

Mission into the Future

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Christian Humanism Charter: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things; and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).

Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ

Quezon City, January 2011

Dreams and Mission

1. God's Dream in the Old Testament

Isaiah 2:1-5 (Isaiah 60)

Micah 4:1-5

- The dream is linked to the relationship of God with the people of Israel, to the foundation experiences that inspire the whole reflection of the O.T.: Exodus and the Return of the Exiles.
- It is a consequence of God's new commitment to humanity after the Fall, since the covenant made with Abraham. God blesses Abraham and all the nations of the earth in Abraham. "You are to be a blessing. I shall bless those who bless you and I shall curse those who curse you. And all clans on earth will bless themselves by you." (*Genesis 12:2-3*)
- "Abraham put his faith in Yahweh and this was reckoned to him as uprightness (justice)" (*Genesis 15:6*). The sacrifice of Isaac is the test of Abraham's faithfulness. "I will swear by my own self, Yahweh declares, that because you have done this, because you have not refused me your own beloved son, I will shower blessings on you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. All nations on earth will bless themselves by your descendants because you have obeyed my command." (*Genesis 22:15-18*) .
- (*Gen 18:18; 26:4; 28:14*); *Sirach 44:21* "The Lord promised him (Abraham) on oath, to bless the nations through his descendants"

The dream is described in Jeremiah and Ezekiel like a New Covenant:

-Jeremiah 31:1-14 (Restoration of Jerusalem)

31-34

-Ezekiel 11:14-21 (a heart of flesh)

“ 37:1-14 (the vision of the bones)

2. God's Dream in the New Testament

Dream of peace and unity and intimacy with God since the Incarnation: (especially Luke's Gospel)

The Song of the Angels at Jesus' birth: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace for those He favors." (*Luke 2:14*). This most beautiful statement is already foreseen and described in the two Canticles that precede Jesus' birth.

The Magnificat:

"God's faithful love extends age after age to those who fear Him"
(*Luke 1:50*)

The Benedictus:

"Because of the faithful love of our God in which the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of Peace" (*Luke 1:78-79*).

The dream becomes true in Jesus in the reflection of faith of the early church: Christological Hymns- the blessing of Abraham becomes the blessing of Jesus.

Ephesians 1:3-14: God's plan of salvation: In Jesus the blessing of Abraham is extended to all peoples. The mystery hidden since the foundation of the world and now revealed in Jesus is the call of the Pagans to share Israel's blessings in Jesus Christ.

Life

Holiness

Unity

Peace

Col 1:15-20 "Because God wanted all fullness to be found in Him and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through His death on the cross" (19-20)

The blessing becomes the realization of the **Destiny of HUMANITY** which is **SALVATION**=Life with God (PRE-DESTINATION: not blind fate but the will of a loving God).

The universal salvific will of God:

1 Timothy 2:1-8 “God our Savior wants everyone to be loved and reach full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and there is only one Mediator between God and Humanity, Himself a human being, Christ Jesus, who offered himself as a ransom for all. He is the evidence (witness) given at the appointed time...”

Roman 8:28-30 “We are well aware that God works with those who love Him, those who have been called in accordance with His purpose, and turns everything to their good. He decides beforehand who were the ones destined to be molded into the pattern of His Son, so that He should be the oldest of many brothers; it was those so destined that he calls; those that he called he justified and those that he had justified he has brought into glory.”

-CHOICE

-VOCATION Faith —————→

-JUSTIFICATION Baptism —————→

-GLORIFICATION

The dream is the Heavenly Jerusalem:

Hebrews 12:18-29

“What you have come to is Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem...”

Revelation 21: the Heavenly Jerusalem like a bride prepared for her husband.

Jesus’ Dream: John 17- Jesus’ priestly prayer: the vulnerability of Love ((Jesus prays for unity, yet we Christians are so divided... Jesus doesn’t force us into unity, but loves us into unity. He accepts the vulnerability of love...))

Mission: GOSPEL WITHOUT BORDERS: The Dream continues

“The nations will come to its light” (Rev. 21:24) By its (of the Lamb) light shall the nations walk of the Heavenly Jerusalem whose light is the LAMB (*Benedict XVI*).

1. **Commission**, charge, duty to proclaim the Gospel-

“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel”

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel”

- to proclaim the Gospel is the greatest service that the church can render to Humanity. (EN)
- “It is necessary to renew our commitment to proclaiming the Gospel which is the leaven of freedom and progress, brotherhood, unity and peace”

2. **CHRIST is the best gift** the Church can give to the world / to Asia

The Blessed Humanity of Jesus:

- Sacrament of our salvation
- place of the encounter between God and Humanity
- model of Human perfection
- object of love and contemplation

CHRIST, Alfa and Omega (Gs 45):

“The Lord is the goal of human history. (“Omega point”, Teilhard de Chardin). The focal point of the desires of History and Civilization, the center of Mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations. “ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (*Rev 22:12-13*). “Yesterday, today and forever Jesus Christ is the same” (*Hebrews 13:8*).

3. **The Sign of Martyrdom**

Persecution of Christians is very much a present day reality in India, Middle East, Pakistan and other countries of the world. We are living in a violent time. Statistics tell us that an average of one missionary priest or religious is killed every week. Great martyrs of our time: Blessed John Paul II whose life was attempted by a Muslim assassin in St. Peter Square in 1981, something which had never happened in the previous history of the Church, and Bishop Oscar Romero, shot dead during the celebration of the Mass in El Salvador.

