

# **Church: A Proclaiming Community - Church and her Mission according to Vatican II**

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*Dr. V. Gnanamuthu,  
Parish Priest  
Thathoor  
Diocese of Kottar*

The pilgrim Church, in her journey through history, has on various occasions renewed its outlook on world and on her mission. Nevertheless, the documents of the Vatican Council II could be said to contain some of the clearest and most efficacious pronouncements of her existential concern for people. The Council's concept of Mission is scattered in all its 16 documents. *Ad Gentes* deals with practical Mission matters while the dogmatic principles are borrowed from other documents. In these documents, the Church has ventured into new avenues to respond to the new demands and challenges of changing society.

## ***The Church's New Understanding of Her Own Mission***

Vatican II developed a new understanding of the Church's own mission. Vatican Council's Decree *Ad Gentes* understands the nature of Church as missionary and it states that "the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father."<sup>1</sup> In this way the very nature of the Church is realised only by

fulfilling her mission and this mission is not a mere activity of the Church or of the Christian community but it is fundamentally an mission of God (*Missio Dei*)<sup>2</sup> which means the mission intended and accomplished by God and required of the Church.

Before Vatican II, the mission of the Church was prevalently understood to be restricted to the so-called spiritual sphere, that is, the salvation of souls (*salus animarum*). The council of Florence (1441) stated, “not only pagans but also Jews, heretics, and schismatics will have no share in eternal life. They will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless they become aggregated to the Catholic Church before the end of their lives.”<sup>3</sup> The root of this understanding lies in Cyprian’s famous dictum ‘there is no salvation outside the Church (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). The practical implication of this paradigm became obvious in the great stress placed on baptism and quantity of conversion, even using unworthy means such as force and allurements in some areas. In this way, the Church appeared as a “waiting room for the hereafter”<sup>4</sup> and this mode of conception of the aim of the Church’s mission continued until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a shift in this paradigm, with the arrival of Pierre Charles, Joseph Masson and André Seumois who popularised “church planting” as the objective of the Church’s mission.<sup>5</sup> This institutional paradigm of the Church’s mission left its imprint on Vatican II, which describes the objective of the Church’s mission as, “the evangelisation and the implanting of the Church among peoples or groups in which it has not yet taken root.”<sup>6</sup>

The institutional paradigm of the Church’s mission has been complemented by other texts from the Council Document, the council being of the view that God’s plan of salvation is not restricted to within the Church but that it reaches out to everyone. “Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, 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.”<sup>7</sup> In this way, “God’s providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, ‘planting the Church’ is to be considered as the immediate goal of the mission and the Council understands that the Church exists in the world as the “sign and instrument”<sup>9</sup> of the Kingdom of God.

Though the term inculturation is not found in *Ad Gentes*, the term adaptation is used to express the spirit of inculturation.<sup>10</sup> It describes the plantation of the local Church not in terms of transporting a western structure and theology into a new territory, but as the “planting of a seed,” the seed of the Word of God.”The seed which is the word of God, watered by divine dew, sprouts from the good ground and draws from thence its moisture, which it transforms and assimilates into itself, and finally bears much fruit.”<sup>11</sup> And it is the responsibility of the episcopal conferences to adapt the cultural milieu of given situation. One of the factors that contributed for this broad understanding of the mission of the Church was the representation of large number bishops from the young Churches at the General Council. Karl Rahner indicated “Vatican II was the first great official event in which the Church came to be realised as the world Church.”<sup>12</sup> The missionary bishops at the Council felt the burden of mission history and they reproached the situation of mixing up the missions with colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, and in this context there evolved the Church’s world responsibility.<sup>13</sup> The mission of the Church has been described in terms of service and respect for cultures and religions. The Church has to serve the world and Christians must commit themselves to making this world a better place for all to live in. *Ad Gentes* insists, “Christians ought to interest themselves, and collaborate with others, in the right ordering of social and economic affairs.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, Vatican II gives a new direction to her mission, taking the human person in his/her totality and willingly sharing the

joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people as her own.<sup>15</sup> A Church that is cut off from the world and disinterested in the wellbeing of humans cannot be the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Council places utmost importance to the establishment of a mature, Christian laity. To quote, "The church has not been really founded, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men, unless there is laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy. For the Gospel cannot be deeply grounded in the abilities, life and work of any people without the active presence of laymen."<sup>16</sup> Further, mission is not something that specialists-missionaries do. It is something that all Christians are called to do. In other words, to be Christian is to be caught up in the very life of God, which is a life of reaching out and saving presence in the world." Since the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God, this sacred synod invites all to a deep interior renewal; so that, having a vivid awareness of their own responsibility for spreading the Gospel, they may do their share in missionary work among the nations."<sup>17</sup>

