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Mission As Struggle To Evangelize Culture

(April 2008)

The church had a negative attitude to the world before Vatican II and so the church became a ghetto or a fortress of 'those who are saved' only because of their belief in the catholic church.

The church became powerful and had the last say in all matters: religious, civil, and state. Every reality was interpreted in the light of revelation. Human life was centred on God and salvation after life. This world and life here was not considered real. So salvation and life after death became a preoccupation. In order to obtain salvation we needed to live a life of penance and sacrifice. At the same time the higher clergy lived a luxurious life where as the lower clergy was not properly educated and was left to fend for themselves. The intellectuals and artists resented the interference of the hierarchy in civil life and they sought autonomy from religious authorities. Renaissance and humanism etc. helped in this struggle. The church authorities did not take kindly to this and so the relations became strained. As a result, the philosophers, thinkers, artists, intellectuals and scientists slowly drifted away from the church and they parted ways.

Vatican II wanted to correct the mistakes of the past on the part of the church and started to view the world in a positive light. This new awareness has led the church to search for new ways to evangelize the modern world and particularly the modern culture which does not want to listen to the teachings of the church on God, morality and other related matters. This paper examines the understanding of the mission of the church in the modern world as a call to witness to Christ and the Gospels in an attitude of openness and dialogue with modern culture. It necessarily leads to various struggles to evangelize modern culture.

1. Evolution of the Church's Approach to Modern World

The Second Vatican Council redefined its relationship to the modern world when it declared that "the joys and the hopes, the grieves and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grieves and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (GS 1). The church understands that it is essentially related to the modern world and that its mission is to be actively involved as an instrument of the kingdom at the service of this dynamic world.

But in fulfilling its responsibility and mission to the world, the church has to face conflicts and struggles with various forces and ideologies of the world opposed to the kingdom from the beginning of the church. This paper discusses the various implications of these struggles with different ideologies for the mission of the church in the contemporary world.

The life and ministry of Jesus involved struggles from the beginning. Jesus had to face temptations to abandon his ministry (Mt 4:1-11) and had to affirm that "my food is to do the will of my Father" (Jn 34). His struggle involved his preaching counter cultural values and ushering in the values of the kingdom such as imitating the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37), eating with tax collectors and sinners (Lk 5:26-ff), washing the feet of his disciples (Jn 13). His option to be faithful to God and to his people through his ministry of proclaiming the compassionate and forgiving love of his Father, led him to face opposition, suffering, rejection and death on the cross.

The apostles had understood that they received the mandate from Christ to continue his mission of proclaiming the Kingdom inaugurated by him. In fulfilling this mission, the missionaries had to face disruptive tensions and struggles, heresies and controversies, persecutions and hostilities. Paul's mission involved continuous struggle to fulfil his mission from the moment of his conversion and realization of his call to be an apostle of Christ whom he had persecuted (Acts 9:5) when he had gone after the disciples of Jesus. He struggles so that Christ is formed in the believers (Gal 4:19). groans together with creation "to obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). In Athens, a city full of idols. Paul argued in the synagogue with the Jews and devout persons, and in the market place with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. In the Areopagus, at the altar of the 'unknown god' when he expounded the new doctrine about Jesus and his resurrection, he had to face ridicule and rejection (Acts 17:16-34).

The church had to struggle for its very existence and missionaries faced hostility from the Jewish people or

from the Roman officials. It was persecuted in the Roman Empire since the Christians showed an aversion to pagan worship and worship of the emperor. Christians constituted a threat to the customary religious policy of the empire. Christianity appeared as a new religious movement which proclaimed its God as the only true God and Redeemer of the whole humanity. This claim of absoluteness of Christian religion led to the persecution of the Christians by the emperors and gradually they were seen as the declared enemies of Classical Culture and religion. Many witnessed to their faith with martyrdom (Pereparampil 2004:29).