4. **The Way of Dialogue:** In October 1986, Pope John Paul II called all religions to Assisi to pray for peace. It was a prophetic gesture that prepared the commitment of the Catholic Church to dialogue and peaceful co-existence in the context of our present day pluralistic world. All the same, the commission remains to preach the name of Jesus as the Savior of all.

MISSION INTO THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

- 1.** For missionary groups and individuals whose *raison d'être* (the reason for existence) and charism are mission *ad gentes* and evangelization, to try to outline the contours of tomorrow's mission, its horizons and objectives, the challenges that come to it from Vatican II and globalization, is a task that cannot possibly be avoided.
- 2.** The ways of Mission have been many and various throughout the centuries. We have reached a time when a **paradigm shift** is necessary so that mission may respond to the changed circumstances of our time (Cfr. "*Transforming Mission*" by David J. Bosch).
- 3.** This is the purpose of the efforts, labors and striving of all who try to understand what Mission is in the present time and especially what it will be in the future. Mission has not reached its end line; it only means that we must find a new way of living it. To continue stubbornly on the old way, making appeal to "old times" generosity, looks like some "aggressive therapy" that increases frustration and crisis instead of overcoming them.
- 4.** Mission is not something that you decide simply at intellectual or rational level: it is a gift and a call. We are not sure of the orientation that the mission will take in the future. As the experience of centuries teaches us, the path of mission will be understood only by going through it.
- 5.** Mission is always a faith option to walk with Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the only way to life. To understand Mission will always be to fix our eyes in Jesus and His sacrificial love for humanity.
- 6.** The paths of Mission are always old and always new. The wealth of missionary tradition is for us the present day experience of hundred of confreres and con-sisters who are enduring life and missionary service with the poorest of the poor or in situation of danger and persecution.

ENLIGHTENING PRINCIPLES

We may find some food for thought and reflection in the following captions from the Bible and the Magisterium, especially RM:

MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

- “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Co 9:16)
- “I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16)
- “The mission of the Church is only beginning” (John Paul II)
- “The missionary thrust belongs to the very nature of Christian life. There is a new awareness that missionary activity is a matter for all Christians”.
- “Faith is strengthened when it is given to others”.
- “Missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive”.
- “Missionary evangelization is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity”.
- “Jesus Christ is the best gift that the Church can give to Asia and to the world”.

PROCLAMATION AND DIALOGUE

- “God our Savior wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).
- “The Holy Spirit is the principle agent of Mission”.
- “We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God”.
- “The Spirit presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions”.
- “Every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart”.
- “Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church”.
- “Dialogue is based on hope and will bear fruit in the Spirit”.
- “Our times are both momentous and fascinating”.

PARADIGM SHIFT

1. The “**paradigm shift**” represents a transformation, a change. It does not represent something absolutely new but a new way of expressing the eternal mission. It can be compared to the changes that happen in a living being: e.g. the adolescent or the adult is different from the child but it is the same person.
2. An important but rather exterior change is the cessation of the IUS COMMISSIONIS and the emerging of the LOCAL CHURCHES and **their missionary responsibility**. The missionary call regards all the baptized.
3. A deeper change is that **the mission of the Church is seen within the mission of God (MISSIO DEI), the mission of the Trinity**. This brings a **more positive approach** to the problem of salvation. From EXTRA ECLESIA NULLA SALUS to the UNIVERSAL SALVIFIC WILL OF GOD.
4. **The proclamation of Jesus**, the Savior of all, is necessary and essential, first by the example of life, then by the preaching of the Gospel and the planting of the Church. A beautiful perspective is Jesus, the revelation of God’s love for the victims of the world, joining them through his paschal sacrifice and so redeeming them.
5. The most fruitful principle is the MISSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT who is present in the non-Christian traditions and religions, before the arrival of the missionary: *the soil that you tread is holy ground*.
6. **Simple Inculturation Statement:**
 - Jesus approves and blesses whatever is good in us and in our culture;
 - Jesus rejects and condemns whatever is bad in us and in our culture;
 - Jesus gives us the fullness of life.

Reference sources: The Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium* (13-17); *Gaudium et Spes* (10, 15, 22); *Ad Gentes* (2-9). Other documents: 1990, *Redemptoris Missio* (21-30); 1999, *Ecclesia in Asia* (10); 2000, *Dominus Jesus*.

THE MISSION OF THE SPIRIT

(THE SPIRIT IS THE PROTAGONIST OF MISSION)

Jesus and the Spirit

The Lord Jesus is alive and present in all the most diverse situations of time and space by means of the Holy Spirit. Full of the Spirit, the risen Jesus gives the Spirit to all flesh and presents himself alive and life giving to all human generations in the same Spirit.

The abysmal gap of centuries that separates us from the story of the Son in the flesh is bridged thanks to the action of the Paraclete, the Consoler. In the Spirit Jesus takes possession nowadays of the hearts that open themselves to him both in the listening to the Word and in the participation to the sacraments, and more generally in the acceptance of the mystery of life and death and in the experience of charity, solidarity and justice.

The Holy Spirit is the powerful memory of Christ, the Lord who gives life, because it makes present here and now the Living Christ beyond all social, racial, cultural and religious barriers.

Recognizing the mission of the Spirit

It becomes therefore necessary to ask ourselves if and in what measure our ecclesial communities are able to live out, within themselves and in their respectful and friendly relationship with other groupings, **the profound communion** that unites them in the one Lord and the one Spirit, welcoming one another mutually in charity.