In carrying out the mission of the Church, the Council attributes great importance to dialogue, which is a learning process in which the dialoguing partners discover the riches present in the other as God's generous gift.<sup>18</sup> One can also learn, understand and appreciate the treasures of other faiths while holding on to one's own religious values and treasures. That is why the Council asks the members of the Church, "to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions."<sup>19</sup> Dialogue must pave the way for a common search for socio-cultural and spiritual enrichment and thus to reprove any discrimination in whatever form.<sup>20</sup> It should strengthen the mutual understanding between members of different religions and help to jointly preserve and promote peace and harmony, social justice and moral values.<sup>21</sup> Such dialogue does not replace but rather accompanies *missio ad gentes*, proclaiming Jesus, "in whom God reconciled

all things to himself (2 Cor 5,18-19), men find their fullness of their religious life.”<sup>22</sup>

The Council makes a special appeal to the laity of the Church to prepare for dialogue with non-Christians through scientific research that promotes knowledge of peoples and religions and in a spirit of brotherhood to collaborate with other Christians and non-Christians<sup>23</sup> in promoting the unity of the human family. Acknowledging all legitimate diversities in society, Christians must be open to all forms of dialogue and be imbued with the spirit of love and peace.<sup>24</sup>

### EVANGELII NUNTIANDI

The apostolic exhortation of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* was written by Pope Paul VI following the deliberations of the Synod of Bishops held in 1974. It was the time when the very idea of mission was being seriously questioned because of the fresh perspectives opened by Vatican II. For example, *Lumen Gentium* states that women and men could be saved outside the Church and without any explicit faith in Christ.<sup>25</sup> If so why missionaries should be sent to other places to convert people to Christ-Further, Vatican II has developed a positive outlook on other cultures and religions. So a question was raised against missionaries going abroad for spreading Christianity and western culture.

In this background the pope preferred the term evangelization instead of ‘mission’. However, these two terms are closely related, so much so that the Church speaks of her evangelizing mission. The Pope uses the term mission in order to include aspects other than simply witnessing to the faith in word and deed. The Pope begins the exhortation with Jesus’ mission of preaching and witnessing to the Reign of God and “only the Kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative.”<sup>26</sup> Following *Ad Gentes*,

Evangelii Nuntiandi also upholds that Church “is linked to evangelization in her most intimate being”<sup>27</sup> but the aim of evangelisation is not of planting the Church but of witnessing to the Kingdom of God.<sup>28</sup>

The Church is the instrument of realising the Kingdom. She needs to be evangelized itself before it takes on the task of evangelization. It must constantly listen to the Word of God; it must constantly be on the road of conversion. Since Church is understood as the people of God, everyone in the Church is called to participate in the mission of the church because “the work of each individual member is important for the whole.”<sup>29</sup> The pope insists that there is real continuity between Jesus’ mission and the mission of the Church and says Evangelization is “not accomplished without her, and still less against her.”<sup>30</sup>

There is a holistic understanding of evangelisation developed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Evangelization does include a commitment to full human development and especially to social justice and liberation. “Evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development—a message especially energetic today about liberation.”<sup>31</sup>

For *EN* the first irreplaceable form of mission is the witness of life.<sup>32</sup> It also recognises the popular religiosity that is found among the people. While underlining its positive aspects *EN* states that, “it is rich in values. It manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know. It makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of manifesting belief. It involves an acute awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence.”<sup>33</sup> Popular religiosity is known by *EN* as religion of the people. Insistence on

life witness and respect for popular religiosity has much relevance to India which is a land for multitude of popular religiosity.

### REDEMPTORIS MISSIO

Another important document which deals with the theme of 'missionary activity' in a detailed manner is *Redemptoris Missio*, which was promulgated out by John Paul II on 7 December 1990 on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Ad Gentes*. The encyclical describes the Church as the sign and promoter of Gospel values which is "at the service of the Kingdom."<sup>34</sup> While presenting the nature of the Kingdom, the encyclical considers that the Kingdom "aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another."<sup>35</sup> The Church, being at the service of the Kingdom,<sup>36</sup> needs to promote these values of love, forgiveness and service.

While dealing with mission *ad gentes*, the Pope deals with the theme of conversion. It is clear that "conversion is also joined to baptism because of the intrinsic need to receive the fullness of new life in Christ."<sup>37</sup> Baptism is an external sign indicating conversion and membership into the Church. The Pope is also aware of the situation in which some, despite their acceptance of Christ and his teachings, do not wish to receive baptism and be a member of the visible Church. He acknowledges,

"it is also true that many profess an interior commitment to Christ and his message yet do not wish to be committed sacramentally, since, owing to prejudice or because of the failings of Christians, they find it difficult to grasp the true nature of the Church as a mystery of faith and love."<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the Pope displays a special sensitivity to the peculiar situations prevailing in some countries such as India where many live outside the

boundaries of the visible Church, while accepting and following Jesus and his teachings. There is a need to take these people into consideration.

Redemptoris Missio insists the role of interreligious dialogue in the missionary activities. "Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission"<sup>39</sup> For the Pope dialogue is not some kind of tactic for eventual conversion. It is born out of respect for the other religions, and is done out of a sincere desire to get to know and to learn from other religious ways.