Intellectual opposition too forced the Christian apologists to engage in debates with the religious philosophies of the time such as Hellenism to prove the truth of Christian faith. The church had to struggle against several heresies also to safeguard its authentic teaching and had to condemn them using her teaching authority (Mt. 18: 17). These heresies included Gnosticism. Manichaeism. Arianism. Nestorianism, Pelagianism, etc., Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St Augustine and others vigorously defended the true doctrine of the Church.

Emperor Constantine signed the "Edict of Milan" in 313 and subsequently persecution of Christians ended and all subjects including Christians were granted religious freedom and the buildings and lands confiscated from the Christians were given back or compensated. In a few decades Christianity experienced growth from an illegal to a legal and then to a dominant social and cultural position in the Roman Empire. Since the rulers professed its faith, the subjects too became members of the church. It led to close collaboration between the church and the state. By the time of the middle ages. Roman Catholicism had centralized church authority in the hands of the Pope.

By the 10th century Christendom had established as the religious and cultural community in every European state with Roman Catholicism as the religion of the state. Christendom fought back against Islam in the Crusades but failed to repossess the lost territories of the Holy Land. At the same time, it strengthened the unity of Christendom and made it conscious of its spiritual and temporal power. The middle Ages¹ saw the rise of the universities which promoted not only "Catholic" learning but also secular learning helped by the transmission of the works of Aristotle through Arab scholars. The new knowledge was synthesized by St. Thomas Aquinas and other Christian thinkers and theologians into Scholasticism, a philosophical and theological system which contributed to the formation of European intellectual tradition. Donovan describes the general religious attitude of people of the West:

God was the fundamental, principal value of medieval culture. And every single aspect of that culture — art, architecture, sculpture, literature, music, philosophy, science, ethics, law, political organization, and family — was formed by that God principle and reflected it... During that period, a negative attitude or indifference to wealth and pleasures and to the temporary city of man predominated, an attitude of apparent despising of the earthly life as little more than the testing grounds for eternal life (Donovan 1989:27).

The seemingly impregnable edifice of the church had to face yet again several revolutionary movements which challenged its authority and which introduced profound changes that affected all areas of culture and religion in Europe. First among these movements is Renaissance which began in Italy in the closing years of the Middle Ages in the second half of the 14th century. It was a kind of transitional period between the medieval world and the modern world. It began with the revival of Greek classic learning, sculpture, architecture, etc. This was the time of the discovery of new continents, new inventions such as paper and printing. Renaissance resulted in a series of social, political, and intellectual transformation affecting European culture. As the church and the Holy Roman Empire began losing their influence on the intellectuals and gradually failed to provide a stable and unifying framework for the organization of spiritual and material life to the people, the city-states and national monarchies began asserting their influence. It was also the time of the development of national languages, and the break up of the old feudal structures.

Renaissance gave birth to an intellectual movement called Humanism. It was initiated by secular scholars rather than by the scholar-clerics who had dominated medieval intellectual life and had developed the Scholastic philosophy. Humanism emphasized the dignity of human person. In place of the medieval ideal of a life of penance as the highest and noblest form of human activity, humanism urged men and women to free themselves from moral controls imposed by religious orthodoxy. Humanism taught that human beings should live a full life here on earth and take interest in the beauties of nature, the knowledge of the natural sciences and the arts, and the effort to solve the problems of life. Humanism came to be cultivated by many men of letters, historians, statesmen and churchmen including clergy. The term "humanism" today refers to value systems that emphasize the personal worth of each individual but that may not necessarily include a belief in God.

Humanism considered human persons at the centre of the universe, limitless in their capacities for development, and led to the notion that humans should try to embrace all knowledge and develop their own

capacities as fully as possible. It taught that God has nothing to do with the lives of human beings. Accordingly, the way to happiness was to live without morals or scruples, seeking all pleasures and living only for the day.

Christian intellectuals and thinkers faced the challenge of humanism by affirming the humanistic nature of Christianity. According to them no real humanism is possible without recourse to the values of the Gospel. They emphasized the uniqueness of human beings created in the image of God. They also showed how the beauties God had created for human beings, could be utilized by them in their search for God.