In no lesser degree, there emerges the urgency of asking ourselves if and how they **recognize the diversity of the gifts** of the Spirit not only within themselves and in the wider community of the Church, but also in the ordinary life of so many men and women who are temple of the Spirit, sometimes even beyond their consciousness or awareness of it.

In one word, we must **recognize the Spirit** who blows wherever he wishes, **wherever he may blow**, without rigidity or set attitudes, without prejudices or forcing, without closing ourselves in by making an absolute of our belonging to the body of the Catholic Church. "Where the Spirit is there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17).

The Spirit is there and is at work everywhere; he was there and at work before us, he operates more than us and better than us.

Carlo Maria Martini

THE TRUE MISSIONARY IS THE SAINT

2 Cor 3:18 4:1-6

“And we with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all **grow brighter and brighter** as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit. Since we have by an act of mercy been entrusted with this work of administration, there is no weakening on our part. On the contrary, we will have none of the reticence of those who are ashamed, no deceitfulness or watering down the Word of God; but the way we commend ourselves to every human being with a conscience is by stating the truth openly in the sight of God...For it not ourselves that we are preaching, but Christ Jesus as the Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. It is the same God that said, ‘Let there be light shining out of darkness’, who **has shone in our minds to radiate the light of the knowledge of God’s glory, the glory on the face of Christ**”.

In order to shine like Jesus **the missionary** must be:

- a contemplative;
- a person of the Beatitudes;
- a witness of joy and hope.

(See RM, 87-91: Missionary Spirituality)

HINTS FOR CONTEMPLATION AND PRAYER

1. The universal salvific will of God: A truth which should be dear to missionaries:

1 Tim 2: 1-8
Acts 10: 34-35

- This is “*Predestination*”:
 - Rom 8: 28-39
- This is the “*Original Blessing*”:
 - Eph. 1: 3-14

2. The Lord Jesus’ amazing openness to recognize the gifts of the pagans:

- ### ***3. Paschal Mission: Mission as com-compassion of God for the world:***

- Heb 10: 4-24
- Heb 12: 1-4

All human life has a paschal configuration: its pattern continually moves through death to a renewed life. Paschal dimensions are characteristic of all life situations: they describe the reality of human brokenness and suffering. Especially they describe the reality of the victims of our society. ***“We must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery” (GS 22).*** Christian faith is a Paschal faith. Christian life requires a continual conversion to paschality: to the mystery of the crucified and risen Jesus. We need a “crucified mind” not a “crusading mind”. The Church must be a caring community of compassion. To live is to be missionary. Missionaries witness the passion of God for Humanity., especially his com-*passion* for the victims with whom the crucified Lord identifies. CRUX PROBAT OMNIA: the Cross is the *litmus paper* of everything.

4. The Holy Friday Icon: the Unveiling of the Cross.

It is as if Christ's sacrifice were discovered afresh by the faithful and with Jesus Christ, the innocent victims of human, political, religious violence... Progressive unveiling and then the procession to adore the Cross, to kiss the Crucified Jesus, and in/with him all the victims... In touching Jesus' wounds, it is the whole body of Christ made up by the victims, the marginalized, the excluded that is recognized and honored. From Jesus' lips goes up the invocation of forgiveness even for the executioners and this points to the reality of the resurrection when every tear will be wiped away.

- Luke 22: 39-46
- Matthew 27: 45-56

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PASCHAL MISSION:

MISSION AS COM-PASSION OF GOD FOR THE WORLD, HUMANITY:

The Priesthood of Christ

Introduction

The Greatest Christian Mystery or the most important truth of our Christian faith is THE INCARNATION.

The incarnation is the person of Jesus Christ, God and Man, and his mystery, his story: life, death and resurrection.

The Blessed Humanity of Jesus is the object of our contemplation. The Sacred Heart is the center of this Blessed Humanity: it represents and focuses on the human love of Jesus in the moment of his supreme sacrifice.

Jesus' redeeming work is described in the New Testament with 3 main categories:

- **Salvation**: it points to life;
- **Redemption**: it points to Freedom (**Liberation** is another word for redemption);
- **Mediation**: it points to Unity between Humanity and God and it introduces the category of Priesthood: Jesus Christ is the Mediator/the High Priest of the New Testament.

This is the object of our reflection, a biblical reflection: The Priesthood of Christ.

The fact of the Pascal Mystery: the death and resurrection of Jesus is the object of theological reflection in order to understand its meaning and its connection with our life (*Fides quaerens intellectum*). The theological category of priesthood is used by the author of the letter to the Hebrews since the time of the first generation of Christians: remarkable and impressive. It is deep theology, sound reflection generating surprise, wonder, awe, love, adoration, imitation.

1. THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST: MEDIATION OF LOVE

The term “mediator” appears 4 times in the New testament: 3 times in Hebrews (8:6; 9:15; 12: 24), one time in 1 Timothy 2:1-8.

MEDIATION is the best term to describe or define the mission of the Priest: to bridge the infinite gap between God and Humanity.

-This is how the letter to the *Hebrews* describes the Priesthood of Christ: the whole letter is a demonstration of the superiority of the worship, the sanctuary and the mediation of Christ, the supreme high priest of the New Testament:

“We have seen that he (Christ) has been given a ministry of a far higher order, and to the same degree it is a better covenant of which he is the MEDIATOR, founded on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6).