From this brief analysis of the above three major documents on mission, one could see a gradual development of Church's understanding of her mission. How far these new developments have made impact on Asian and Indian soil is our present concern.

### *Dialogue as a Journey: Conviction of FABC*

Following the new understanding of Mission developed by Vatican II, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*, the Asian Bishops developed a new outlook on mission in Asian context. They understand mission as dialogue. The FABC speaks of triple dialogue namely dialogue with Asian religions, cultures and with the poor and this dialogue is a journey. "The journey of dialogue is a journey from ignorance to enlightenment, from fear and prejudice to openness and acceptance, from darkness to light, from death to life."<sup>40</sup> It is a journey of re-imagining the Christian message in the light of Asian realities so that new symbols, rituals, languages and expressions that are truly Asian in flavour and character can be formulated.<sup>41</sup>

Dialogue, according to the Asian bishops, is a dialectical process between contemplation and liberative praxis. They point out, "It is within the dialectics of silent contemplation and liberative compassion that dialogue with sisters and brothers of other religions evolve in Asia."<sup>42</sup> In this dialectical

process there is no contradiction between the life of prayer and social commitment, rather both are complementary as two sides of the same coin. To insist on one at the neglect of the other would not be a correct perception of dialogue in the context of Asia.

In a similar way, there is no dichotomy between proclamation of the Gospel and working for justice. The Asian bishops express their conviction in this regard saying, "If the proclamation of the Gospel is the goal of the Church, then advocacy for justice and peace is our path to God's Kingdom of harmony and solidarity."<sup>43</sup> Christians need to have a radical commitment to promoting justice and human dignity. Nevertheless, this commitment should not be limited to members of the Christian community as happened in the past, but rather should be extended to all people regardless of caste, colour, creed or religion, unanimously raising the voice against all such violations, wherever and in whatever form they may happen.<sup>44</sup> There is a need to venture into a "paradigm that is liberative, inclusive (gender – sensitive) and holistic marked by preferential commitment to and solidarity with the powerless and marginalised, a paradigm that integrates social justice and human rights with peace and harmony."<sup>45</sup>

### **SEARCH FOR CREATIVE AND RELEVANT MISSION PRACTICES IN INDIA**

As mentioned earlier, Vatican II developed a holistic outlook on Mission. The Church's mission has to be concerned with everything that pertaining to the wellbeing of human person and society at large. In order to popularise this Council's idea the Indian Church has taken multifarious efforts such as seminar, theological reflection, multi-religious live-in and so on. This enquiry will show how the Indian Church, through her constant reflection and theologizing on Indian realities, has evolved a new mind set and a changed understanding of her mission in the multi-religious and multicultural context.

### *1. All India Seminar on the Church in India Today*

The All India Seminar on the Church in India Today<sup>46</sup> was one of the important steps taken by the Indian Church to make herself relevant to the Indian situation. This seminar was organised in order to “study carefully in the world context, the economic, social cultural, political and religious forces shaping the new India and try to apply the principles hammered out in the Vatican Council to the conditions pertaining in this country.”<sup>47</sup> It was to rethink the relationship between Church and society and thus to enable the Church to be an effective instrument of social change.

This seminar exhibited a positive attitude towards other religions and acknowledged the “wealth of truth, goodness and beauty of India’s religious traditions” as “God’s gift to our nation from the ancient time.”<sup>48</sup> The open search to understand the voice of the Spirit which echoes in Indian realities resulted in a request for forgiveness of the Church’s past mistakes,<sup>49</sup> and boldly expressing the Church’s desire to be in communion with all the religions of the country.

“We wish to be in contact and communion with other religions of our country, which we value for their great contribution to the spiritual treasures of mankind. If in the past our relations have sometimes been strained through our fault, we ask forgiveness; and we now invite them to a common witness to the transcendent destiny of man.”<sup>50</sup>

In a multi-religious and multi-cultural context of India, the evolution of a theology and catechesis that promotes “collaboration of persons based upon attitudes of mutual acceptance and respect for each other’s integrity and a shared desire for growth in truth”<sup>51</sup> was visualised in the seminar. In order to make dialogue with other religions more effective and thus to foster better relationship, a request was made to the CBCI to re-organise the Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue into two separate commissions,

one for ecumenism and the other for dialogue with non-Christians and non-believers.<sup>52</sup>

There was an awareness created in the seminar regarding the Hindu perception of Christianity in India as something foreign, associated with colonial rulers. With the view of disassociation with this alienation and becoming a true Indian Church, an Indian theology which expresses Christian doctrine in Indian terms, and a worship that acknowledges Indian signs and symbols, was proposed.<sup>53</sup> A fidelity to India's ascetic and contemplative traditions and the setting up of ashram will be insisted upon.<sup>54</sup> While underlining the importance of evangelization, the seminar will view this not as transferring of people from one socio-cultural community to another, but as the sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ with neighbours.<sup>55</sup> So the person who announces Christ must himself/herself have the Christ-experience.

