christ by calling Mary the Mother of God. Christian faith speaks of Christ as one in whom the “fullness of God” dwelt, God’s “beloved Son” who is utterly unique and the bringer of universal salvation. It affirms that Jesus Christ not only belongs to human history but also transcends it as its center and its goal. Belief in a single economy of salvation implies belief that God’s gifts of salvation—“spiritual treasures” given to every people—are never given independently of Christ. We affirm that Christ has united himself with *every human being* by his Incarnation, and that his Holy Spirit offers *everyone* the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery. We reject the view that Christ is Mediator of salvation only for some, or that he reveals only some aspects of the truth about God and the truth about the human person. It is not possible to remove the “scandal” of the Christian claim that we are saved in “no other name” and remain a believer.

A third Christological point in this chapter is that the new life offered to the world in Christ is the gift of God’s love. The salvation he brings is a “participation in the very life of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”[49] *Redemptoris missio*, as we have already noted, uses the expression “integral salvation” in speaking of Jesus’ mission. This entails, negatively, liberation from everything that oppresses and, positively, the prospect of divine filiation. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God: and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1). In this sense, the Christian concept of salvation is utterly distinctive. Without the revelation of the Father’s love and intimate participation in it, the human person does not yet know his full dignity and value in the divine plan.[50] The faith conviction that God has communicated *himself* to us in this radically new way in Christ is what drives the Church’s mission.

The second and third chapters of this encyclical contain two additional points relevant to our question: (1) the God whose kingdom we proclaim is the God revealed by Jesus Christ, and (2) the mission of the Holy Spirit reveals that He is the Spirit of Christ the Redeemer. These two clarifications are offered, again, in response to theories which advance the possibility that there is more than one divine economy of salvation. These theories err by discounting the role of Christ as Mediator and Redeemer. They have the net effect of dividing the work of salvation among the Persons of the Trinity.

In chapter two, the Pope observes that some kingdom-centered theologies proclaim God but remain silent about Christ, and that they celebrate creation but remain silent about salvation.[51] The kingdom that Jesus preached, however, was the kingdom of the God he revealed, that is, the kingdom of a Father full of compassion and mercy. Jesus invited all to repent and believe and so enter this kingdom to enjoy “liberation from evil in all its forms” and communion with one another and with God. This kingdom was already “at hand” in Jesus’ very person, and the Father’s love for the world was fully manifest in the gift of his life on the Cross. Because the Resurrection marked the definitive inauguration of this kingdom, the apostolic preaching joined the proclamation of the Christ-event to the proclamation of the kingdom. Any theology of mission that attempts to find common ground with non-

Christians in a “theocentrically” based understanding of the kingdom but remains silent about Christ is deficient on two counts. It fails to acknowledge that Christ is the revelation of God’s kingdom in person, and it promotes a false theocentrism, for it promotes the kingdom of the “one divine reality by whatever name it is called,”<sup>[52]</sup> not that of the God revealed by Jesus as “Abba.” Christian theocentrism cannot fail to speak of Christ, for it is Trinitarian. Likewise, any kingdom-centered theology that emphasizes the mystery of creation but remains silent about Christ’s redemptive work and the Church which mediates it to us is deficient, for it fails to include what is specific to the Gospel and to the identity of Christ as Lord and Redeemer.

Reflecting on the mission of the Holy Spirit in chapter three, the Holy Father notes that some contemporary theories attempt to account for the salvation of non-Christians by proposing a separate economy of the Holy Spirit.<sup>[53]</sup> The Church teaches, of course, that the Spirit “fills the earth” and is at work sowing the “seeds of the Word” in human hearts, cultures, and religions in order to prepare the way for the Gospel message.

The activity and influence of the Holy Spirit, however, is never divorced from that of Christ. The same Spirit who was active in Jesus’ life is active in the Church. The “seeds” he sows are “seeds of the *Word*.” The offer of salvation he makes is that of sharing in Christ’s paschal mystery. The Spirit, therefore, is “not an alternative to Christ,” the Pope explains, “nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about . . . serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit.”<sup>[54]</sup> According to *Dominus Iesus*, it is contrary to Catholic faith to propose “an economy of the Holy Spirit with a more universal breadth than that of the Incarnate Word, crucified and risen.”<sup>[55]</sup> The mission of the Spirit is always linked to that of the Son; it is not independent of or parallel to his mission. The Church teaches, in fact, that there is only one economy of salvation—a Trinitarian economy.

