

# The Mission and Witness of the Church

## A Study Outline

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### INTRODUCTION

#### A. — Present-day renewal in the Catholic Church

1. No one can still be unaware that the Catholic Church is going through an irreversible phase of deep renewal.

The various factors responsible for this historic transition include, in God's providence, the so-called "modern movements of renewal". We can speak of a genuine "return to the sources".

2. The first and most important of these movements to note is the **biblical** movement, which is bringing to the fore once again the study and living out of Scripture as the necessary condition for the life and activity of the Church in the world. The **liturgical** movement stresses the biblical "history of salvation" which the community of faith must live, and points back to the central meaning of worship of the One God as "memorial" and as offering of thanks for all his wonderful works in the history of his people, and "blessing" Him who has performed them and of praise and glory to Him in so far as he is who He is. The **patristic** movement is helping us to recover the living, global and pastoral way in which the Fathers of the Church nurtured the people on the continuous reading of Scripture and its application to the liturgy of the community and to life. The **pastoral** movement is concerned with study and activity for the

(1) Cf. about the meeting of Venice, *E.T.* 1977/1-2; about Professor Federici, *E.T.* 1967/1-2 and 1968/1.

daily life of the communities. The **catechetical** movement deals in particular with the content and techniques of the ongoing teaching of the Church and its necessary scriptural bases. The **missionary** movement is bringing about a renewal of evangelisation by the Church among the peoples and cultures of the earth, preceded by a careful study of the many different questions involved. The **spirituality** movement is deepening and disseminating the vital biblical content of every-day faith. The **ecumenical** movement is uncovering aspects of the centuries-old divisions between groups of Christians and studying the causes and the remedies to be applied; it is moving towards the toilsome path of the rediscovery of unity and is making us discover again that there is no ecumenism without genuine ongoing renewal (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6-8). **Dialogue** with other religions and new ideologies calls Christians to give a hearing to the deep questionings of men today and to offer them their own experience as men and as believers, for the upbuilding of the "society of love", illuminated by the "light of God". Finally a new sense of **history**, read in the light of Scripture, is bringing about a deeper understanding of the origins and vicissitudes of the Church; of her place in the world in relation to different peoples and cultures; and to the biblical plan of salvation and its unfolding in the lives of men of every age.

3. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965), met at a time when all these movements were happily converging, as well as other complementary movements, which had been started and pursued by various pioneers with increasing fruitfulness. The Council gave its blessing to the insights, desires, studies and efforts of preceding decades; it analysed and synthesised their provisional results and finally endorsed their essential main content. The effect of the Council, in response to the pressing demands of renewal, was to provide a powerful incentive towards rethinking and deepening the whole life of the Catholic Church, both internally and in so far as this life is lived in the world among different men and cultures and in the flow of world history. All this was put down in the 16 official Documents of the Council, which will be the necessary basis of the modern activity of the Church in the future.

4. However, this basis is not closed, as has been shown by the numerous "Documents of implementation" which have concentrated on various urgent points in the Council Documents or have answered new needs arising from recent events. They provide for the full and coherent implementation of the programme laid down by the Council itself. But even the magisterium of the Popes who guided the work of Vatican Council II and direct its orientations manifests this irreversible will for a renewal. Thus approximately 10 years after the close of the Council it is possible to record the stage not only of the Council's implementation, but also of the real

7. Christ before and after his Resurrection commanded his faithful disciples to carry on his own mission of proclaiming the Name of God and Father, and all the saving realities which spring from it as from a single wonderful source; his mercy and justice, his Kingdom of salvation through love, the brotherhood of all men, the return to the House of the Father of all men in a spirit of conversion of heart (*teshuva*, *epistrophê*, *niham*, *metânoia*), and as the recipients of the ever-present reality of divine grace, according to the Promise made to the Fathers (cf. *Mark* 1, 14-15, *Matthew* 28, 16-20; *Mark* 16, 15-20, *Acts* 1,8 and other texts). Therefore the Lord grants his Spirit (cf. *Luke* 24,49; *Acts* 2,1-11; *John* 20,21-23).