-This is how the same concept is neatly summarized and clearly expressed by the *Magisterium*:

“Jesus Christ has revealed in himself the perfect and definitive features of the priesthood of the new Covenant. He did this throughout his earthly life, but especially in the central event of his passion, Death and Resurrection.

As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes, Jesus, being a man like us and at the same time the only begotten Son of God, is in his very being **the perfect mediator between the Father and Humanity** (Cf. Heb 8-9)”.

“The priesthood of Christ, the expression of his absolute “newness” in salvation history, constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all Christian and the priest in particular. Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of priesthood”.

PDV 12, 13

Technically Christ is the one and only true mediator: he is true man and true God, Col 2:9, and so the one and only intermediary, Rom 5:15-19; 1Tim 2:5; cf. 1 Co 3:22-23; 11:3, between God and the human race. He unites them and reconciles them, 2 Co 5:14-20. Through him come grace, Jo 1:16-17; Ep 1:7, and complete revelation, Heb 1:1-2. In heaven he continues to intercede for those who are faithful to him, 7:25.

Mediation describes the essence of the mission of the Priesthood and Priesthood on its turn embraces all the other theological categories that we find in the New Testament to describe Jesus Christ’s work and mission: Salvation/Redemption/Liberation.

It is the very purpose of these reflections to elaborate on the meaning of this mediation to which Jesus associate us, his Church, the priestly people, and to see what it means in terms of spirituality: how we live up to the expectations of our priestly spirituality.

2. THE FORMS OF CHRIST'S LOVING MEDIATION:

Mediation of life: Phil. 2:6-11

"In your mind you must be the same as Christ Jesus: His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Mediation of sacrifice: Hebrews 10: 4-21

"Bull's blood and goats' blood are useless for taking away sins, and this is what he said, on coming into the world: *You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me. You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin; then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, 'God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will.'*

Notice that he says first: You did not want the Law lays down as the things to be offered, that is: the sacrifices, the oblation, the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin, and you took no pleasure in them; and then he says: Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. He is abolishing the first sort to replace it with the second. And this *will* was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ...

In other words, brothers, through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary, by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body. And we have the supreme high priest over all the house of God. So as we go in let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith, our minds sprinkled and free from any trace of bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us keep firm in the hope we profess, because the one who made the promise is faithful. Let us be concerned for each other to stir a response in love and good works. Do not stay away from the meetings of the community, as some do, but encourage each other to go; the more so as you see the Day drawing near".

Mediation of Intercession: Hebrews 7:23-28

"The former priest were many in number, because they were preventing by death from continuing in office; but Christ holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since **he always lives to make intercession for them.** For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. He has no need like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once and for all when he offered up himself. Indeed, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever"

The intercession that Jesus offers now, sitting at the right hand of the father in heaven, he had already started during his earthly life as we have the beautiful example of his prayers recorded in the gospels:

Matthew 11:25-30

John 11:41-42

John 17: the priestly prayer

3. THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST AND THE EUCHARIST

Pope Benedict wrote some very beautiful reflection in this context:

The exemplary figure of Melchizedek: Genesis 14:18-20 taken up in the messianic psalm 110, becomes the type of the priesthood of the Messiah:

“The Lord has sworn an oath and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4).

Melchizedek is

- Priest of the Most High God
- King of peace
- Without genealogy
- **Offers bread and wine**
- Blesses Abraham
- Abraham pays tribute to him

“Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is the real and eternal presence of Jesus as a priest”

The Eucharist is the anticipation of Jesus Passover: his Priestly Sacrifice. Saint Paul in Hebrews 5:7-10 presents the Passion as **a prayer and an offering**:

‘In the day of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek”.

Jesus’ will is in perfect union with the will of the Father, in this way giving origin to the definition of prayer as we find is in Karl Rahner: **“Prayer is the loving acceptance of God’s loving will in our life”**. Lived in prayer, the tragic destiny that Jesus faces is transformed into an offering, a living sacrifice. The Father heard him/listened to him

when he resurrected him and so delivered him from death. Jesus Christ is the universal mediator/mediation of salvation.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus offered himself in the last supper with the sign of the bread and wine: they are transformed because of the Holy Spirit: **it is divine love that transforms:** the love with which Jesus accept in advance to give himself completely to us.

It is the divine power, the same that brought about the incarnation of the Word, which transforms, on the cross, the extreme violence and the extreme injustice of his death into **a supreme act of love and justice.**

This is the work of the Priesthood of Christ, which the Church has inherited and continue to perpetuate in the twofold forms: that of the ordinary priesthood of the baptized and that of the ordained ministers: **to transform the world with the love of God. Mediation of love.**

The Eucharist is always with us and keeps alive in our midst the priesthood of Christ and our priesthood: TRANSFORMING EUCHARIST.

6 Transformations or 6 steps:

1. Jesus transform his body into a gift: mature love (“This is my body which is given for you...);
2. Jesus transform violence into an act of love “sacrifice”;
3. Jesus transform death into life: Resurrection;
4. Jesus transform the bread and wine into his body and blood (Eucharist);
5. Jesus transform the communicants into himself: You are the body of Christ;
6. Through the priestly vocation and mission or commitment of his followers who have become like him, Jesus transforms the world into a house of peace, the dwelling place of God.