Insofar as faulty theories of salvation appear to discourage mission *ad gentes*, the crisis of mission is revealed to be a crisis of faith as well. This crisis calls forth a defense and clarification of the Church’s faith in Christ and his work of Redemption. This inevitably entails a defense of belief in the Blessed Trinity as well.<sup>[56]</sup> Both *Redemptor hominis* and *Redemptoris missio* are clearly Christocentric in emphasis, but they presuppose that the Trinitarian missions are source of the Church’s missionary nature, as *Ad gentes* taught.<sup>[57]</sup>

In past generations, Catholic theology of mission was rooted primarily in Christ’s “mandate” to “go forth and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28: 19-20). Today, missiologists prefer to seek the source of Christ’s mandate and of the Church’s mission in the mystery of the inner-Trinitarian relations and in the divine missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit *ad extra*. The Church’s mission, in this perspective, is a participation in the *missio Dei*.

The gift of salvation is, in fact, “participation in the very life of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>[58]</sup> It “consists in believing and accepting the mystery of the Father and of his love, made manifest and freely given in Jesus through the Spirit.”<sup>[59]</sup> The one economy of salvation for the whole world is an economy of divine self-communication in love, a love also described as mercy. <sup>[60]</sup> In his self-emptying love and vulnerability—in the womb, in the manger, in the company of sinners, on the Cross—God’s Son made man reveals the face of the Father as love and mercy. He longs to share with every person the glory and the love he has from the Father, and so he send his disciples into the world that everyone may know and believe (John 17: 21-23).<sup>[61]</sup> The Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life, is sent forth into the whole world “to offer the human race ‘the light and strength to respond to its highest calling.’”<sup>[62]</sup>

### C. Challenges to the Church in fulfilling her Mission

A text is always written and read in a context. The textual context of *Redemptoris missio*, as we have just explored it, is created by the documents on the Church and the Church in the world from the Second Vatican Council, by Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Evangelii nuntiandi* and by Pope John Paul’s constant proclamation of the mystery of redemption by Christ. The ecclesial context revealed

in *Redemptoris missio* is marked by a crisis of faith which makes it difficult for Catholics to love so deeply that they desire to proclaim Christ to the world. God's motive in sending his Son to save us was love of the world (John 3: 16). The Son's motive was his love for his Father and for those the Father had given to his care (John 17). The Church's motive for mission is love for her Lord and all those He died to save. If we do not love, we will not act. But it is faith that tells us who God is in Christ and whom God loves. It is faith that tells us how to love. A crisis of faith weakens the charity which is the soul of the Church, and a Church so weakened cannot act, cannot be missionary. A Church filled with the love born of faith is eager to share Christ's gifts with the world. She will discover new forms of missionary cooperation and will hold her missionaries, especially those who have given their lives to the service of the mission *ad gentes*, in great honor and esteem. The best way to celebrate the tenth anniversary of *Redemptoris missio* is to examine ourselves as Christ's body in the world and take the steps necessary to stir up the love that marks an evangelizing Church, a missionary body.

The world in which the Church evangelizes has continued in the last ten years to develop within a pattern called globalization. This is the social context in which *Redemptoris missio* must now be read and implemented. Because of technological advances in communication, growth in the movement of peoples and ideas and increase in the transfer of capital and goods have so transformed the world that our very experience of space and time are altered. But growth in contacts between individuals and among peoples is not the same as a deepening of relationships, and evangelizing means bringing people into relationship with another through their relationship to Jesus Christ. How make use of global communications to transform contacts into relationships? In his recent message for the World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II returns to the dialogue among cultures which is necessary not only to establish world peace but also to evangelize. If contacts made possible in an era of globalization give birth to genuine dialogue among cultures, new paths for evangelization, new ways of mission, open up in the new global aereopagus.

We speak often, especially since the Council, about the Church in the world. For the world to become truly global and become so in the solidarity born of Gospel love and social justice, we should speak as well about the world in the Church. The Church, if she is faithful to her Lord, will not only proclaim who he is but will act to become herself the womb, the matrix, in which a new world can gestate and be born. Listening and welcoming, the Church is the locus of interfaith encounter, of interreligious dialogue, of the intercultural collaboration among religions and people of good will. In this context of universal mutual respect created by the Church, she offers the gifts that transform the world and bring salvation in this life and the next. In her own inner life, the Church, like her risen Lord, transcends and encompasses human history.

