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IS AFRICA STILL A MISSIONARY CONTINENT?

Abstract. The concept of Mission takes three dimensions: *ad Gentes*, re-evangelization and finally the missionary activity of the Church, which the Church undertakes among her faithful members. The mission is a constitutive element in the nature and the life of the Church; the Church, devoid of her missionary character, is non-existent.

Theologically, therefore, Church and mission are complimentary, two sides of the same coin. As a consequence, then, the question to ask in today's discussion is not whether Africa is still a missionary continent because, essentially, where the Church is there is the mission of God.

The Church in Africa is missionary in two fold ways: (1) as passive recipient of the deposit of faith entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and (2) as active agent in bringing the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

There are also areas where mission in Africa is urgent: 1) The mission of Reconciling Peoples, 2) Proclamation of the Gospel to the adherents of non-Christians through dialogue, 3) Evangelization of the society (secularism, modernism as challenges today), 4) Pastoral care of the "already baptized," 5) Inculturation: "Continuous dialogue between the Christian faith and human cultures."

Summarised by Rev. Patrick Mwanja

Key words: Church in Africa; Mission; evangelization.

This is a very provocative question! It reminds me of a similar situation in which a similar question was raised some 50 years back in Europe. The French mission Theologian, Ivo Zeiger, speaks of surprisingly strong reactions by the participants of a theological congress he had been invited to attend in Germany where he had to make a daring and courageous statement that Germany has become a missionary country. One can only be able to

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understand this reaction of the German Christians if one is aware of the way mission was understood at that time before the understanding of Mission was redefined. It was a courageous and daring question because of the conception of mission at this time, it was unimaginable in this era to think of Europe as a missionary territory, because Europe was the mother Church and it was taken that Christianity has been there for so long and it would be impossible to think of Europe as target of missionary activity.

Ivo Zeiger argued that, in spite of the presence of many good practising Catholics and wonderful attendance at churches on Sunday, many of these Christians lacked conviction and were lukewarm Christians. According to his analysis, the Christians in Germany and, indeed, in many parts of Europe were living in a missionary environment, that is, they lived in a society in which Christian faith and Churches life are no longer determine the life of individual people and society as was the case earlier. Indeed any attempt to carefully provide an answer to the provocative question “Is Africa still a missionary continent” will as well require a clear and precise definition of the concept of mission today.

The word, “Mission,” in its common usage is ambiguous and therefore not easy to define. Etymologically, the word comes from the Latin verb, *mittere* (an act of being sent), and in it a twofold is expressed: First, the sending of a person by a person who has the power to send and, secondly, a specific task that the sender entrusts to the person sent. As such, mission expresses the nature of the task entrusted by the sender to the person sent, the aim of the mission itself and the receiver of mission.¹ In an attempt to capture the all-embracing definition of Mission, one can say that it is the task of announcing the Gospel of Christ to the people of all nations by making them into disciples of Christ, calling them to repentance and faith, in accordance to Christ’s command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...” (Mt 28:19–20). Christian Mission is the act of proclaiming, serving, and witnessing to God’s reign of love, salvation and justice.

Often, Mission is used as a synonym of *evangelization* understood in its broader sense) to sum up the Church’s entire calling, not only the explicit verbal proclamation. Indeed “... to evangelize does not mean simply to teach

¹ Cf. Giuseppe BUONO, *Missiology: Theology and Praxis* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2002), 55–58.

a doctrine, but to proclaim Jesus Christ by one's words and actions, that is, to make oneself an instrument of his presence and action in the world."² According to Paul VI, evangelization is

Carrying forth of the Good News to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter into the hearts of men and renew the human race... In a word, the Church may be truly said to evangelize when, solely in virtue of that news which she proclaims, she seeks to convert both the individual consciences of men and their collective consciences, all the activities in which they are engaged and finally, their lives and the whole environment which surrounds them.³