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PASCHAL MISSION: OUR BAPTISMAL PRIESTHOOD

§ We are a priestly people because Christ associates us to his priesthood. Our mediation with Jesus is, first of all, a **mediation of life**. The universal vocation to holiness finds its place in this priestly perspective. Then there is the **mediation of witness** by which we are a prophetic people. The missionary mandate flows from our being a prophetic people. Hence there comes the universal responsibility for the spreading of the Gospel.

Lastly, there is the **mediation of the secular character of our Christian vocation** (*Secularity*). By this we fulfill our call to be a kingly people and it is expressed by the universal task to bring all created realities (economy, arts, politics, etc...) to God. The prophetic and kingly dimensions are like subordinate functions of the priestly nature of the people of God.

§ “**All human life has a paschal configuration:** its pattern continually moves through death to a renewed life. Paschal dimensions are characteristic of all life situations: they describe the reality of human brokenness and suffering. Especially they describe the reality of the victims of our society.

“We must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery” (GS 22).

Christian faith is a Paschal faith. Christian life requires a continual conversion to paschality: to the mystery of the crucified and risen Jesus. We need a “crucified mind” not a “crusading mind”. The Church must be a caring community of compassion.

To live is to be missionary. Missionaries witness the passion of God for Humanity.,
especially his com-*passion* for the victims with whom the crucified Lord identifies.

CRUX PROBAT OMNIA: the Cross tests everything, is the *litmus paper* of everything”. (Fr James M. Kroeger, MM).

[illegible]

MARY'S MISSION

MARY, THE EXPECTANT MOTHER, THE VIRGIN OF OUR WAITING

PRAYER

MOTHER, YOU KNOW THE ANXIETY AND BEAUTY
OF WAITING AND EXPECTATION.
YOU HAVE WAITED FOR THE BIRTH OF THE SON OF GOD
WHO CHOSE YOU AS THE CRADLE OF HIS MYSTERY.
YOU FELT THE BEATING OF HIS DIVINE AND HUMAN HEART
AND YOU HAVE WAITED WITH EXPECTATION
FOR THE JOY OF SEEING HIS FACE.
YOU ARE NOW WAITING FOR US:
YOU ARE THE EXPECTANT MOTHER, THE VIRGIN OF OUR WAITING.
PLEASE, PUT OIL IN OUR WEAK LAMPS;
TEACH US TO WAIT PATIENTLY FOR JESUS' BIRTH WITHIN US,
AND TEACH US TO WAIT JOYOUSLY FOR JESUS' RETURN,
TO WAIT FAITHFULLY, TO WAIT SINGLE MINDEDLY EVERY DAY.
MARANA THA! COME, LORD JESUS!
THE CHURCH PLEADS YOU: COME, LORD JESUS!
WITH MARY WE PRAY: COME, LORD JESUS!

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“THERE IS NOTHING MORE POWERFUL ON EARTH THAN PURITY AND PRAYER” (Teilhard de Chardin)

Before we contemplate Mary being a mother at Christmas, we may fix our attention in the very being of Mary as the person who is integrated in the Advent of the Lord, because of her Immaculate Conception (God’s part: GRATIA PLENA – full of grace) and her Virginity (her faith and total availability). She conceived Jesus in her heart before conceiving Jesus in her womb. She was Jesus’ disciple before being Jesus’ mother (St. Augustine).

The key biblical passage is the Annunciation: Luke 1:26-38. The feelings, sentiments, the attitudes of Mama Mary in the last months of her pregnancy.

INTRODUCTION

The most important person/biblical character that we find in the Advent period who can inspire us with the right and vital attitudes and dispositions in order to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord at Christmas is THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

We meet her in the liturgy of Advent first as the Immaculate Conception, then as the expectant, pregnant mother of Jesus:

The Immaculate Conception

The Miraculous Conception

These two moments in Mary’s life are bearers of spiritual dispositions/attitudes that find their link in the truth (dogma) of the VIRGINITY of Mary: SEMPER VERGIN, always virgin, perpetual virginity, before Jesus’ birth, during and after. Let us remember, in this context, Teilhard de Chardin’s frase: “There is nothing more powerful on earth than purity and prayer”.

MARY’S ADVENT

The fruits of our contemplation of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and of the expectant mother in her last month of pregnancy are:

1. **The spirit of Advent:** waiting for the Lord/longing for the Lord/making room for the Lord/Growing awareness that we are in the Lord-with the Lord/That we

belong to the Lord: so we must own this presence of the Lord in our life in faith and radical commitment.

2. **CONSECRATION:** our religious consecration in its radicality, the Vows, especially the vow of Chastity: to belong to the Lord completely: loving the Lord God as Jesus did with single mindedness and undivided heart.

A. The Immaculate Conception speaks of God's initiative of Love towards Mary: AVE MARIA, GRATIA PLENA. **It is a celebration of life:** Mary comes into the world not only blessed with the gift of life, but with the fullness of God's life: Grace, without experiencing the wound of sin. This gift is a blessing for all. In Mary is pre-figured the destiny of all of us in the blessing which originates in God's universal will of salvation, redemption and sanctification.(Missionary resonance of the Immaculate Conception).

B. **Contemplating the love of God for Mary**, we must contemplate and relish God's love for us. Our consecration, our belonging to God (especially through the Vow of Chastity) is grace. It must become JOY.