Enlightenment, an intellectual movement concerning God. Reason,² nature and human beings gained wide acceptance in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries and challenged the widely held church teachings of scholastic-philosophy concerning the nature of God, world and human beings. It also challenged the teaching which had made reason as a tool of understanding but subordinated it to spiritual revelation and the revealed truths of Christianity. Enlightenment celebrated reason, the power of human beings to pursue unlimited knowledge, freedom and happiness and stressed that human beings have the capacity to improve the human condition.

Other movements and revolutions such as Scientific Revolution. Industrial Revolution. Protestant Revolution. American Revolution, provided added impetus to the intellectuals, artists and scientists to shape an alternate worldview where humans search for meaning in this life based on rationalism and science. The Scientific Revolution replaced the organicist view of the world with the view that the mechanical one in which the world can be manipulated like a machine. Industrial Revolution gave rise to the growth of technology, production centres for mass consumption leading to urbanization which disrupt the traditional societies due to movement of people to the urban centres in search of employment and better living standards. Growth of commerce has given rise to Capitalism and money economy replacing the traditional systems of trade and commerce. The Protestant Revolution challenged the monolithic authority of the Catholic Church in shaping religious and secular life. American and French revolutions promoted the values of individual freedom and democracy as the normal way of organizing social and political life.

These revolutionary movements in the long run challenged and weakened the authority of the church in the world and also laid the foundation for a methodology based on human reason, in various fields of enquiry such as the pure sciences as well as in the social sciences. According to this methodology, received authority, whether of Ptolemy in the sciences or the claims of the church based on divine revelation was to be subjected to the probing of human reason.

These movements have given rise to the culture of modernity which has offered a fresh challenge to the church and its mission. David Bosch suggests we need to shift our gears or paradigms to be relevant in our mission. He lists the following factors which offer challenges to the contemporary church and mission:

1. The realization that the west has lost its dominant position in the world and people want to be liberated from western domination in their religious, social and political life.
2. Individuals, communities and nations want to promote social justice and free people from oppression and exploitation by unjust social systems and from effects of exploitation based on race, caste or gender.
3. The notion of progress and development proposed by western industrialized societies of Europe is increasingly questioned by people of developing and third world countries.
4. There is a growing concern for protecting ecology or the common heritage of limited resources of the globe. People are more and more aware that they and their environment are mutually dependent.
5. Technological advance such as nuclear technology has given nations power to wipe out humanity and destroy the earth. Hence the need to promote peace and harmony among human beings as well as protection of environment are of great importance.
6. Theologies shaped in Europe should not claim superiority over other emerging theologies of the third world since the pluralism of cultures will shape theologies according to the genius of each culture.
7. Pluralism of religion is an accepted fact in today's world and so Christianity should shed its superiority complex and drop its claims of superiority over other religions. These realities make Bosch suggest a paradigm shift in our understanding and practice of mission taking into account the understanding of culture of modernity (Bosch 1992:188-9).

2. The Challenge of the Culture of Modernity

The revolutionary movements since renaissance have opened up unlimited vistas to gain knowledge based on scientific, rational approach to life. Due to the continuous search for knowledge, the amount of knowledge in the world continues to increase. This knowledge is made available to ever-wider consumers due to the rapid growth of communication technologies. This knowledge is transferred into various technologies to improve the quality of human life which in turn affects socio-political and economic changes affecting majority of people of the world today. Individuals as well as communities are affected in their values, attitudes, behaviour and beliefs. Modernity is the result of the transformation of an agrarian, rural society to an urban industrial one. Modernity brings about economic, social, political, religious and cultural changes. Modernization is a continuous and open-ended process through which modern society has mastered the most profound and far-reaching revolution in human history. It promoted a work ethic which valued all occupations as a religious vocation. It broke down the distinction between the church and the world and between the monastery and the market place.