Theologically, Mission takes three major dimensions as John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, succinctly treats it. The first dimension is that of Mission *Ad Gentes* which literary means "mission to the nations". Mission *ad Gentes*, sometimes also known as "primary evangelization" refers to the Church's unceasing responsibility of communicating the Gospel to those people who have scarcely, or not yet, heard at all about Jesus Christ. It is the missionary activity directed to "peoples or groups who do not yet believe in the Gospel," those "who are far from Christ," those in whom the Church "has not taken root" and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel.⁴ It is the Church's activity of "proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building the Local Church and promoting the values of the Kingdom," an activity which is directed to "peoples, groups and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and His Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups."⁵

The second category of the missionary activity of the Church is known as re-evangelization or sometimes as the new evangelization. This is a kind of evangelizing activity which is undertaken by the Church to respond to a reality which is found particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger churches as well: entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and

² Vatican II, *Doctrinal Notes on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, No. 2.

³ PAUL VI, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 18.

⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 34.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 33.

his Gospel.⁶ In such a situation, the Church sees her role in re-evangelizing to mean re-rooting the Good News of Christ and the Gospel values in the lives of people.

Finally, there is another dimension of the missionary activity of the Church, which the Church undertakes among her faithful members. This is a kind of mission directed to Christian communities, which have been already established and have adequate and solid ecclesial structures and are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. As already established ecclesial groups, they bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission.⁷

THE CHURCH IS BY NATURE AND ESSENCE MISSIONARY

The notion of Mission and particularly mission *ad Gentes* has been a point of controversial discussion among theologians in recent years. This came about due to the paradigm shift brought about by Vatican II in the way the world outside the Church and particularly non-Christian religions are to be viewed in relation to the economy of salvation in Jesus Christ. Vatican II is regarded as a watershed in the modern mission theology today as it provided a land-mark as to what the Church is in relation to the mission of God. It was also a turning point as well in providing the Catholic Church's understanding of faith outside the Church, for it recognizes the presence of the Spirit: in the world outside the Church; it recognizes the admirable positive and precious elements in other religions; it recognizes both religious and human values in the world cultures and in other religious traditions which are true and good and which the Spirit qualifies to be regarded as "preparation for the Gospel", a gift from him who enlightens all human beings that they may finally have life.⁸

The Catholic Church rejects nothing holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and teachings, which, though differing in many ways from her teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.⁹

⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 33.

⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 33.

⁸ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, No. 16.

⁹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Nostra Aetate*, No. 1.

The Council sees the role of the Church in this regard to consist in trying in a spirit of openness and authenticity to strive to accent what is shared and valued in common and not what brings division. She should “prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness to the Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral good as well as the socio-cultural values found among them.

This pronouncement of the Vatican II that there are elements of truth in the world cultures and religious traditions outside the Christian dispensation and that adherents of other religions could experience salvation has many implications on the theology and praxis of Mission. A relevant question among some scholars in this regard has been about the validity and justification to those who have never had the opportunity to know Christ. Is mission to non-Christians, particularly among adherents of other religious traditions, still necessary and, if so, what form does it take. What should be the basic motivation and goal of mission to the nations, if the world outside Christianity is not devoid of religious experience since the Spirit of God is operational there and if non-Christian religions may be regarded as playing a significant role in the salvation of their followers? These questions among others became for mission theology and missionary congregations and societies specifically founded for the evangelisation of non-Christians not merely of academic interest but of critical importance because they touch upon the very *raison d'être* of the Church's existence and nature, which is fundamentally Mission.

Indeed in a situation of immense confusion as to what the meaning and significance of mission is; in a time when some people spoke of the “moratorium of mission”; in a time when mission was misunderstood to mean the efforts of individual missionaries and groups and the goal to be “plantation ecclesiae”; in a time when mission was taken to mean “traditional ways of foreign mission and therefore evokes pictures of clergy and nuns who have felt called to bring the gospel message to the lands far away”, Vatican Council II managed to affirm the continual validity of the missionary activity of the Church emphasizing that the Church of Christ is still a necessary visible and tangible mediation, which God uses as instrument in carrying out his plan of salvation. Despite the recognition that in ways better known to God Himself there is salvation for those living outside the Church; the council affirms the need of proclaiming the Good News of salvation especially to the people of other faiths, through the Church.