With regard to socio-economic activities, Christian involvement in an integral development of the country, through eradication of inequalities and exploitation, guaranteeing to everyone the necessities of life and true respect of the dignity of the human person was highlighted.<sup>56</sup> In civil and political life, the urgency for Christians to be involved in existing socio-political organizations "that promote national integration, the building-up of democratic structures of a secular society, such as trade unions, political parties etc.,"<sup>57</sup> was underlined. Christian involvement would facilitate these structures as instruments to bring about social justice and equality.

The seminar illustrated some concrete ways of collaboration with members of other religions. For instance, in the sphere of education, collaboration with other educational agencies in the country, including teaching and research in non-Catholic institutions by catholic laity, priests and religious and encouraging the Catholic students to join good non-Catholic institutions have been recommended.<sup>58</sup> By doing so, there would be a greater potential for Catholic interaction with the people of other religions.

## ***2. National Consultation on Paths of Mission in India Today***

The CBCI Commission for Proclamation and Communication organised a 'National Consultation on 'Paths of mission in India today' on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the CBCI (1944-94).<sup>59</sup> It was the first time in CBCI consultations, that members of other religions were invited and asked to address the bishops.

There emerged strong opposition to missionary work, especially in the tribal areas, from Hindu speakers, considering it to be a means of conversion through inappropriate methods such as fraud, force and allurements.<sup>60</sup> The position of the Church regarding conversion was expressed by stating, "The Church categorically denounces and rejects all such methods, holding sacred the freedom of the individual."<sup>61</sup> This consultation remained a significant moment in the life of the Indian Church, being able to hear from Hindu neighbours and to explain to them the position of the Church regarding the burning issue of conversion.

## ***3. Research Seminar on The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium***

The National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC) under the mandate of the CBCI organised a Research Seminar<sup>62</sup> on 'The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium'.<sup>63</sup> The purpose of the seminar was "to enable the Christian community to project a renewed image of the Church and to evolve a new style in its ministry to serve a world that is emerging in a period of cultural crisis."<sup>64</sup>

The goal of the Church mission was understood by the seminar as "to transform persons by the power of the Spirit so that all live together and share a communion in love."<sup>65</sup> Communion denotes "relatedness born out of love and respect for the other"<sup>66</sup> and there is no hindrance for the non-baptized to live out these values. Recognising the Spirit that is present in the

whole world, the seminar underlined the inalienable role of dialogue with the people of other religions and ideologies in the mission of the Church.<sup>67</sup>

Certain pastoral guidelines have evolved to bring all people into communion and assist them in living together. They are: forming Basic Human Communities in parishes, promoting dialogue of life, organising inter-religious meetings and dialogue, inviting friends of other religions to the Christian celebrations such as jubilee and other anniversaries, common celebration of feasts of all religions, reading the scriptures of other religions during the interreligious prayer meetings, visits to places of worship of other religions, introducing symbols and values of other religions in the school curriculum in order to inculcate respect for all religions, joint efforts to respond to social problems and functioning as agents of reconciliation in times of communal conflicts.<sup>68</sup>

## **JOINT-VENTURES WITH OTHER RELIGIONS**

In carrying out the mission of the Church in a multi-religious and multi-cultural context, the need of solidarity with people of all religions has been very much accentuated by the teachings of the Church. An initiative, however good it may be, promoted from one direction, without the involvement of the other in the reflection process, may not lead to a desired end, but on the contrary, it may deepen the suspicion that already existed. So to initiate and promote a joint action-plan, the involvement of all people in the process of reflection is also pertinent.

### ***1. World Conference of Religions on 'Religions and Man'***

The World Conference of Religions on 'Religions and Man', held in Kochi, from 15 to 21 November 1981, was organised on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Parliament of Religions held in Kollam in 1971

and the 150<sup>th</sup> year of the foundation of the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate.<sup>69</sup>

Being an interreligious conference, the issue of conversion was proffered for discussion. It must be noted that on 19 February 1981, a mass conversion of *Dalits* to Islam took place in Tamil Nadu. This issue was fresh in the minds of the participants and there were heated arguments for and against the right to conversion. The genuineness of mass conversions was questioned stating that “mass conversions are seldom genuine and might at best be a form of protest against some system or against current injustices. Genuine conversion can take place at the individual level, but conversions for political or economical gains ought to be condemned and avoided by all truly religious persons.”<sup>70</sup> Further, the feeling of the Hindus was also expressed. A Hindu understands Christianity and Islam against a background of invasions and thus conversion to these religions is seen in the light of political invasion in order to weaken the original Indian ethos and culture.<sup>71</sup>

However, through their open discussion, a conclusion could be arrived at in the conference that “conversion based on personal conviction and not by unfair inducements should be considered normal.”<sup>72</sup> There evolved a suggestion for the establishment of an International Parliament of Religions that can work for the removal of injustice rooted in a misinterpretation of religion on an international level.<sup>73</sup> The participants determined to put aside trivial religious differences and to work together for the “total liberation of every human being and the progress, and unity of all our brothers and sisters especially the poor, the exploited or the voiceless.”<sup>74</sup>