8. Modern methods of analysis of the New Testament texts authorise the assertion that the earliest missionary activity was based on the fact that Christ himself and therefore the Apostles with him, being conscious that they belonged to their people, the one people of God, intended from the outset to involve and associate Israel with the universal mission of salvation to the gentiles, a mission seen as one and the same in God's plan. The Church has never wanted to work on her own. It was therefore necessary to turn to the House of Israel (*Matthew* 9,35 - 11,1; Christ's messianic mission and the "missionary discourse" to the apostles, cf. particularly 10, 5-10; *Acts* 2, 13-40; 3,16-26; 7, 1-53; 13,14-41 and 44-47; 18, 4-9; 22, 1-21; 28, 17-28 and other texts). It was only afterwards that they turned to the pagan nations who were outside the covenant with the Fathers, in the renewal brought about by Christ (cf. *Matthew* 28, 16-20; *Acts* 10, 34-48; 13,46-52; 14, 15-17; 17, 16-34; 19; 20; 26, 1-23; 28, 30-31).

9. The best documented missionary experience in the New Testament is that of Paul. The experience enabled him to reflect in depth on the difficult question of the relationship between the new community of believers, the Church, and the historic Israel, a question which from the start posed itself in dramatic terms. The fundamental text for Paul's treatment of the question is *Romans* 9,1-11,36 (which should however be read in the wider context of numerous other New Testament texts). The question has often not been examined adequately in its premises, its vital substance and its ultimate consequences. While carefully recognising the possibility of our knowledge being further extended and deepened, we may venture to say this: that renewed examination of Paul's text allows the conclusion that the Church's mission to Israel consists rather in living a Christian life in total fidelity to the One God and his revealed Word. This should lead to a competitiveness having saving value between Jews and Christians in relation to God (cf., e.g., *Romans* 11,1-14). It is this which comprises the universal salvation of Jews and gentiles. The core of Paul's admonition to his Churches is that in virtue of the divine election made once and for all to

the Fathers by God's faithful and living Word (cf. *Romans* 9, 4-5), the Israelites are God's "beloved" (*Romans*, 11,18). This is because God unlike men who are always sinful — never ceases to be He who is faithful to himself and therefore "the gifts and the call of God" to Israel "are irrevocable" (*Romans* 11,29). This is why the Church over the centuries and especially today with the emergence of various fresh lines of research, has held and holds various concrete attitudes in relations to the Jews: respect for their mission, a desire to find common forms of witness to the Divine Name before the world, particularly the world of today which is losing all sense of the divine and the transcendent; for a long time in earlier periods there was also the desire to absorb Israel by means of actual conversion to Christianity. Today, however, there is emerging in the Church once again the realisation that the people God chose for himself is "the people dedicated to the praise of God" (cf. e.g. *Ad Gentes* 2, on mission to non-Christian peoples).

10. A further conviction has been expressed in a number of different contexts (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 16; *Dei Verbum* 14-16; *Nostra Aetate* 4; "Guidelines and Suggestions for implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (n° 4)", especially para III) and has been studied more seriously within the Church and needs to be expressed here, namely the conviction that none of the inspired Christian sources justifies the notion that the old Covenant of the Lord with his people Israel has been abrogated or in any sense nullified (cf. *supra* B 2). This is true despite the fact that the Christian Passover and Pentecost as vividly described for example by Luke have meant for the Church, which for Luke is Israel, a profound awareness of having received from God in a real, if still inchoative way, the object of Israel's messianic expectation.

## B. — Mission to peoples and cultures in history

1. In obedience, then, to the Lord's compelling command to his people, the Church has proclaimed the name of the One God to the world and its people down to the present day. It has been a colossal task over 2,000 years; adverse historical conditions notwithstanding, this work has never been interrupted. The papal exhortation of Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of 8 December 1975 today brings into full light the unchanging conditions of the mission.

2. The Church has always proclaimed to the world the God she prays to, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of Moses (*Exodus*, 3,6; cf. Jesus' quotation of this passage, *Mark* 12, 26-27 and parallels), the God of David, the God of the suffering Servant, the God of Jesus Christ. He is the hidden Lord, the Lord of Israel, the Saviour (*Isaiah* 45,15). He is the Lord who is Creator, Provider, Father, tender and gracious (*Exodus* 35, 5-8; *Psalms* 103,8), « who gives food to all creatures — for his

advances achieved to date as well as the large amount which still remains to be done either in the immediate future or by future generations.

5. What has been brought about, then, is a series of irreversible new achievements as a result of the peaceful work of the Catholic Church, both internally and in her relations with other Churches or with other world religions in the present case with Judaism or with other human groups.

6. It should not be concealed that the work, while steady, but under the guidance of the Pope and the bishops has necessarily been gradual; it has had to face numerous difficulties both internal and external, but it is nevertheless moving forward irreversibly with hope and trust in God's will.