Although in ways known to himself God can lead those, who through no faults of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (*cf.* Heb 11:6), the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred duty to evangelize all men.¹⁰

Here the council is saying that the Church cannot compromise explicit proclamation of the Gospel to all people, which is her identity and mission.

The need for the missionary Church to participate in humanity's quest for truth cannot be disregarded even in the name of a legitimate religious pluralism. The point that Vatican II is making here is that there is a continual necessity, relevance and urgency of the Church's *Mission ad Gentes* and that this Mission must include the explicit proclamation of Christ as saviour of the world. It must proclaim a salvation that is not only an interior, personal and spiritual and other worldly reality but rather it must proclaim that an integral reality, embracing the material and spiritual, the personal and political-historical aspects of human existence,¹¹ is offered to everyone, but never apart from the mediation of Christ and his Church, which is "the sacrament of salvation for all mankind". This teaching that there is no salvation outside Christ brings us to some fundamental mission theological considerations to which we now turn.

By declaring evangelization to be fundamental to the Church's being and identity Vatican Council II taught that the Church is missionary by nature.

The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary, since according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This plan flows from 'fountain-like love', the love of God the Father.

The *raison d'être* of the Church is undoubtedly mission because mission is a constitutive element in the nature and the life of the Church; the Church, devoid of her missionary character, is non-existent. There is a very close link between the Church as a vehicle/instrument of doing mission and God's mission itself; there is a very close link between the action of the Church and that love-founded interest of God to reach out to the world. Mission and the Church are closely interrelated. This radical statement of Vatican II emphasizes a number of theological implications. At the heart, or better the core, of the Church's existence, essential and fundamental to her missionary vocation, is the "proclamation of the Gospel" (Mt 16:15) to "all nations" (Mt

¹⁰ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Ad Gentes*, No. 7.

¹¹ *Cf.* JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 11.

28:19) “up to the earth’s remotest end” (Acts 1:8). Accordingly, the Church’s reason for existence becomes the missionary sending, the commission. Mission cannot only be a subsidiary, additional or secondary task of the Church, but indeed its major pre-occupation. The real and authentic Church, because she is born of the mission of the Son and of the Father in the Holy Spirit, ought to be missionary in spirit, on the one hand, and apostolic in outlook, on the other. Mission is for the Church neither accidental nor facultative; it is rather a necessity, a being, indeed a fundamental imperative.

Theologically, therefore, Church and mission are complimentary, two sides of the same coin. The Church cannot exist without Mission; she exists by way of evangelizing, indeed she exists in order to evangelize. Mission is the origin, the meaning and the final goal of the Church’s existence. Indeed “it is plain that missionary activity wells up from the Church’s inner nature and spreads abroad her saving Faith”¹² As a consequence, the Church fulfils and realizes her very nature by realizing her mission.

As a consequence, then, the question to ask in today’s discussion is not whether Africa is still a missionary continent because, essentially, where the Church is there is the mission of God. The Church is present in the African Continent (indeed from the earliest centuries of Christianity); therefore, mission is there in Africa. In fact from the aforementioned development in Vatican the Church cannot not be missionary otherwise she is not Church. The Church in Africa is missionary in two fold ways: (1) as passive recipient of the deposit of faith entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and (2) as active agent in bringing the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The disciples of Jesus were called first to be with Jesus (recipients) and secondly to go out and preach the Gospel (agents). As such they were both recipients and preachers of the Gospel. Each Christian is both a receiver and a giver. The two are two sides of the same coin; they are complementary.

The question here should therefore be rather: what kind of mission is the Church in Africa undertaking?, How is the Church in Africa missionary and how is she exercising her missionary vocation? In which way is the Church in Africa (1) active recipient of the deposit of faith and (2) active agent: how is she in turn missionary proclaiming the Gospel of Christ within and outside to people in the non-Church?