Why mission? The primary service the Church can render to humankind is to direct their gaze towards Christ the Redeemer, "the center of the universe and of history," in whom God's love and mercy are fully revealed. Christians take up this service out of love for God and for their neighbor, but also in order to imitate God's own self-giving love by sharing with others the riches of their radically new life. Our obligation comes "not only from the Lord's mandate but also from the profound demands of God's life within us."<sup>[63]</sup> Just as within the life of God, the dynamism of self-emptying love from the "fountain-fullness" of the Father overflows in the missions of the Son and of the Spirit, so "the love of Christ urges us" (2 Cor 5:14) to share the Good News of God's love with the world.

Holy Father, on this tenth anniversary of *Redemptoris missio*, I offer you the thanks of the Church and the world.

---

[1] *Redemptor hominis* [RH] 1.

[2] *Tertio millennio adveniente* (1994).

[3] *Redemptoris missio* [RMis] 2.

[4] Ibid. This is implied in his observation that “in the Church’s history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis in faith.”

[5] “What is man? What is the meaning of suffering, evil, death...? What is the purpose of these [human] achievements, purchased at so high a price? What happens after this earthly life is ended?” (GS 10)

[6] GS 22.

[7] RMis 8; cp. GS 22 and *Ad gentes* 8.

[8] RH 9.

[9] RH 13 and 14.

[10] *Redemptoris missio* also commemorates that of the publication of the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes*.

[11] *Evangelii nuntiandi* [EN] 4.

[12] EN 14.

[13] EN 18. “Evangelization is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative.” (EN 24)

[14] EN 9.

[15] EN 30-32.

[16] Cp. RMis 32.

[17] EN 35.

[18] EN 22.

[19] EN 27.

[20] EN 80

[21] Ibid.

[22] EN 5.

[23] EN 78-79.

[24] Ibid.

[25] RMis 4.

[26] The position which defends religious pluralism in principle argues that: (1) since every belief system is historically and culturally-conditioned, none has the right to make universal claims and to judge other religions; (2) it is impossible to know God (“Ultimate Reality”) in a definitive way; and (3) it is unethical and oppressive to claim normativity for any religion, for this implies a depreciation of other religions. See K.W. Brewer, “The Uniqueness of Christ and the Challenge of the Pluralistic

Theology of Religion,” in H. Häring and K.-J. Kuschel, eds., *Hans Küng: New Horizons for Faith and Thought* (London: SCM, 1993): 198-215, at 201.

[27] RMis 44.

[28] RMis 46.

[29] RMis 48. He continues: “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.”

[30] RMis 34.

[31] RMis 33.

[32] RMis 32. Some positive features are (1) the restoration of “the missions” into the mission of the Church, (2) the inclusion of Missiology in Ecclesiology, and (3) the integration of mission theology into the Trinitarian plan of salvation.

[33] The deeper response concerns faith in Jesus Christ, the topic of the next section.

[34] RMis 39 and 7.

[35] RMis 10-11; 36.

[36] RMis 60.

[37] RMis 11.

[38] For a presentation of these objections, along with a Catholic response, see Paul Griffiths, “The One Jesus and the Many Christs,” *Pro Ecclesia* (1995)...

[39] RMis 11.

[40] *Redemptor hominis* 1.

[41] Ibid.

[42] RMis 4.

[43] RMis 5.

[44] Ibid.

[45] *Dominus Iesus* [DH] 6.

[46] DI 9-10.

[47] See John P. Galvin, “From the Humanity of Christ to the Jesus of History: A Paradigm Shift in Catholic Christology,” *Theological Studies* 55 (1994) 252-73. Galvin notes that the “Jesus of history” does not name the human nature, just as the “Christ of faith” does not name the divine nature (at 256). The apparent correspondence, however, suggests to some authors that Jesus is only human and Christ is only divine. In traditional usage, these are two concrete names for one and the same Person.

[48] Cp. St. Augustine, Sermon 186 (“On Christmas Day”), 3.

- [49] RMis 7.
- [50] RH 10.
- [51] RMis 17-18.
- [52] RMis 17.
- [53] RMis 28-29.
- [54] RMis 29.
- [55] DI 12.
- [56] AG 2.
- [57] AG 2-4; cp. RMis 1.
- [58] RMis 7.
- [59] RMis 12.
- [60] RH 9.
- [61] RMis 23.
- [62] RMis 28.
- [63] RMis 12.

**OMI DOCUMENTATION** is an unofficial publication  
of the General Administration of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate  
C.P. 9061, 00100 ROMA-AURELIO, Italy

Fax: (39) 06 39 37 53 22 E-mail : [information@omigen.org](mailto:information@omigen.org)