#### B. — The return to biblical Sources

Characteristic of the present stage of renewal in the Catholic Church is a definite universal and daily expanding return to the biblical Sources.

1. This movement by Christians is due both to the work of pioneers, at first Protestant and then also Catholic, and also to the official efforts of the Catholic Church, with the establishment of specialised institutions for biblical training at an advanced level. The present liturgical reform has been the occasion of one particular aspect of this "return to the Sources". Not only has the reform involved —and still involves— studying the Jewish biblical origins of Christian liturgy, but in the new "Roman Lectionary" for the Mass and other celebrations, it has restored in full the precious reading of the Old Testament and the consequent vital sense of the historical dimension both of the worship of the One God and of the salvation extended to all men in history. Furthermore a number of Papal directive documents followed by those of the Council (specially *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy and *Dei Verbum*, the Constitution on Divine Revelation), and finally the documents implementing these have ensured that this "return" has now become general both in extension and in depth.

2. Study and continuous contact with the Sources has gradually accelerated the total rediscovery of God's revelation contained in Scripture as "sacred history". This is the history of God's salvation continually at work among men, the divine plan of universal salvation in the world and in the complex history of men and peoples of the earth. The plan began to become a reality with the choice of a historical people, Israel, and from that people spreads through the whole universe. There is a better understanding of the definitive saving power of God's Word. This was once given to the Fathers (*Genesis* 12,1-3, to take the example of Abraham) in the form of an Irreversible and trustworthy Promise; it was continually proclaimed

to the people in worship, so that it could also be lived in every-day life; it was confirmed by the prophets —but in its essence it "abides for ever" (*Isaiah* 40,8). There is a better understanding of the way Christ urgently insisted for his disciples of every age on the need to search the Scriptures, in his personal teaching with which he started them on their way. (Cf., for example *Luke* 24,25-27. 44-47, quoted by *Dei Verbum* 14-17 on the Old Testament in the life of the Church today). Scripture at that time meant, in practice, the Old Testament with its enduring value for every-day life.

For this reason when the Apostle Paul demonstrates the historical foundation of the death and resurrection of Christ he proclaims that these events come about "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15,3-4) which were at the time no other but the Old Testament.

This meant and still means today difficult problems of interpretation, comparison and application, which justify the Second Vatican Council's appeal for the Church as a whole first of all to evangelise itself with the word (cf., in particular, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Dei Verbum*). This deeper study of Scripture is leading to a better and better understanding of the Passover theme in salvation history. As a result, as the Church comes to recognize that she is a "pilgrim on this earth" (cf., e.g., *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 2:8; *Lumen Gentium* 48:68; *Dei Verbum* 7; *Unitatis Redintegratio* 2:6; *Ad Gentes* 2; *Christus Dominus* 16), in the sense that her "passover exodus" is still happening, her prayer and her activity are again and again directed towards the paschal dimension of existence. The whole life of faith is thus better seen as continual living of the paschal event, and a continual "memorial" of the Passover, by giving constant blessing, thanks and praise to the Lord. Indeed it has rightly been said by authorities that the major Christian rediscovery of our day is that of the Passover; Christian life will be more characterised by a distinctively **Paschal spirituality**. It may be noted that these same official documents make more frequent and apt use of quotations from the Bible to give the best expression to the thought of the Church on the various questions they deal with.

3. In a relatively short space of time, and in particular since the Second Vatican Council there has been a change of mentality within the Catholic Church on the part of leaders and faithful alike, though not without some delay and reluctance. Facts and reality can no longer be ignored, in practice nor can they be interpreted in a "closed" and so reductionist way; the internal and external relations of the Church must henceforward be based on full and realistic inductive and mutual relations — with a firmer adherence to God's will expressed in the biblical revelation to men in history, and specifically to the people God chose for himself.

4. It is therefore possible to predict that in the not too distant future the Catholic Church's relations with other human cultural

and religious groups will enter a better phase of greater openness and readiness to collaborate.

5. In all this ecumenical experience in the recent and more distant past has been of great service in teaching and perfecting a new method of analysing facts and subsequent relations.

6. It was necessary first of all to clarify these points in order to present the subject of this study in the inalterable fulness of the Catholic faith.

I

### THE BIBLICAL COMMAND OF MISSION TO THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH

The Catholic Church does not conceal the fact that the basis of her mission in the world, in history among the peoples of the world and their different cultures is to be found exclusively in the revealed Will of God, not, in any human motive of power, domination or conquest: on the contrary she claims a two-fold mission of service of the One God and of brotherly Service of the people of the earth.