So, is Africa, firstly, still a recipient of faith today and secondly is Africa an active Agent of the Gospel of Christ?

¹² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Missionary Declaration *Ad Gentes*, No. 6.

1. IN THE SENSE OF BEING ACTIVE AGENTS:

I answer the question with an enthusiastic “Yes”. Africa still a missionary continent in the second sense here because today there is an evident effort in Africa to see to it that the Gospel is preached to all people within and outside of Africa. Looking at the members of African origin in many missionary-oriented congregations within Africa and abroad, there is a clear sign that the Church in Africa is taking a leading role in making sure that the Gospel takes root in all strata of human life within and outside the continent. *Mission Ad Gentes* is a priority in Africa.

2. IN THE SENSE OF BEING RECIPIENTS:

Looking at many situations where it is evident that the Gospel has not taken root, Africa is certainly still a needy recipient of the liberating good news of Christ. We still have many regions, which are not evangelized. The fact that we have many missionaries around, both local and foreign, is a clear indication that the Gospel has been fully integrated into the actual life situations of people. Indeed even after the two thousand years of efforts by the Church to proclaim Jesus to the Africans, mission situation in Africa is still wanting:

Today’s Situation:

- ◆ Total Population of Africa — 1.080.000.000
- ◆ Number of Christians in Africa today — 460.000.000
- ◆ Number of Catholics in Africa — 190.000.000

Consequently, there are still 620 Million people who have not yet known Christ (non-Christians), 75% of whom are Moslems

CONCLUSION: The proclamation of Christ to the not-yet baptized is still urgently needed; it is still a great challenge to the whole Church because it is urgent, difficult and alarming in its dimensions

AREAS WHERE MISSION IN AFRICA IS URGENT:

◆ THE MISSION OF RECONCILING PEOPLES

One of the greatest challenges facing the Church in Africa is in the area of reconciliation, peace and Justice. Africa is a continent, which is faced with many situations of unending violence and conflict which have almost become the order of the day. The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 which saw an estimated 1.000.000 or more people dead as the culmination of longstanding ethnic competition and tensions between the minority Tutsi and the majority Hutu. The ever-enduring civil wars in the DRC, Angola, Sierra Leone,

Mozambique, Somalia, South Sudan etc., which have resulted in millions of people dying, displaced and asylum seekers. The 2007 post election violence in Kenya in the wake of the disputed presidential election which left thousands of people dead, thousands injured, over 300.000 internally displaced, and a significant number sexually and otherwise abused.

♦ PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL TO THE ADHERENTS
OF NON-CHRISTIANS THROUGH DIALOGUE

From the statistics I gave above, from 1.080.000,000 world population, 620 million people are non-Christians. This makes the *mission ad Gentes* extremely important and urgent. According to John Paul II, Inter-religious dialogue is essential, indeed an integral element of the Church's evangelizing Mission: "[I]nter-religious dialogue is a part of Church's evangelizing mission"¹³ because "dialogue is a path towards the Kingdom of God."¹⁴ The Church in Africa is obliged as is the Church worldwide, to enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives because she has a message to deliver, a communication to make.¹⁵ This however is the dialogue that "...does not originate from tactical concerns of self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity."¹⁶

Dialogue, rather, should be seen as an effective way of discovering the Spirit, which is at work within all individuals of various religions. Dialogue is a means of seeking truth and of sharing it with others. Its fruit is harmonious living in communion with one another and with God since "by dialogue we let God be present in our midst; for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God."¹⁷ When Christians live with people of other religions, dialogue receives a central function, for it brings about love and mutual respect as well as taking away or at least diminishing hatred and prejudices among the followers of various religions. It promotes unity and friendship among Christians and followers of other religions.¹⁸ The fruit of dialogue is "... union between people and union of people

¹³ JOHN PAUL, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 57.