## ***2 World Conference of Religions on ‘Religions and Human Solidarity’***

After ten years, a similar World Conference of Religions was held in Kochi from 1 to 6 October 1991, on ‘Religions and Human Solidarity’, organised by the World Fellowship of Inter-religious Councils in collaboration

with the CBCI Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue. Around four hundred believers from various religions participated and all had a deeper commitment to inter-faith dialogue and a harmonious society. In an atmosphere of warmth of love and openness to each other,<sup>75</sup> this Conference has instilled in the minds of the participants a new vigour and enthusiasm to promote inter-faith harmony. They vowed to promote inter-religious harmony through inter-religious prayers, live-togethers, common celebration of religious festivals, inter-faith pilgrimages, inter-faith dialogue and through promoting justice.<sup>76</sup>

### *3 World Celebration of 'Unity and Life'*

It was on the occasion of the centenary of the Chicago Parliament of Religions of 1993, the CBCI Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue organised a 'World Celebration of 'Unity and Life' at Kanyakumari' from 10 to 14 August 1993, intending to bring together various dialogues and inter-faith groups from both within and outside India. It is pertinent to note that this was organised a few months after the chains of communal conflicts related to the destruction of the *Babri Masjid*.<sup>77</sup> In the meeting,

"In the context of the prevailing communal tension, the participants shared, in an atmosphere of meditation and prayer, their concerns, reflections, plan for the future, for joint action around themes as: the real religion, value based economics, wholeness and holiness, dialogue and action in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, politics and religion, different models of inter-religious dialogue, our religio-cultural heritage in the celebration of Unity and Life."<sup>78</sup>

As a climax to the celebration, there was an inter-faith procession to the seashore, carrying the symbols and posters drawn from different religions. The participants, forming them into a circle around a campfire, celebrated

through songs and *bhajans* their communion that had newly emerged during the celebration. During the procession songs such as 'We shall overcome...' or 'We will be together forever'<sup>79</sup> were sung, expressing a determination to promote harmony in the society.

#### **4 *Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana***

Another effort in line with placing Christian mission relevant to Indian soil was the *Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana* (National Interfaith Assembly), held in Bangalore, from 28 to 30 November 1998 on 'Towards a New Society of Religious Harmony and Co-operative Action.' It was organised to celebrate the Jubilee year 2000,<sup>80</sup> and 270 people representing eight religious traditions of India participated. The purpose of the Assembly was "to bring together people of all religions to reflect and experience the beauty of Indian religiosity as 'unity in diversity'."<sup>81</sup> The late Archbishop Alan de Lastic, then president of the CBCI, underlined the objectives of this initiative stating,

"To promote harmony and cooperation among all people irrespective of caste and creed in order to build a new India; to create understanding and mutual respect between religions in the context of existing conflicts and violence; to encourage everyone to have sufficient knowledge about his/her own religious beliefs and customs, and at the same time to be open enough to acknowledge and appreciate the good things found in other religious traditions, customs and way of life; to initiate the people of all faiths for joint action to fight against all kinds of corruption and to motivate their energy for constructive work like literacy programme, social service and developmental activities for the benefit of the poor and the oppressed."<sup>82</sup>

Different religious leaders such as the Sage of Kanchi Jagadguru, Sri J. Saraswathi Swamy, and Cardinal F. Arinze, President of the Pontifical Council for interreligious dialogue, issued messages. In this Assembly it was

clarified that in a society where deep religiosity and social oppression and other evils exist side by side, religions must be sources of liberation. It is only through inter-religious dialogue, that the liberative potentiality of the religions can be brought out and employed for social transformation. To realise this vision, a religious person must be an interreligious person, deeply rooted in his/her religion and at the same time open to the insight of other religions.<sup>83</sup>

Through panel discussions and workshops, the Assembly gave birth to twelve innovative proposals to promote inter-religious relationship and harmony. They are, Re-reading of the scriptures in today's context; Understanding, acknowledging, appreciating, preserving, promoting and assimilating the values found in other religions; Placing integral development of the human person as the central concern of each religion; Instructing students in schools about the essentials of all religions in order to prevent the spread of misunderstandings and prejudices regarding other religions; Formation of local level harmony groups to promote inter-religious fellowship and to bring about reconciliation when conflicts arise; Forming of Basic Human Communities to unite people of all castes and religious; Being sensitive to the feelings of others and avoiding public religious convention that would create fear and suspicion in other communities; Preserving the integrity of family that would communicate religious and ethical values; Promoting national integrity and harmony; Spreading the noble values of religions through media; Avoiding the use of inducement or coercion in propagating faith; and Setting up a National Inter-faith Forum for harmony and co-operative action at all levels in the country.<sup>84</sup>

### ***5. Sarv Dharm Saanskrutik Sandhya (Multi-faith Cultural Evening)***

Multi-religious endeavours with a view to promoting harmony in the society do not stop with the leaders of various religions, but also extend to other sectors of society. The multi-faith cultural evening at Gautam Nagar,