Modernity is also linked to the development of modern scientific method of observation, hypothesis, experimentation, and verification which could be applied not only to nature but also to society. Eventually, toward the end of the 18th century, what would later be called social sciences - economics and sociology especially - began to find a place alongside natural sciences. The scientific outlook - sceptical, autonomous, applying fixed standards of observation to continually changing phenomena, to reach conclusions that were never to be considered more than provisional - became the hallmark of modern society.

Modernization leads to a process of individualization, differentiation or specialization, and abstraction. In concrete, the structures of modern society take the individual as their basic unit rather than, as with agrarian or peasant society, the group or community. Modern institutions are assigned the performance of specific, specialized tasks in a social system with a highly developed and complex division of labour in contrast with the family in an agrarian society, which is at once the unit of production, consumption, socialization, and authoritative decision-making. Modern society is governed by rational scientific thinking rather than led by the agents of particular individuals, such as a king or priest, endowed with divine or prescriptive authority, but act according to the rational and impersonal precepts formulated by "experts."

Underlying this phenomenon of growth are certain core components of the industrial system. These include technological change, whereby work is increasingly done by machines rather than by hand: the supplementing or replacement of human and animal power by inanimate sources of energy, such as coal and oil: the freeing of the labourer from feudal and customary ties and obligations, and the consequent creation of a free market in labour; the concentration of workers in single, comprehensive enterprises (the factory system); and a pivotal role for a specific social type, the entrepreneur.

Specifically, modernization involves a process of secularization: that is, it systematically displaces religious institutions, beliefs, and practices, substituting for them those of reason and science. Although secularization is a general tendency or principle of development in modern societies, this does not imply that religion is driven out altogether from society. Against a deep background of tradition, it inevitably leaves many religious practices in place and may even stimulate new ones. The majority of the population may hold, however insecurely, traditional religious beliefs alongside more scientific ones. There may even be, as in the India, waves of religious revivalism leading to religious fundamentalism as a reaction to the threatening effects of secularization involving large sections of the population.

Modernity gives rise to secularization. As modernity promotes rational scientific consciousness, secularization challenges the faith of religious individuals and communities. The Second Vatican Council expressed the origins of the secularization process rather optimistically in *Gaudium et Spes*:

Through their labours and natural endowments people have ceaselessly striven to better their lives. Today, however, especially with the help of science and technology, they have extended their mastery over nearly the whole of nature and continue to do so. Thanks primarily to increased opportunities for many kinds of interchange among nations, the human family is gradually recognizing that it comprises a single world community and is making itself so. Hence many benefits once looked for, especially from heavenly powers, are now enterprisingly produced by people for themselves (33).

Today the hold and influence of secularization on the lives, people can never be disregarded:

Secularization manifests itself when explanations of reality previously attributed to mythical or religious sources are shown to have rational ones. It is also manifest when the scientist takes over from the witch doctor, the psychologist assumes some previously priestly functions, or a technological discovery disintegrates a traditional explanation. ... The church is challenged to evangelize this new and emerging person who seems to need an experience of God

quite different from that of the past. Secularization is forcing us to find a new presence of God, a presence which permeates, integrates, energizes for action and which brings human and divine values into secular realities (O'Donnell 1991:118).

Secularization leads to the growing differentiation among the various elements of society, such as politics, religion, culture, science, economy, etc. These elements become autonomous from religion. From providing the main organizing principle and meaning system in society, religion becomes one among these sources providing meaning and intelligibility to individuals and communities. Religion is pushed more and more into the private sphere lacking moral influence on individuals and society.

Another effect of modernity and secularization is the growth of consumerism, competitive individualism and break up of family and community life. It facilitates urbanization and movements of peoples from the rural to urban areas leading to destruction of socio-cultural structures. It breeds the growing gap between rich and poor, exploitation of women and nature.

We may have thought that modernity is a western phenomenon which does not affect a traditional and religious country such as India or other Asian countries. Now it is evident that modernity has given birth to globalization which is going to affect each and even individual in one way or other. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into the positive and negative effects of globalization on culture.