¹⁵ PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, No. 65.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 57.

¹⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, No. 30.

with God, who is the source and revealer of all truth and whose Spirit guides men in freedom only when they meet one another in all honesty and love.”¹⁹

In a world which is pluralistic and where freedom of expression of faith reigns, *dialogue* as a uniting principle is important and, perhaps, inescapable. In a world where religion tends to be a divisive factor, dialogue, as an authentic form of Christian witness, is obligatory. Given the current situation, which is marked by religious pluralism and diversity, dialogue becomes a *conditio sine qua non* of Christian existence. If the Church has to be faithful to her call of encountering in genuine respect people of other religions who share the same ultimate spiritual pursuit (the quest for the Absolute, the quest for God), then she has to embrace the Spirit of dialogue which is an “attitude of respect and friendship which permeates all activities constituting the evangelising Mission of the Church.”²⁰ Dialogue is demanded today more than ever, by the dynamic course of action which is changing the face of modern society—it is demanded by the pluralism of society and by the maturity humanity has reached in this day and age—be he religious or not. Secular education has enabled people to think and speak, and to conduct dialogue with dignity.²¹ The Church must, therefore, proclaim its specific *kerygma* in a way that is distinct from that of earlier ages and it can only do so dialogically.

According to Paul VI, a genuine dialogue has to be preceded by a genuine recognition and acceptance of the values in other religions and their relevance. That is why he began his encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, by appreciating and praising every religion as containing sparks of light within itself, which must neither be despised nor quenched, even though they are insufficient for giving clear vision. In one of his speeches on the Easter Sunday of 1964, the Pontiff further said that:

Every religion has within it rays of light which must neither be disdained nor extinguished, even if they are not sufficient to offer man the clarity of which he is in need, and are incapable of arriving at the miracle of the Christian light, which enables truth to coincide with life. Every religion raises us to the transcendence of Being ... Every religion is the dawn of Faith ...²²

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, No. 9.

²¹ Cf. PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, No. 78.

²² PAUL VI, Easter Radio Message to the World, March 29, 1964, p. 120.

Echoing the voice of his predecessor, John Paul II talks explicitly about the need for, and urgency of dialogue with people of other religious traditions of the world. His call to dialogue is based on his strong conviction that because “the Holy Spirit is active within and outside the visible Body of the Church” and “because all human beings are called to one divine destiny”, all people have a possibility of being associated, in a way known to God, with the Paschal Mystery.²³ In *Redemptor Hominis* John Paul II relates the redemption of Christ to each and every person, without exception. He affirms that the human person—every person without exception- has been redeemed by Christ; because Christ is in a way united to every person. Even if the individual may not realize this fact, Christ “can through the Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny”.²⁴

For John Paul II, dialogue and proclamation are not alternative but complementary; they are equally authentic elements of the evangelizing Mission of the Church, whose goal is to make the salvific action of God be felt through all of human history. For him, “[i]nter-religious dialogue at its deepest level is a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with mankind.”²⁵ As such an authentic dialogue, which is open and disinterested, objective and frank, which excludes pretence, rivalry, deceit and betrayal²⁶ “leads to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful”.²⁷

- ♦ Evangelization of the society (secularism, modernism as challenges today)
- ♦ Pastoral care of the “already baptized”
- ♦ Inculturation: “Continuous dialogue between the Christian faith and human cultures”.

One of the greatest challenges facing the African Church is the inability to integrate the gospel values with the African cultural values in such a way that a person can be truly Christian and truly African at the same time without any contradiction. The growth of Christianity in Africa, at least in terms of numbers, is evident. According to J.O Mills, “while every day in

²³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 14.

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, “To the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council of Inter-religious Dialogue, Rome, November 13th.1992,” p. 498.

²⁶ Cf. PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, No. 110.

²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, No.56.

the West roughly 7500 people, in effect, stop being Christians, every day in Africa roughly double that number become Christians". The growth in the numbers is not the problem. The problem is, rather, the lack of conviction and authenticity of the baptized in practicing the faith.