This binding command is already present in the pages of both Testaments of the Bible. And the Church feels herself called and addressed directly and continually by the Old Testament as much as by the New Testament; the former is something real and concrete which she feels to be her own, not something external and as it were accidental and distant, though it has to be explored on the basis of the fulfilment brought to it by the New Testament. For this reason the Church has always stressed and stresses again her links with the Jewish people.

#### A. — The specific command of mission

1. The Church emphatically takes as belonging to her the sublime command of the Old Testament, incorporated, fulfilled and delivered again in the New Testament, of making known the name of One God among all peoples of the earth in every age (cf. infra). The Lord in his infinite majesty and in his goodness, has himself revealed his one true Name, the only authentic name (Exodus 3,15), alone to be adored and called upon with fear and faith, but also with love (Exodus 23, 13); it is this which will distinguish the people whom he has chosen for his own from all other peoples as they call upon and remember the Name in praise, in remembrance, invocation and intercession. The Name is "terrible" (Deuteronomy, 28,5), eternal (Psalm 135,13), all-holy (Psalm 99,3.5.9), sanctified (Isaiah 29,3), praised, thanked and invoked (Psalm 7,18) and loved (Psalm 5,12).

To call upon the Name of God and not in vain (Exodus 20,7: Deuteronomy 5,11) marks the attainment of salvation (Joel 3,5).

2. The people God himself has chosen for his plans of goodness is thus obliged to bring other peoples, though only through the grace of the One Lord, to "invoke the Name of the Lord and serve him under the same yoke (adoration)" (Zephaniah 3,9). This is the universalist opening which echoes through the whole Old Testament, in the Torah of Moses (e.g. the "brotherhood covenant" of Abraham, our common Father: Genesis 12, 1-3), in the Prophets (cf. e.g. Isaiah 2,1-5; 10,33-11,10; 19-25; 6,12, Jeremiah 16, 19-21, Jonah and others), in the Wisdom books and in the Psalms.

3. But the Lord himself has also given warning with clear and severe prophetic threats that he in no way tolerates his people "making his name blasphemed" among the nations (cf. e.g. Ezekiel 36, 16-32; cf. also Deuteronomy, other Prophets; similarly in the New Testament, Christ, e.g. in Luke 6; Paul, e.g. in Rom. 2,14 which recalls Is. 52,5; 1 Tim. 6,1; Tit. 2,5; 1 Peter 4,4; Jam. 2,7).

4. The mission, then, of the people of God over the ages and throughout the earth is always the "sanctification of the Name, qiddush ha-Shem" in the world and among the peoples (Exodus 9,16; Isaiah 29,23; cf. Numbers 20,12; Isaiah 8,13; Ezekiel 20,41; 28,22.25; 36,23; 38,16.23; Malachi 1,11,14).

5. In the New Testament the person of Christ Lord and God (John 20:29) is presented both as the continuation of the Old Testament prophetic line and as something new; he thus stands in his place as the centre and source of this complex process so rich in historical and spiritual consequences. Christ himself, following in the footsteps of the Old Testament first gives us the command to "sanctify the Name" in the "Lord's Prayer" or "Our Father", which he taught his disciples (Matthews 6,9; Luke 11,2; cf. also the synagogal parallel in the liturgical Qaddish); this was then spelled out by apostolic men (as in Hebrews 13,15; cf. also Romans 9,17, in the difficult context of the "mystery of Israel", which specifically quotes Exodus 9,16), such as Eph. 3. Christ reveals in a new way to his disciples of every age the fulness of the divine Name, which is "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", the ineffable and awesome object of adoration and love (cf. e.g. the whole of John 17, similarly the opening of the Pauline epistles).

6. The person of Christ, Lord and Master, therefore, together with his own and his apostles' teaching means that Christians of every age are committed to seeing themselves in the historical and prophetic line of the biblical covenant and, in a supranational sense, as a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people God chose to proclaim his own wonderful deeds" (1 Peter 2,8, which picks up Exodus 19,5-6, with its Old Testament parallels).



love is everlasting" (Psalm 136, 25, the great paschal Hallel), who keeps his Promise to the Fathers (Psalm 105, 42-45; 106, 45-47) in a perpetual divine "memorial", and continually makes it real and spreads it in Jesus Christ, his poor, humble and gentle servant (Acts 10, 34-43; 13, 16-41).