- My life is marked by the coming of God: Isaiah 43:1-7
- Mary's heart fulfils all the promises of God about a new humanity: Ezekiel 11:16-21; Jeremiah 31:31-34
- We are sealed by God: Song of Songs 8:6-7

C. **VIRGINITY:** Mary's virginity is her response to the fact of belonging completely to God: it is virginity of the heart first and foremost: longing for God to take possession ever more of her being. Virginity in this sense entails:

- **Existential poverty:** we are transient like the grass (Ps 90);
- **Total inadequacy** to the infinite gift of God: grace;
- **Complete availability**/Total surrender/Freedom to accept and to obey God's will: Isaiah 6:1-9 ("Here I am, Lord, send me"). Hebrews 10:4-7 ("You have given me a body..."). Romans 12:1-2 ("Offer your body as spiritual sacrifice").

D. CONSEQUENCE for our Consecration: the joy of living, loving and caring is witnessed by a consecrated person: this is the impression I have gathered many times from the life and example of many Comboni confreres and sisters.

This experience of consecration becomes an experience of compassion, tenderness, joy and wonderment: contemplation!

This life of consecration/Contemplation is a life of self-giving/Going out of oneself (*Ecstasy*). It implies the cross (“Love until it hurts”; “Love until it hurts no more”). “FOR THEIR SAKE I CONSECRATE MYSELF...”(John 17).

By giving back in love the life we have experienced and perceived as a gift, joy and blessing, we are consecrated i.e. we are joined/grafted/united to Jesus, to his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. Through the Vows of Chastity, poverty and obedience, we give back our life to God in love so that, because of him, it may be **a blessing and a joy for others**, especially the little ones.

As the beautiful life of Mary, received from the Father’s love and preserved immaculate in view of Jesus’ Paschal Mystery, for her to accomplish her destiny of divine motherhood, in the same way, our consecration, which is **the conscience of belonging to God as his exclusive possession**, SEALS our heart and our life for the service of Mission: cf. Song of Songs 8:6-7.

Beautiful commentary by John Paul II in *Redemptionis Donum*, n.8: “May the knowledge of belonging to God himself in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world and Spouse of the Church, SEAL YOUR HEART, all your thoughts, words and deeds, with the sign of the biblical spouse. As you know, this intimate and profound knowledge of Christ is actuated and grows deeper day by day through the life of personal prayer, community and liturgical prayer proper to each of your religious families. **In this too, and especially so, the men and women religious who are dedicated essentially to contemplation are a powerful aid and a stimulating support for their brothers and sisters devoted to the work of the apostolate.**

May this knowledge of belonging to Christ OPEN YOUR HEART, thoughts and deeds, with the key of the mystery of the Redemption, to all the sufferings, needs and hopes of individuals and of the world...You take part, in the most complete and radical way possible, in the shaping of that “new Creation” which must emerge from the redemption of the world by means of the power of the Spirit of truth operating from the abundance of the Pascal Mystery of Christ”.

3. IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND TENDERNESS (COMPASSION)

The fact of Consecration and the Vow of Chastity lived without compromise, should not make us hard or cold, insensitive, indifferent but the opposite: benevolent, caring, compassionate, humane, kind, warm and tender-hearted, vulnerable and affectionate. This is not simply a human quality, but **a gift of the Spirit born by faith and to be asked in prayer.**

We have gathered it from our meditation upon the mystery of life and Consecrated Life: love repaid with love, gratuity with radicality. We have perfected it by our experience of communion: a love received, appreciated, longed for, searched for, cherished, enjoyed, believed, possessed, reciprocated.

It is the experience of our maturity in living our Consecration: the experience of compassion and of our vulnerability: Virginity of the heart is also silence, loneliness and standing alone in faith:

- Experiencing our vulnerability and bearing it in faith;
- Seeing our fragility and relying on God’ Strength;
- Persevering in the moments of silence and apparent absence of God.

This can happen in three instances:

- When we become aware that what we have given up will no longer be there, will never be there: a person or persons, a home/house, a career. It will never be there. **Our poverty will always be with us.** This is the consistence of renunciation, the unending poverty, the long loneliness. When we experience this emptiness, then is **the moment to surrender** to

Jesus and renew our Vows. “*Nada te turbe, nada te espante. /Quien a Dios tiene nada le falta/Nada te turbe nada te espante/Solo Dios basta*” (St. Teresa de Avila). Accept in the Lord. Let surrender in pure faith generate peace, tolerance, wisdom, tenderness. “Don’t bother me, I carry in my body the wounds of Jesus” (Galatians 6:17).

- When we break down, we fall, we experience rebellion, fragility, the weight of evil, sin. But Grace is given to sinners. God carries us in his arms. He can make us new. There is **true virginity in accepting forgiveness** and being new again. Tenderness of heart wipes away despondency, despair, withdrawing within ourselves, anger, rejection, self-pity, regret...
- When we experience loneliness, silence and the apparent inutility of our efforts...The mystery of Jesus’ burial...The solitude of the long distance runner...The solitude of the Pope who stands for the moral principles in the midst of the general sell-out of values for money in the mass media...The mystique of John the Baptist: “He must grow greater, I have to grow smaller” and “The bride belongs to the bridegroom”. **Tenderness: love experienced as compassion...**Mama Mary at the tomb, holding the body of Jesus (LA PIETA’).

EROS AND AGAPE IN MARY

Eros is the power of the feeling of love and affection/ it is proper of the human beings/ it anthropomorphizes the love of God (when applied to God, as we see in the Bible).

Agape is descending love, it prevails on the relationship of a mother to her son/daughter; it is more *amor benevolentiae* than *amor concupiscentiae*.