Rise of fundamentalism in major religions together with the spread of new religious sects is also related to modernity and globalization. Fundamentalism seems to give a psychological security to orthodox believers who are afraid to face the rapid changes. It may also result when religion becomes accommodative to political groups who use religion to gain political control and power. We have the example of the rise of Hindutva in India which uses religion to promote the political ideology.

3. The Church's Response: Evangelization of Culture

Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* acknowledges that modernity has so profoundly changed the social and cultural aspects of the world that we can speak of a "new age of human history" where "the growth of social sciences, ethnical progress, communication technology, and the culture of today greatly develop critical judgment: customs and usages are becoming more and more uniform: industrialization, urbanization, and other causes which promote community living create a mass-culture from which are born new ways of thinking, acting and making use of leisure" (GS 54).

The Council accepts the fact that men and women are increasingly becoming conscious that they themselves are the authors and artisans of the culture of their community. Throughout the whole world there is a growing sense of autonomy as well as of responsibility. As there is also a growing thirst for a better world based on truth and justice, the Council urges the world to evolve a human culture "in such a way that it can both develop the whole human person and aid man in those duties to whose fulfillment all are called, especially Christians fraternally united in one human family" (56). "Christians, should work with all men in the building of a more human world to give to human culture its eminent place in the integral vocation of man."

But the Council is aware of the danger of "today's progress in science and technology can foster a certain exclusive emphasis on observable data, and an agnosticism about everything else. For the methods of investigation which these sciences use can be wrongly considered as the supreme rule of seeking the whole truth. By virtue of their methods these sciences cannot penetrate to the intimate notion of things. Indeed the danger is present that man, confiding too much in the discoveries of today, may think that he is sufficient unto himself and no longer seek the higher things."

The Council also accepts the positive values of the culture of modernity:

Among these values are included: scientific study and fidelity toward truth in scientific inquiries, the necessity of working together with others in technical groups, a sense of international solidarity, a clearer awareness of the responsibility of experts to aid and even to protect men, the desire to make the conditions of life more favourable for all, especially for those who are poor in culture or who are deprived of the opportunity to exercise responsibility. All of these provide some preparation for the acceptance of the message of the Gospel - a preparation which can be animated by divine charity through Him Who has come to save the world (57).

The Council cautions us. "Although the church has contributed much to the development of culture, experience shows that, for circumstantial reasons, it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching.... The recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which affect life and which demand new theological investigations" (62).

The Synod of Bishops continued the process of renewal of church's mission in the modern world. The

Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) by Pope Paul VI, the fruit of the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization gives a wider and deeper understanding of evangelization. Evangelization is no more geographical expansion or planting of churches but affecting cultures and ideas of every strata of humanity. It means transforming the people in their thinking and the value systems they hold. In other words it deals with what upsets mankind's criteria of judgment, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration, models of life that are in contrast with the Word of God (EN 19). Thus, evangelization is the renewal of humanity in all its aspects. Gospel must penetrate every strata of society and change both personal and collective consciences, which means hearts and structures (EN 59).

As every Christian is called to be a missionary, he or she is called to witness to faith which is a continuous process. Witnessing is not only personal, but also communitarian, based on communion of life and solidarity. Thus an evangelized community in its turn should become evangelizing community. This is the test of truth, and the touchstone of every effort of evangelization (EN 24).

Evangelii Nuntiandi speaks of renewal of humanity by "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" and "the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete *milieux* which are theirs" (EN 18). It implies "affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (EN 19). So in other words. "What matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures ... in a vital way. in depth and right to their very roots".... "Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel (EN 20).

Building on the riches inherited from the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI and the Synod of Bishops. John Paul II founded the Pontifical Council for Culture in 1982 . In his address to the members he spelt out the objective of the Council as "to give the whole Church, both its leaders and the faithful, a strong incentive to become aware of the duty that is incumbent upon all to listen carefully to modern man, not in order to approve all of his behaviour, but rather in order to discover first of all his latent hopes and aspirations." He thus encouraged the bishops, intellectuals and committed people in the church to "commit themselves with conviction to a dialogue among cultures" (JP II 1983).