3. Over the centuries the Church has thus brought countless peoples, kingdoms and cultures to faith in and love for the One Living Lord, continually showing how he had acted, acts through great and terrible deeds in the history of his people, "with powerful actions and by his words" (thus *Dei Verbum* 2). And how the Lord has also acted and still acts in this way in the history of the same nations of the earth in the periods of the Old and New Testaments and in the course of world history, according to the plan of his inscrutable wisdom. Then there are his powerful acts of goodness and mercy, of forgiveness and call, of winning back what was once lost, and of the entry into the messianic kingdom of what God himself has saved; then again there are those hard, but just "signs" whereby he calls man back to the necessary conversion of heart. The Church would have been more widely active in the world had not her missionary zeal and effort been constantly retarded and often frustrated by repeated different historical obstacles, particularly in the East, but also and no less by irreparable schisms and attitudes not free from ambiguity, compromises, mistaken tactics, ill-judged words and cruelty, causing the visible infidelity in following, the right way of announcing the divine Name.

4. While resisting any temptation to triumphalism and simply being aware of the Church's mission, it may be stated that the Church has pondered the revealed yet inexpressible mystery of God's goodness, and through it over the centuries not only have many peoples been brought to adore and sanctify the Name, but also this Name has at least been made known throughout the world and the substance of the Bible's message, centred in Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, who died and rose from the dead out of love, hence a message of justice, goodness, humanity, wisdom, freedom, equality, brotherhood, real peace and aspiration to full human and social development, has become a common universal heritage, even if many, both cultures and individuals, are often unaware of the fact.

5. Through this unceasing mission, even in the midst of insurmountable difficulties, men have also been shown the laborious, but certain path which through the saving news of Christ's Death and Resurrection leads all brothers united in a common solidarity towards the One God and Lord and to love him, know him, thank him and adore him. This dynamic saving faith has meant and still means the total liberation of man, with very real effects in the field of social relations. This was reaffirmed also in the recent apostolic exhor-

tation of Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of 8 December 1975, which is, as it were, the "summa" of the missionary work and of the Catholic church's witness in the contemporary world.

6. It may be stated further that the Church recognises that in God's revealed plan, Israel plays a prominent fundamental role of her own the "sanctification of the Name" in the world.

7. The Church is clear too that the "honour of the Name" is never unrelated to the salvation of the Jewish people, who are the original nucleus of God's plan of salvation.

8. The Church's faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ in which she cannot fail, obliges her to proclaim to the world that Christ himself through his life, his word, his works, his death and Resurrection did not nullify God's plan, but rather presents himself, in his humility and gentleness, his poverty and his service, as the living and efficacious synthesis of the divine promise to give men the Spirit of God.

#### C. — Christian life as witness

1. It is becoming clearer in the Catholic Church today, despite any temptation which may exist to the contrary, that the mission she received from her Lord and Master is above all to live in faithfulness to God and men; it is unity in love, respect for all brothers, service without distinction of persons, sacrifice, goodness: this is all clear from the message of the Bible, confirmed by the Master on the very evening when he accepted to die for all men (cf. *John* 13,1-17,26).

2. This automatically involves the repudiation and rejection of that inauthentic form of mission when while announcing the Lord and his Kingdom to men, the bearer and witness of the mission fails to urge them to live out these realities (cf. Paul's hard words in *I Corinthians* 9,27) and through this failure is blind to the duty of asking pardon of our common Father and of our brother men every time in history evil and harm may have been done to one's neighbour.

3. It seems that today, in various Christian contexts, among both groups and individuals there is an increase of faithfulness to the Lord and to his revealed Word as well as a greater awareness of being and acting in the world and to the renewal that is needed. Consequently Christians today are better able to understand the basic necessity of living a fully Christian life.

4. It should be just as carefully realised and remembered today and continually be brought to the mind of all Christians that precisely believing Jews as such, who "sanctify the Name of God" in the world by a life of justice and holiness in which God's gifts bear fruit, are a real witness before the whole world to the Jewish people's destiny. It is for this reason that one can observe in the Church today deep research on a number of themes connected with the

permanent place of the Jewish people according to God's plan (cf. *supra* n° 1, A,10, the Council texts).

#### D. — Witness as a vital necessity

1. From the contemplation of God's plan of salvation with the eyes of faith and love and in adoration of God's inscrutable Wisdom and Majesty, the Church derives her awareness of the absolute necessity of witness. It is constitutive of her very mission to the world and its peoples and is in accord with the concern which was to be heard in the very first days of the Church itself (cf. I **Corinthians** 9,16; "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!") and has never disappeared and has now been clearly restated by the Second Vatican Council (cf., e.g., **Lumen Gentium**; **Ad Gentes**; **Christus Dominus**; **Dei Verbum**; **Gaudium et Spes** and other documents such as **Evangelii Nuntiandi**, e.g. 21; 26; 41; 76).