New Delhi, on 14 December 2007, proves this point. This was an initiative of the CBCI Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue, with the following vision: "Involving students of schools run by diverse faith traditions into an educative process, performing arts as a medium of inculcating positive values and promoting universal multi-faith values as the motivating force for fostering harmony in social life."<sup>85</sup>

Students of schools run by different religious communities were invited to present programmes based on the universal values inherent in the respective religious traditions. Various religious leaders also attended and enlightened the participants with their address which while upholding the values of different religions, highlighted the importance of recognising the religious 'others' as one's brothers and sisters.<sup>86</sup>

As an evaluation of these efforts, it can be stated that the effort to broaden the understanding of mission through various seminars and theological discussions and the effort to bring together the people of different religions on a common platform are in itself a positive step to promote mutual understanding among the members of various religions. The joint-meetings have paved the way for open discussions on various burning issues such as conversion and did help at least, to arrive at a theoretical consensus on accepting conversion, based on personal conviction, as a normal one. It acts as a solution to the longstanding question of conversion though in practice the problem continues because of the socio-economic, cultural and political repercussions of mass conversions. However, the doubts continue to exist among the Hindus regarding the openness with which the Church initiates these activities. While speaking about the Parliament of Religions which was held in 1936 in Bombay, M. K. Gandhi asked, "Did Christianity enter the parliament on a par with the others?"<sup>87</sup> This question demands serious reflection on the part of the Church, even today, if a convincing answer is to be presented.

### To Summarise

From the above study, the mission of the Church in the context of India can be summarised in the following way. The Church is missionary in her very character, and theologically her mission springs from the plan of the Father and the mission of the Son and Holy Spirit. The Father's plan flows from his 'fountain-like love', and is universal in character,<sup>88</sup> embracing all people, beyond the barriers of religions. Therefore, mission is *missio Dei*, that is, the sending of the Son and the Spirit to the world by the Father so that the world "may have life, and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10,10). It is a mission of effecting qualitative change in humanity by speaking the word of God's justice, love and mercy in a broken yet hope-filled world. "All life in the world is the object of mission in so far as it is to be permeated and transformed by the Gospel."<sup>89</sup> In order for this to happen in the multi-religious context of India, the mission of the Church needs to aim at a tradition broad enough to include the adherents of diverse religions such as Hindu, Christian, Muslim, and all other cultural traditions and only this can keep India united in the long run. This tradition may be termed following *EN* as the "Kingdom tradition," or "Reign of God".

The Kingdom of God is an expression of Jesus, expressing his own particular consciousness of mission and his own personal experience of God. The Kingdom of God, as taught by Jesus, is a treasure worth selling everything else to get, a pearl of great price, incomparable in value (cfr. *Mt* 13,44-45). It is the state of creation that scripture calls the new heaven and new earth (cfr. *Rev* 21,1). The Kingdom of God refers to the exercising of God's goodness and power of liberation from everything that is not in conformity with the plan of God and to give shape to God's plan, which is manifested through creation and redemption: a life of sharing, solidarity, equality and justice.<sup>90</sup> It would usher in the age of peace, harmony and fellowship, where God would be the Father of all and people would be brothers and sisters to

one another. The virtue of love is the basis for this Kingdom and all realities will be fully permeated by this love and will fully respond to it.

The Kingdom of God preached by Jesus was not addressed to any religion but to all human beings. The Church is primarily seen as the sign and instrument of this Kingdom<sup>91</sup> and is called to prepare for it. Jesus sacrificed his life for the Kingdom and instituted the Church as the instrument for the Kingdom. All, including Christians, are called to conversion to God, but Christians have another call to witness in word and deed to God's action in Jesus Christ, which has to be carried out to facilitate the Kingdom.<sup>92</sup> In this way, the Church works towards the realization of her basic prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come', which involves personal renewal, healing of mind and body, reconciliation between God and men, men with men and men with nature.

In a country where people of different religions live side by side and Christians live amidst a majority of non-Christians, it is not only Christians who are called to this mission but also people of other religions, though in a different way. It is pertinent to note that other religions have similar visions such as the Dharma of Buddhism, *Ram Rajya*<sup>93</sup> of Hinduism and an Islamic society modelled after the teaching of the Qur'an of Islam. The very fact that all are created in the image and likeness of God, all share the responsibility of ushering the advent of the Kingdom of God. In this context, in India, Christians need to have awareness that they are engaging in a world where God is present and acts in the course of its history. "It is not a 'pagan' world which is godless and devoid of the redemptive powers of God. In such a world, Christianity can become the 'salt' or the 'leaven' transforming Indian culture from within, towards Life."<sup>94</sup> In a situation where things stand against the Reign of God, the mission of the Church is to challenge people to convert and to conform to the reign of God.

**(Endnotes)**

<sup>1</sup>AG 2.