In his address to the members of the Pontifical Council he admits, "The dialogue between the Church and the cultures of the world has assumed a vital importance for the future of the Church and of the world." He goes on to say that both "the evangelization of cultures and that of the defence of man and of his cultural advancement, demand that new pathways of dialogue between the Church and the cultures of our period be forged" (JP II 1983).

The Pontifical Council for Culture spells out its objectives and goals which can be taken up as the mission agenda by the church at the level of the local church:

1. To promote the encounter between the saving message of the Gospel and the cultures of our time, often marked by unbelief or religious indifference, in order that they may be increasingly open to the Christian faith, which creates culture and is an inspirational source of science. literature and the arts.
2. To manifest the church's pastoral concern in the face of the serious phenomena of the rift between the Gospel and cultures. It therefore promotes the study of the problem of unbelief and religious indifference found in various forms in different cultural milieux, inquiring into their causes and the consequences for Christian faith, in order to offer adequate support to the church's pastoral activity in evangelizing cultures and inculturating the Gospel.
3. To foster the church's relations with the world of culture, by undertaking appropriate initiatives concerning the dialogue between faith and cultures, and intercultural dialogue.
4. To establish dialogue with those who do not believe in God or who profess no religion, provided they are open to genuine cooperation. The Council organizes and participates in study congresses in this field by means of experts.
5. To co-operate with Catholic universities and international organizations of a historical, philosophical, theological, scientific, artistic or intellectual nature, and to promote co-operation amongst them.
6. To keep up with the activities of international bodies like UNESCO which are concerned with culture, the philosophy of science and human sciences and to keep up with the cultural policies and activities of governments throughout the world.
7. To facilitate church-culture dialogue at the level of universities and research centres, organizations of artists and specialists, researchers and scholars, and to promote meetings of note in and through these sectors of culture (Pontifical Council: 1999).

Conclusion

As "the split between Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time, just as it was in other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture or more concretely of cultures" (EN 20). The Pontifical Council of Culture suggests several pastoral approaches to culture "as a Christian cultural project" as to bridge this gap between the Gospel and Cultures. These include helping families to "safeguard its basic role as the primary place of humanization of the person and society"(PCC 2000:35). The primary pastoral objectives include "the concepts of men and women, of the family and of education, of school and of university, of freedom and of truth, of labour and of leisure, of the economy and of society, of the sciences and of the arts" (PCC 2000: 47).

In order to participate in the mission of evangelizing cultures, every Christian is invited by the church to an attitude of appreciation to understand and evangelize the contemporary world. For this one needs to shed the negative attitude which many Christians had before Vatican II which saw modernity as evil and cultivate an approach of critical discernment. We need to develop a methodology to analyze cultures both in themselves and in their moral and spiritual significance. The struggles of the church "will predominantly remain on the educational level, in training minds and consciences, but we must also teach the young generations that the culture of tomorrow depends on their common discernment, joint effort, and ability to mould cultural reality, as such" (Carrier 1993:62).

Notes

1 Middle Ages refer to Europe between 600 and 1500. Scholars coined the term in the 15th century to refer to the interval between the downfall of the classical world of Greece and Rome and its rediscovery at the beginning of their own century, a revival in which they felt they were participating. It began with the papacy of Gregory the Great and ends with the Muslim seizure of Constantinople (1453) and the Portuguese and Spanish voyages of discovery (Normal E. Thomas 1995: 16).

2 Reason in philosophy, the faculty or process of drawing logical inferences ("ratiocination." from Latin *ratiocinari*. "to use the reasoning faculty") is classified from Aristotle on as deductive (from generals to particulars) and inductive (from particulars to generals). In theology, reason, as distinguished from faith, is the human intelligence exercised upon religious truth whether by way of discovery or by way of explanation.

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