2. The first necessity is the living of the Christian life and then the messianic missionary preaching of it to those who have not yet received God's Word of salvation, or, sadly, to those who have not yet responded to it for various reasons and finally to those who have received it, but did not actually live it and even despise it and fight against it. But it needs to be made clear to all that it is first of all to herself, as has been repeated many times, that the Church preaches the realities she must live, and then brings them to others (cf. *supra*, I **Corinthians** 9,27, **Evangelii Nuntiandi** 15) if her mission is not to be denied by the facts.

3. It can be no secret that although the Church's mission comes from the Will of God and is aided by his grace, it is carried on by men. For this reason it will always be imperfect because of the actual attitudes of Christians, their errors of judgement concerning facts, people and methods, actions which the passage of time has shown to accord ill with the mission itself, their betrayal of their original mission, their prejudiced view of mission, lack of respect for the various peoples and cultures involved and failure to identify values contributed by other religions (cf. also *supra* I, B, 3).

4. The Second Vatican Council has examined these facts too, and has recognised prevarications and inadequacies, excluding anything which does not belong to the original biblical mission and indicating new methods and attitudes which correspond more fully with the real situation of the Church and of men today. Furthermore, it has several times, and especially in the declaration **Nostra Aetate**, expressed its conscious esteem for other religions' values and the urgent need to get to know them and have dialogue with them (cf. *infra*).

## II

### THE REJECTION OF UNDUE PROSELYTISM

#### A. — Undue proselytism (1)

1. Many Christians, especially during and after the last war and with the subsequent experience of the Council, have come to realise that after two millenia of incomprehension and in particular of contempt and moral, spiritual and even physical persecutions, attacks on the very existence of the Jewish people as such precisely because they are Jewish, with deliberate diabolical intention —and the responsibilities of Christians must not be concealed— make it urgently necessary to start a new reflection not only on the destiny, permanence and mission of the Jewish people, but also on general anthropology itself. Earlier contacts with Jews and now, in a different climate, the possibilities which have emerged for collaboration with them in the social field, are opening up new perspectives which must not be neglected.

2. On October 28th, 1965 the Second Vatican Council promulgated the Declaration **Nostra Aetate** on relations between the Catholic Church and non-Christian religions. The whole of section 4 is devoted to relations with the Jews and is of outstanding importance as the first document of its type. Its actual contents were definitely taken up and have been seen to be capable of improvement in time and have initiated an irreversible movement.

3. On December 1st, 1974 this Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews published its first document by way of implementation of section 4 of **Nostra Aetate**, entitled "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration **Nostra Aetate**, n° 4". Its main points, after an introduction are: Dialogue, Liturgy, Teaching and Education, Joint Social Action. Suffice it here simply to mention this document, along with **Nostra Aetate**, n° 4, as providing the only possible general context. The intention in issuing the document was to open a new phase in the Church's relations and action toward the Jews, and, above all, within the limits of what is possible today, to put an end to the many persisting misunderstandings in this field.

4. The intention in this present study outline is to set out in a few points the difficult question of proselytism which has alienated and continues to alienate many people.

5. Earlier, however, in May 1970 the "Joint Working Group" between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of

(1) In the Italian the term is *proselitismo indebito*.

excluded are hateful forms of comparison, and especially those harmful ones already condemned by *Nostra Aetate*, 4 and then by the "Guidelines and Suggestions", which exalt the religion and fact of Christianity by throwing discredit on the religion and fact of Judaism, whether in the past or in the present.

15. It is recalled also that any action is rejected which aims to change the religious faith of the Jews, whether groups, minorities or individuals by offering more or less overt protection, legal, material, cultural, political and other advantages, on educational, social or other pretexts. In particular any action or behaviour of this sort is excluded which is aimed against children, the aged, the sick or adolescents who are still seeking their place in society. A fortiori every form of threat or coercion is excluded, even when indirect or disguised. Freedom of conscience is an alienable right of the human person and of human groups and must therefore be guaranteed against every possible attack and coercion in every sphere, external and internal, physical and moral.