<sup>2</sup> The debate on *Missio Dei* began with protestants at the Wellingen Congress of 1952 and was inspired by the thesis of Karl Barth on *actio Dei*. Accordingly, God is the protagonist of mission and the real aim the *missio Dei* is the reign of God, not *ecclesia viatorium*. At the Uppsala Congress held in 1968, the term, *missio Dei* was accepted in its historical evolution. Cfr. F. A. Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll (NY), 2006, 29.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books Maryknoll (NY), 1991, 218.

<sup>4</sup> D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 377.

<sup>5</sup>Cfr. F. A. Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, 82-91.

<sup>6</sup>AG, 6.

<sup>7</sup>GS, 22.

<sup>8</sup>NA, 1.

<sup>9</sup>LG n. 1.

<sup>10</sup> The term inculturation began to appear in theological and missiological literature in the 1970s, and is only first used in a Roman magisterial document in John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendi* in 1979.

<sup>11</sup>AG n. 22.

<sup>12</sup> K. Rahner, "Concern for the Church," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 20, Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1981, 78.

<sup>13</sup>Cfr. *ibidem* 80-81.

<sup>14</sup>AG n. 12.

<sup>15</sup>Cfr. GS, n. 1.

<sup>16</sup>AG. n. 21.

<sup>17</sup>AG. n. 35.

<sup>18</sup>Cfr. AG, n. 11.

<sup>19</sup>NA, n. 2.

<sup>20</sup>Cfr. NA, n. 5.

<sup>21</sup>Cfr. NA, n. 3.

<sup>22</sup>NA, n. 2.

<sup>23</sup>Cfr. AG, n. 41.

<sup>24</sup>Cfr. GS, 92.

<sup>25</sup>LG. n. 16.

<sup>26</sup>EN. n. 8.

<sup>27</sup>EN. n. 15

<sup>28</sup>EN. n. 8

<sup>29</sup>EN. n. 15.

<sup>30</sup>EN. n. 16.

<sup>31</sup>EN.n.29.

<sup>32</sup>EN.n. 41.

<sup>33</sup>EN.N.48.

<sup>34</sup>JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), n. 20. (Hereafter it will be referred to as RM).

<sup>35</sup>RM, n. 15.

<sup>36</sup>RM, n. 20.

<sup>37</sup>RM, n. 47.

<sup>38</sup>RM, n. 47.

<sup>39</sup>RM. N. 55.

<sup>40</sup>FIRA I, "Final Statement," Malaysia, September 1998 in F. J. Eilers (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 3, 121, n. 2.9.

<sup>41</sup>Cfr. *Ibidem*, 121, n. 2.10.

<sup>42</sup>FIRA II, "Final Statement," Thailand, July 1999, in *Ibidem*, 128, n. 3.4.

<sup>43</sup>Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, "Towards a Culture of Peace in the 21st Century: Our Responses as Christians to Social Advocacy," in *FABC papers 102* (2001), 9.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibidem*, 7.

<sup>45</sup>Summary Report of the Consultation on Advocacy for Justice and Peace in the 21st Century, "The Prophetic Path to the New Millennium through Social Advocacy," Thailand, September 2000 in F. J. Eilers (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 3, 53, n. 6.3.

<sup>46</sup>This seminar was organised under the auspices of the CBCI, in Bangalore from 14 to 25 May 1969, with a view to implementing the renewal process encouraged by Vatican Council II. As preparation for this seminar, the seminar topics were discussed at length in 14 Regional Seminars, 9 National Consultations, 9 Seminary Seminars and a large number of seminars organised by special groups. The procedure, papers presented, workshop reports and the final statement of the seminar are found in *All India Seminar: Church in India Today*, Bangalore 1969, CBCI Centre, New Delhi (n.y).

<sup>47</sup>J. Thaliath, "The Thought of the Seminar," in *All India Seminar: Church in India Today*, 513.

<sup>48</sup>"Declaration of All India Seminar," in *All India Seminar: Church in India Today*, 240, n. 13.

<sup>49</sup>In the past, the Church had been very defensive, refusing to recognize the good that is found in society, especially in other religions. This led to the increasing alienation of the Church from the world.

<sup>50</sup>"Declaration of All India Seminar," in *All India Seminar: Church in India Today*, 243-244, n. II.3.

<sup>51</sup>"Seminar Resolutions," in *All India Seminar: Church in India Today*, 258, n. II.1.A.

<sup>52</sup>Cfr. *ibidem*, 259, n. II.1.F.

<sup>53</sup> Cfr. *ibidem*, 254, n. I.3.A.iv.

<sup>54</sup> Cfr. *ibidem*, 253, n. I.3.A.i.

<sup>55</sup> Cfr. J. Thaliath, "The Thought of the Seminar," in *All India Seminar: Church in India Today*, 524.

<sup>56</sup> Cfr. "Declaration of All India Seminar," in *All India Seminar: Church in India Today* 245, n. II.1.

<sup>57</sup> "Seminar Resolutions," in *All India Seminar: Church in India Today*, 270-271, n. IV. 2.ii.

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. *ibidem*, 267, n. III.4.iv.