It is noticeable that a good number of Catholics, in times of crisis seek solutions either in the African traditional religions or in the booming Independent Churches. The latter seem to take the culture and life situations of the people more seriously. As Robert Lowie observes:

the acid test of religion is man's behaviour in a crisis. What he does when stirred up to the very depth of his being, when he is racked with pain, when his crops fail, that constitutes his religion."

This suggests that many African Christians live a kind of double life, which calls into question the authenticity, relevance and conviction of their Christian belief: The inculturation of Christian faith is an imperative.

Throughout its history Christianity has come into contact with other religions and cultures—a contact that resulted in Christianity influencing these religions and cultures as well as being influenced by them.²⁸

Evangelization is a sublime task of the Church, directed to specific individuals or groups in a particular cultural and social context and in a given space and time. Culture is an essential constituent of human existence. As E. Nunnanmacher clearly points out: culture "is an essential characteristic of human existence: where there are human beings, there is a culture, because the human being is naturally a cultural being..."²⁹ Human beings are cultural beings and live within a framework of set cultural traditions which influence their way of life and behaviour. A faith-contact with individuals necessarily implies contact with their culture, which is what defines people's manner of existence. It follows therefore that, in order for the Gospel to penetrate deeply into people's hearts and minds, in order for it to have its desired effect and transforming power, it must not be foreign to their culture;³⁰ it has to touch the

²⁸ The dialogue between the Gospel and culture has been an issue throughout the rich history of Christianity. According to New Testament accounts, the Gospel came into contact with different people in different cultural milieux. We witness for example the translation of the Christian message from its Hebrew mother culture to Greek culture which is altogether different. All this was done to make the message touch people's lives where and as they are.

²⁹ E. NUNNENMACHER, "Culture," 94.

³⁰ Paul VI emphasized this point when he pointed out that "the gap between Gospel and culture is undeniably the tragedy of our time" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 20).

heart of the context of their culture; indeed it has to be incarnated in it, i.e. to take flesh in the integral³¹ mainstream of peoples' lives. The Gospel must become relevant and influential in peoples' lives; it has to be "translated into the total context of its hearers' history and present experience of faith".³²

As a matter of principle, the Gospel message cannot remain foreign or a stranger to the people with whom it lives; it "must put down its roots in cultural, social and human terrains".³³ It must take root; it must be reformulated into the very thought-pattern of the people.³⁴ It must be integrated into people's life in such a way that it acquires a home in their culture, so that it can touch their entire life within their own social milieu. The work of evangelization is bound to be effective if the Christian faith is deeply rooted in people's way of life, if it touches people's lives in the context of their culture. The Good News must not be preached in a foreign language which people do not understand but should be translated into the symbols and language that people understand. As Paul VI rightly said:

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs, their symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.³⁵

Christianity is only real and authentic if it takes flesh in the culture of a people. Christian faith is authentic if it finds its roots in human cultures, thereby transforming them into the values of the Kingdom. A Church is local and real if it is "incarnate in a people, if it is a Church that is indigenous and inculturated".³⁶ The process by which Christianity becomes a people's way of life by integrating the Gospel message into their concrete life situations is technically referred to as "inculturation," which can be defined as

³¹ The Gospel is meant for the integral salvation of the person in question. The inculturation process should also address all the aspects of life in the light of the Gospel values, with the intention of purifying and transforming the quality of each person's life, the environment, the community and indeed, the whole society. (Cf. A. HOPE and S. TIMMEL, *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*, 66).

³² K. MÜLLER, *Mission Theology*, 153.

³³ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 62.

³⁴ Cf. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 44 and 66; Decree *Ad Gentes*, No. 22.

³⁵ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 63.

³⁶ Cf. "Statement of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference First Plenary Assembly," p. 122.

[...] the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation'.³⁷

CONCLUSION: THE CHANGING FACE OF THE AFRICAN SOCIETY: AN URGENT CALL FOR A NEW PARADIGM OF MISSION IN AFRICA.