16. The time of methods of enforced conversion of Jews, imposed catecheses and compulsory sermons imposed by Christian majority powers has come to a definitive end and been disowned and deprecated. But the latent danger still exists that popular religious writing and the behaviour of Christians may put pressure on Jews, both individuals and groups. This contradictory way of acting (which must always be rejected) is still expected by some to lead to "conversion", while those who engage in it are unwilling to bring about their own "conversion of heart" to God and their brothers.

17. In fact it is openly recognised in the Church today, as has been repeatedly and insistently confirmed by the Second Vatican Council, that "conversion" understood as passing from one faith or religious denomination to another, belongs in the setting of the inalienable right of freedom of religious conscience, since it is an inviolable process involving the interaction of God's grace and man's response. No "conversion" can ever be genuine if it does not bring about a spiritual deepening in the religious consciousness of the person who is taking the step, usually after great heart-searching.

18. Consequently, attempts to set up organisations of any sort, particularly educational or welfare organisations for the "conversion" of Jews must be rejected. On the contrary encouragement is to be given to all efforts to get to know the history of Israel, starting with the Bible and exploring in depth the spirit, the existence, the history and the mission of Israel, her survival in history, her election and call, and her privileges which are recognised by the New Testament (cf., once again, *Romans* 9:4-5; 11:29); the true Christian will carry out this in the light of the message of God's love and

goodness brought by Jesus Christ in the Spirit of God; simultaneously what the Jews have to say must be listened to (cf. *infra* on dialogue, Guidelines and Suggestions, Introduction par. 5).

19. All the above is stated openly and without mental reservations and follows from the official texts of the Church (cf. *supra*). In this way the works may be seen and the glory given to the Father (cf. *Matthew* 5,16) and men may one day discover the face of the brother which bears the one common image and likeness of the Almighty Lord the Good One and rewarder of men (cf. *Genesis* 1,26-27).

## B. — The New Christian Attitude

1. It is necessary to recall once again the Church's obligation to bear witness, to preach and to fulfil her mission as outlined. This is understood and implemented through the explicit Christian biblical announcement; (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22:29) and without ever any attempt to restrict this announcement and without any ambiguity and obscurity (cf. *ibid.* 32). This is all directed toward the sole purpose of the Church, the Glory of the One God, which in turn is the one and only salvation of men. *Lumen Gentium* has expressed in clear terms for all Christians the God-centred, saving purpose of the people of God in the world (cf. whole *Lumen Gentium*, II).

2. The gift of Christian faith, love and hope cannot be hidden. From their works all men should see the Glory of God, in Christian awareness that every man who adores the One God is the recipient of the grace of God's Spirit and not of human success alone.

3. The Catholic Church, then, conscious of her mission, has undergone a renewal in the spirit and in her attitude. She is ready to offer trust to men, just as she is ready to receive it in demonstration of her good will. Her sons wish to be "the servants of the truth" (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 78). They wish to fulfil their Christian mission out of no other motive but love (*ibid.* 79).

4. This concrete renewal, as has been recalled above, is already clearly visible and is destined to grow and become more universal, more profound and more rapid in the years to come. At the level of organisms appointed by the Church for relations with other religions it is today possible to see the real intentions of the Church herself. Their influence will be increasingly felt at the level of the rank and file.



## THE DIALOGUE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. One of the major 'innovations' emerging in the Catholic Church today is the positive desire for 'dialogue' whether with other Christian churches, with worshippers of the God of Abraham (Jews and Muslims), with adherents of the world religions, or even, with the appropriate analogy, with atheists. This intention on the part of the Church, once broached by pioneers, was clearly outlined in the Second Vatican Council and was presented as a practical programme by Paul VI in his first Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964); it has been followed up in study and activity which have now reached an advanced stage. More specifically the premises for beginning dialogue were put forward in *Nostra Aetate* 4 and then in a more analytic and practical way in «*Guidelines and Suggestions*», in particular in the introduction and in paragraph I on dialogue.

2. The fundamental presuppositions of dialogue are respect for, and acceptance of, the "other" in his inviolable, human, real, cultural, historical, spiritual and religious identity.

3. Of decisive importance for the development of the dialogue mentality among Christians have been the substantial contributions offered by Jewish thinkers (above all by Martin Buber). Their constant recourse to the Bible and Hassidic spirituality has enabled them to bring out and deepen the meaning and importance of faith in the personal God, who is Creator and Saviour; from him alone originate the dignity of the human subject and the reality of his ontological relationship with "the other", with the community and with God.