In Mary, *agape* prevails over *eros*.

In Mary the love takes the two aspects in her relationship with God the Father and with Jesus:

1. **Mary’s relationship with God the Father:** it takes after Jesus’ love for the Father especially as seen in the Gospel of John. It assumes the following characteristics:

THE VOWS AND MISSION

- The evangelical counsels or imperatives are *conditions that Jesus puts* to those who want to be in his following or *sequela*.
- The vows by which we radically fulfill the evangelical imperatives are great means by which **we absorb Jesus' way of being and acting**. They are ways of living closer to Jesus' way of life.
- The vows are **radical sequela Christi** because they are the renunciation of realities that are good and we are naturally entitled to : to possess what is necessary for our life and is legitimately acquired, to form a family and to pursue a career. It is Jesus' radical commitment to love that the religious want to imitate.
- Jesus chose not to marry and he praised the eunuchs for the Kingdom of God. He loved single mindedly and with undivided heart his Father and us, his brethren.
- Jesus emptied himself in order to share our condition and chose to be poor to make us rich.
- Jesus came to accomplish the father's will: his food and his drink was to do the will of his Father. This will was for Jesus to save us from everlasting death, to redeem us from the slavery of sin and to unite us with God, sharing God's life as adopted sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus and temple of the Holy Spirit.
- **Jesus' example is the only real reason of the existence of Religious Life.**
- The vows represent a radical way of love at the service of Jesus' mission entrusted to the Church: **the vows have a great missionary and apostolic meaning**. The whole Church history testifies to the link between Religious Consecration and Mission.

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POVERTY

Poverty is the door to consecration and mission This is why Saint Francis of Assisi took “Lady Poverty” as his lover/wife.

Poverty proclaims that God is our only treasure. Poverty states that being is more important than having, people are more important than things and whatever we have is not ours.

Our vow of Poverty is availability to love.

Poverty means to want less and to thank more.

We must learn how to love people and to use things, not to use people and to love things.

Poverty means simplicity, hospitality and accountability.

Poverty means open-ended love and open-hearted sharing.

The greatest good that I give up with my vow of poverty is time.

AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE OF THE VOW OF POVERTY

1. By my vow of poverty, am I happy to share my talents, my time and my service with those who are poor and are entrusted to my care or do I do it grudgingly and negligently?
2. Do I appreciate the occasions of formation, education and growth which are given to me by the community? Am I happy with what is provided by the community in terms of food, clothing or comfort or do I easily complain?
3. Do I try to share my inner life and values with people, especially my religious family? Do I accept in faith the vulnerability of sincerity and in-depth sharing?
4. Do I affirm the giftedness of my confreres with joy or am I sad and jealous of their success? Do I know how to support and encourage them?
5. Am I generous in judging the needs of my confreres or am I inclined to be mean? Am I over-indulgent with myself?
6. Am I ready to do the little services required by the community or would I normally prefer to let the others come forward? Do I hide in time of need?
7. Am I accurate in the practice of my poverty: asking permission, giving accounts, caring for the things of the community?

CHASTITY

It is more precisely called **Vow of Celibacy**: we vow not to marry for the sake of God and his kingdom in order to be single minded in loving God and neighbor and to love with undivided heart.

The vow of chastity is Jesus' way of loving/to love as Jesus loved.

Sexuality: my condition as a consequence of my sex: masculinity or femininity. My sexuality is a source of positive energy and it is wanted by God, sacred. **Chastity** is the virtue by which I use my sexuality according to God's plan and the circumstances of my life. There is the chastity of married people, single, widows/widower, friends, religious, etc...

Love is to see and contribute/make the goodness and beauty of another person/or persons. The **stages of love** are:

- Attraction: the emotional, sentimental, romantic side of love;
- Commitment: the decision of the will expressed in front of the community;
- The cross of Jesus: Love until it hurts and love until it hurts no more;
- Time: faithfulness/perseverance until the end/death.

AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE ON THE VOW OF CHASTITY

1. By my vow of chastity, am I really free to love? Do I really love, care and trust, and remain open and considerate in every situation towards my brothers in the community and the people I serve?
2. Am I open to friendship and faithful to my friends, or do I have excessive expectations and neglect the ordinary, day-to-day occasion of friendship?
3. Am I free to move to new places, new works, because I have no unbreakable link with anything or anyone but Jesus? Or do I get involved in exclusive relationships or allow others than Jesus to monopolize my heart? Am I compromising with my vow of chastity?
4. Is my heart full and at peace? Am I able to stay alone, to study and pray or am I a compulsive socializer? Do I find interest and joy in the things of God (e.g. in thinking about God, his Word, the life of the Church, people coming to God...), in prayer and in my commitment towards holiness?
5. Do I speak positively of the people I meet in my apostolate with the members of my community or do I usually criticize them, stressing their defects and shortcoming? Do I indulge in gossip about my fellow confreres or about the people entrusted to my pastoral care?
6. Am I excessively preoccupied with myself, my health, my appearance?

7. Am I able to speak about my chastity (the way I live it out and my difficulties about it) to some members of my community and to my Spiritual Director? Am I aware of what is going on in me about it?

OBEDIENCE

Obedience tells us that the passion of love by which God gave life to the world is to be welcomed and shared.

Obedience comes from the conviction that Jesus is present in human history and makes it history of salvation.

Jesus came to accomplish the Father's will: his food and drink was to do the will of the Father.

Obedience to the Father's will for Jesus is the way he saved the world.