Heraclitus said that “the only constant thing in life is change.” The African continent has, since the independence of individual countries, undergone significant social-cultural, politico-economical, and religious changes. These changes have had both positive and negative consequences. These changes have had an impact on the mission of the Church as well. Gloria Wirba said “the future or continuity of the Church in Africa depends on the capacity to answer the ever-growing need to root the Gospel in the local realities of the people of this continent.” I agree with Gloria Wirba, especially when I look at the changing face of the African continent vis-à-vis its existential social, economic and political problems. As a result of globalization, urbanization and mobility, Africa is increasingly multicultural. There are immense problems like famine, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability, violation of human rights, etc. In the face of these challenges, the mission of preaching the “Good news” becomes a great challenge. As the fathers of the African Synod asked: “In a continent full of bad news, how is the Christian message ‘Good news’ for our people? In the midst of an all-pervading despair, where lie the hope and optimism which the Gospel brings? Evangelization stands for many of those essential values which our Continent very much lacks: hope, peace, joy, harmony, love and unity.”

The mission of the Church is that of bringing these virtues to the people. However, the best of these, hope comes from God Himself. As Pope Benedict XVI says in his encyclical, *Spe Salvi* (No. 27):

In this sense it is true that anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life. Man’s great true hope, which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—God who has loved us and

³⁷ M. DHAVAMONY, “The Christian Theology of Inculturation,” *Studia Missionalia*, Vol. 44 (1995): 3. This article can also be found in S. INIOBONG UDOIDEM, *Pope John Paul II on Inculturation: Theory and Practice*, 5.

who continues to love us “to the end” “until all is accomplished.” Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what “life” really is.

Indeed Africa is a continent of hope par excellence and the African Church is full of youth and vitality. At the same time, the continent has suffered terribly in recent decades due to the fratricidal struggles between various ethnic groups. As does the the rest of the world, Africa still needs the salvation of Jesus Christ, He who is our only peace and our hope, the only source of true reconciliation. The Church needs to take the good news of Christ seriously so as to radiate that reconciling love of Christ and at the same time become for others a source of peace and agents of reconciliation. Pope Benedict XVI said:

In the Lord Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is not male or female (cf. Gal 3:28). In his flesh He has reconciled all peoples. With the power of the Holy Spirit I appeal to everyone: “Be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor 5:20). No ethnic or cultural differences, race, gender or religion must become a source of contention between you. You are all children of God, our Father in heaven. With this conviction it will finally be possible to build a more just and peaceful Africa, worthy of the legitimate expectations of all its children³⁸.

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CZY AFRYKA JEST WCIĄŻ KONTYNENTEM MISYJNYM?

Streszczenie

Współczesna koncepcja misji opiera się na trzech elementach: misji *ad Gentes*, reewangelizacji i wreszcie stałej działalności misyjnej Kościoła wśród jej wiernych członków. Misja jest centrum życia Kościoła, a Kościół pozbawiony charakteru misyjnego w zasadzie nie istnieje. Pytanie, jakie należy zadać, to nie czy Afryka jest jeszcze kontynentem misyjnym, ale jaka jest istota misji Bożej. Kościół w Afryce jest misyjny w dwójnasób: (1) jako bierny odbiorca depozytu wiary powierzonego przez Jezusa Apostołom i (2) jako substancja czynna w niesienia Ewangelii aż po krańce ziemi. Sfery, w których misja Kościoła w Afryce jest priorytetem, są następujące: 1) zadanie pojednania i pokoju, 2) głoszenia Ewangelii dla niechrześcijan poprzez dialog, 3) ewangelizacja społeczeństwa (sekularyzm, modernizm), 4) duszpasterstwo „ochrzczonych”, 5) inkulturacja: „Ciągły dialog między wiarą chrześcijańską i kulturą”.

Słowa kluczowe: Kościół w Afryce; misja; ewangelizacja.