4. This atmosphere of interpersonality which pervades the Jewish Bible is in no way decreased in the Christian parts of the Bible itself; on the contrary it develops and becomes universal as it describes all human relationships in compelling terms of brotherhood and service. Respect for the conscience of the other, above all if he is weak, bearing his burdens, consciousness of one's indebtedness to him, accepting him in his existential condition, meeting his deepest desires, answering his need for growth and affirmation are all categorical imperatives of New Testament morality. Dialogue thus becomes part and parcel of the actual order of daily existence and behaviour.

5. However it is evident that these imperatives contain within them a desire to witness and communicate, not in an abstract or doctrinal way, but concretely, not in the form of a dictate or conquest, but a response and sharing, by offering men in the form of an existential experience the specific contribution that Christian existence can give. It is intended as an act of obedience to the invita-

tion found in the New Testament: "Always have your answer ready for people who ask you for the reason for the hope that you all have. But give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience" (I Peter 3,16).

6. In this way dialogue is today becoming one of the major forms of communication between the Church and contemporary men. In fact it has been authoritatively noted that dialogue is the form of communication par excellence in an adult society. Thus it does not represent either a betrayal or an obscuring of that essential mission which is constitutive of the Church and of the whole people of God, which consists in bearing witness to the Glory of God in the world, "sanctifying his name". Rather, dialogue coexists with other forms of communication on the part of the Church, such as continuing evangelisation of herself, preaching, catechesis, pastoral activity (cf. *supra*), and the mission to evangelise in the strict sense, i.e. the mission to raise up a new community of people who worship and glorify God in spirit and truth. But the essence of dialogue is in its being and action of giving and receiving, of attentive listening and full response, of total respect and generous offering, all expressed first in existence before it is expressed in words (cf. *supra*). Obviously it takes place and develops in various stages, progressing from a "thaw" in relations to sympathy, deepening mutual knowledge and working together for common purposes and objectives. Of these last many practical questions which necessarily arise in the social and international fields can be usefully raised and solved by common agreement through dialogue. The journey that is beginning will be a long one to embrace exchange and constant interaction with a clear awareness of reciprocity and of intercommunication (sharing).

7. If the dialogue is to go forward in sincerity, it must also proceed with self-discipline on both sides. There must be no temptation to exclusivism, imperialism or self-sufficiency. On the other hand also necessary are faithfulness and commitment in one's personal religious search, avoiding any form of relativism and syncretism which would try artificially to join together irreconcilable elements. When the spiritual identity of the self and of the other has been guaranteed, mutual esteem and respect are required (also on the theological level) and a conviction that all growth and improvement in the spiritual field will come about with some contribution from the other party. It can quite often happen in this process that dialogue with the other party helps one to discover new dimensions and values in one's own faith and that above all one learns to live one's faith in humility and docility of spirit, by seeing the "treasures God has distributed among men" (*Ad Gentes* 11).

8. One final difficult problem is that raised by Paul VI in his opening speech to the Synod of Bishops (29th September 1974): "How to reconcile respect for individuals and civilisations and sin-



**care dialogue with them... with the universality of the mission entrusted by Christ to the Church."** On this point it is existence and experience which may be able to tell us something and help produce a sincere and realistic answer. In principle the Gospel message in no way aims to destroy anything which is properly valid in the religious experience of men of all faiths. It is portrayed in various images in the Bible, as for example that of grafting. Seen in this way it does not alienate or depersonalise, it brings a new dimension which restructures all that went before. Moreover it demands of Christians openness to conversion and change, while it provides a warning that it is difficult to foresee in what way peaceful encounters and separations and reshaping without triumphalism can take place, except in awareness that "He who wishes to save his life will lose it — and he who loses it will save it" (cf. Mark 8,35).

9. In their turn, the central insights of other religious faiths can enrich the Christian, as they offer him possibilities of expression and encourage the development of hitherto latent strengths and potentialities. But these possibilities are all the greater in contacts with the Hebrew tradition, with the treasures of its exegesis, liturgy, mysticism and religious and philosophical thinking.

10. If this is true of other religions in relation to Christians, it is all the more so of the Jewish religion to which Christians are and must remain bound by so many unbreakable bonds. For this reason amongst all others, dialogue with Judaism is and remains for Christians a remarkable model. This means that with dialogue Christians are embarking on a new attitude, a substantial element of which consists in being ready and able to listen to Jews who want to talk about themselves and their vision of reality; in being ready to be taught and in being willing to learn in a spirit of gratitude. This also avoids even the unintentional harm done when one tries to understand Judaism through an interpretation which projects onto it categories which are not original to it.

*(Translated from the Italian original  
after the Author's final revision)*