<sup>59</sup> This national consultation took place in Pune from 4 to 9 January 1994. The proceedings and report of the consultation are found in A. Kanjamala (ed.), *Paths of Mission in India Today*, St. Paul's Publication, Mumbai 1997.

<sup>60</sup> Cfr. A. Shourie, "Missionaries in India," in A. Kanjamala (ed.), *Paths of Mission in India Today*, 73-75.

<sup>61</sup> "Statement of the CBCI Consultation on Mission, Pune, 4-9 January 1994," in A. Kanjamala (ed.), *Paths of Mission in India Today*, 298, n. 62.

<sup>62</sup> The keynote address, orientation and research papers, final statements and the pastoral guidelines of this research seminar are published in T. D'Sa (ed.), *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium*, NBCLC, Bangalore 2005.

<sup>63</sup> This seminar took place in two phases. The first phase was organised from 29 to 30 November 2003 in which the regional representatives met with the scholars who had to present the paper. The second phase was organised from 4 to 9 January 2005 in which the interdisciplinary study of research papers took place. Cfr. "Final Statement of the Research Seminar," in T. D'Sa (ed.), *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium*, 748, n. 3

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, 747, n. 1.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 758, n. 44.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, 759, n. 48.

<sup>67</sup> Cfr. *ibidem*, 760, n. 52.

<sup>68</sup> Cfr. "Pastoral Guidelines," in T. D'Sa (ed.), *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium*, 766-767, nn. IV.8-IV.19.

<sup>69</sup> Cfr. "The Declaration by the World Conference of Religions," in A. Nambiaparambil (ed.), *Religions and Man*, Chavara Cultural Centre, Kochi (n.y), 129, n. 3.

<sup>70</sup> "Workshop Discussions - Summary," in A. Nambiaparambil(ed.), *Religions and Man*, 116.

<sup>71</sup> Cfr. *Ibidem*, 117.

<sup>72</sup> "The Declaration by the World Conference of Religions," in A. Nambiaparambil (ed.), *Religions and Man*, 134, n.14.

<sup>73</sup> Cfr. *ibidem*, 134, n. 15.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, 137, n. 24.

<sup>75</sup>Cfr. Report of the CBCI Commission and National Centres and Regional Bishops Councils 1990-1991, Pune, January 1992, 16-17.

<sup>76</sup>Cfr. *Ibidem*, 17-18.

<sup>77</sup> This was in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992.

<sup>78</sup> *Report of the CBCI Commission and National Centres and Regional Bishops Councils 1992-1993*, Delhi, February 1994, 34.

<sup>79</sup>Cfr. A. Nambiarambail, "Dialogue as a Spiritual Pilgrimage," in *Jeevadhara* 37, 221 (2007), 475.

<sup>80</sup> Cfr. F. Machado, "Interreligious Dialogue in Asia," in *Pro Dialogue* 109, 1 (2002), 116-117.

<sup>81</sup> Reports of the CBCI Commissions, National Centres and Regional Bishops Councils 1998-1999, Chennai January 2000, 35.

<sup>82</sup> A. De Lastic "Presidential Address," in A. Suresh (ed.), *Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana, CBCI Commission for Interreligious Dialogue*, New Delhi 1998, 67.

<sup>83</sup>Cfr. "Statement of the Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana 1998," in A. Suresh (ed.), *Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana*, 160.

<sup>84</sup>Cfr. "Statement of the Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana 1998," in A. Suresh (ed.), *Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana*, 160-162.

<sup>85</sup> THE NATIONAL Commission, "Sarv Dharm Saanskritik Sandhya," in *Fellowship* 16, 1 (2008), 35.

<sup>86</sup>Cfr. *ibidem*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> M. K. GANDHI, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India*, Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad (n.y), 152.

<sup>88</sup>Cfr. AG nn. 2-3

<sup>89</sup> J. Kavunkal, "Vatican II and the Mission of the Church in India," in K. Kunnumpuram – L. Fernando (eds.), *Quest for an Indian Church: An Exploration of the Possibilities Opened up by Vatican II*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Gujarat 1993, 42.

<sup>90</sup>Cfr. L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 28.

<sup>91</sup>Cfr. LG 1.

<sup>92</sup>Cfr. M. Amaladoss, "The Kingdom, Mission and Conversion," in J. Mattam – S. Kim (eds.), *Mission and Conversion: A Reappraisal*, St. Paul's Publications, Mumbai 1996, 34-35.

<sup>93</sup> It must be noted that often this vision is mutilated because of the Hindu communalists' identification of the Ram Rajya with the rule of their communalist's political party, namely BJP. This vision of Ram Raiya is not shared by all Hindus, as Hinduism has no official creed or doctrine followed by all Hindus.

<sup>94</sup> A. Kalliath, "Pilgrimage Identity of Christianity and the Emerging Religious Nationalism: An Analysis on the Political Trends in India," in *Idem* (ed.), *Pilgrims in Dialogue: A New Configuration of Religions for Millennium Community*, Journal of Dharma & Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore 2000, 240.