Obedience is the content/object of our love.

Obedience is faithfulness to our charism, our identity.

We owe absolute obedience to our charism, to mission and religiously motivated cooperation to those with whom we live out our mission: our superiors and our confreres.

The mystique of the monk who leaves everything to look for God, in the modern, "apostolic" form of religious life, become the mystique of the missionary who becomes the "hidden stone" in the great building of the universal Church.

AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE ON MY VOW OF OBEDIENCE

1. By my vow of obedience, do I experience freedom to respond in service to the demands of my religious family and happiness in the task entrusted to me? Am I usually enjoying peace of mind or am I restless, unsatisfied, frustrated, gloomy?
2. Do I confuse obedience with conformity? Am I happy in just keeping the law or do I really care and develop my sense of responsibility? Or am I stubborn and unable to see the common good and to cooperate for achieving it?
3. Do I identify with the work that is assigned to me; does it awake my interest? Do I like what I do or am I usually preoccupied with myself and my welfare?

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MISSION INTO THE FUTURE (1)

INTRODUCTION

- The ways of Mission have been many and various throughout the centuries.
- We have reached a time when a **paradigm shift** is necessary so that mission may respond to the changed circumstances of our time
- The paths of Mission are always old and always new.
- The wealth of missionary tradition is for us the present day experience of hundred of missionaries who are enduring life and missionary service with the poorest of the poor, often in situations of danger and persecution.

ENLIGHTENING PRINCIPLES

- “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Co 9:16)
- “I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16)
- “The mission of the Church is only beginning” (John Paul II)
- “Evangelization is the primary service the Church can render to humanity”.
- “Jesus Christ is the best gift that the Church can give to Asia and the world”.

- “God our Savior wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).
- “The Holy Spirit is the principle agent of Mission”.
- “We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God” (GS 22).
- “The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions”.

- “Every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart”.
- “Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church”.
- “Dialogue is based on hope and will bear fruit in the Spirit”.
- “Our times are both momentous and fascinating”.

Reference sources: The Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium* (13-17); *Gaudium et Spes* (10, 15, 22); *Ad Gentes* (2-9). Other documents: 1990, *Redemptoris Missio* (21-30;91-93);1999, *Ecclesia in Asia* (10);2000, *Dominus Jesus*.

MISSION INTO THE FUTURE (2)

PARADIGM SHIFT

1. The **“paradigm shift”** represents a transformation, a change. It does not represent something absolutely new but a new way of expressing the eternal mission.
2. An important but rather exterior change is the cessation of the IUS COMMISSIONIS and the emerging of the LOCAL CHURCHES and **their missionary responsibility**. The missionary call regards all the baptized.
3. A deeper change is that **the mission of the Church is seen within the mission of God (MISSIO DEI), the mission of the Trinity**. This brings a **more positive approach** to the problem of salvation. From EXTRA ECLESIA NULLA SALUS (There is no salvation outside the Church) to the UNIVERSAL SALVIFIC WILL OF GOD.
4. The most fruitful principle is the MISSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT who is present in the non-Christian traditions and religions, before the arrival of the missionary: ***“the soil that you tread is holy ground”***.
5. **The proclamation of Jesus**, the Savior of all, is necessary and essential, first by our example of life, then by the preaching of the Gospel and the planting of the Church.
6. **Simple Enculturation Statement:**
 - Jesus approves and blesses whatever is good in us and in our culture;
 - Jesus rejects and condemns whatever is bad in us and in our culture;
 - Jesus gives us the fullness of life.

[illegible]

MISSION INTO THE FUTURE (3)

THE TRUE MISSIONARY IS THE SAINT

2 Cor 3:18 4:1-6

“And we with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all **grow brighter and brighter** as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit...

For it not ourselves that we are preaching, but Christ Jesus as the Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. It is the same God that said, 'Let there be light shining out of darkness', who **has shone in our minds to radiate the light of the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ**".

In order to shine like Jesus **the missionary** must be:

- a contemplative;
- a person of the Beatitudes;
- a witness of joy and hope.

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MISSION INTO THE FUTURE (4)

HINTS FOR CONTEMPLATION AND PRAYER

1. *The universal salvific will of God:* A truth which should be dear to missionaries:

1 Tim 2: 1-8

Acts 10: 34-35

This is “*Predestination*”:

- Rom 8: 28-39

This is the “*Original Blessing*”:

- Eph. 1: 3-14

2. *The Lord Jesus’ amazing openness to recognize the gifts of the pagans:*

- The centurion, Mt 8:5-13 (10-11)
- The Canaanite woman, Mt 15:21-28

3. *Paschal Mission: Mission as com-passion of God for the world:*

Jesus on the Cross is the revelation that God sides with the victims and comes to share their predicament:

- Heb 10: 4-24
- Heb 12: 1-4

All human life has a paschal configuration: its pattern continually moves through death to a renewed life. Especially it describes the reality of the victims of our society.

“We must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery” (GS 22).

We need a “crucified mind” not a “crusading mind”. The Church must be a caring community of compassion. Missionaries are the forerunners of this attitude.

4. *The Holy Friday Icon: the Unveiling of the Cross.*

Poignant is the progressive unveiling and then the procession to adore the Cross, to kiss the Crucified Jesus...In touching Jesus’ wounds, it is the whole body of Christ made up by the victims, the marginalized, the excluded that is recognized and honored.

- Luke 22: 39-46
- Matthew 27: 45-56