

## COMMUNION FOR MISSION

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### Abstract

*Gereja di Asia telah memilih motto : “persekutuan untuk misi.” Motto ini sangat tepat untuk dihidupi untuk membangun Gereja yang berwajah Asia. Keduanya, persekutuan dan misi, saling berkaitan. Persekutuan dengan Allah membawa serta tanggung jawab untuk membangun persekutuan dengan sesama manusia. Persekutuan sejati ini menuntun pada tugas perutusan Gereja, bukan untuk memperluas pengaruh Gereja sebagai lembaga, melainkan untuk menghadirkan diri sebagai sakramen universal keselamatan. Demikianlah misi dalam realitas terdalamnya adalah kesempatan untuk berbagi dalam kehidupan Trinitas yang selalu mencari kesatuan dengan manusia. Hanya dari persekutuanlah Gereja dapat dengan yakin melanjutkan perjalanannya, memikul tanggung jawab yang dipercayakan kepadanya untukewartakan kabar baik Kristus.*

**Keywords :** persekutuan, misi, Gereja Asia

### 1. Introduction: Asian Context and FABC Motto

In the closing address of the Asian Synod in 1998 in Rome, Julius Cardinal Darmaatmaja, then was the Archbishop of Jakarta, described the Synod as a search for “a fuller way for the Church to be rooted in Asia...to be a Church with a truly Asian face.”<sup>1</sup> What does ‘a truly Asian face’ means?

While harmony is highly esteemed in Asia, the reality of Asia can be very far from the expected ideal. On May 13<sup>th</sup> 1998, for example, on the day Cardinal

Darmaatmaja delivered the closing remark of the Asian Synod in Rome, his city, Jakarta, was in total chaos. Malls, stores, houses were looted and burned. The Chinese Indonesians became the target of the aggravation. Tens of thousand of Chinese Indonesians, many were Catholics, left the country for Singapore, USA or other countries, in panic for fear of being harassed.<sup>2</sup> In other part of Asia, Pakistan, a few days before the closing of this Asian Synod, on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1998, a well-loved Bishop John Joseph, shot himself to death as a protest to an anti- blasphemy law in Pakistan. The Bishop argued for an

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<sup>1</sup> See James Kroeger, *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia*, (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 8.

<sup>2</sup> “Many Christians say the attacks are motivated by envy and racism. Christians are seen as comparatively wealthy and linked with the Chinese population, a traditional scapegoat. Others, though, feel under threat for their religion itself. They point out that probably fewer than half of Indonesia's 6m Chinese are Christian out of a total of 6 m Roman Catholics and maybe as twice as many Protestants.”

See Economics.

<http://www.economist.com/node/114337>. The Volunteers Team for Humanity led by Fr. Sandyawan, SJ, recounts the data of the crimes that happen in the capital of Indonesia between 13-15 May 1998. The team was able to collect the data of 152 ladies in Jakarta who were victims of mass raping, and 20 among them died. See <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1314302/posts>.

injustice being experienced by a Christian who was punished death penalty due to an accusation of blasphemy, while the real case was a dispute over ownership of a piece of land.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the Asian Synod of 1998 was marked by the absence of the Bishops of China. The Vatican especially invited them to the Synod, but they were not able to come due to the restriction of the Chinese government.<sup>4</sup> These events were constant reminders of how difficult it is to be Church in Asia. Indeed, it is a continent marked by turbulent events, where diversity is not only a fact, but also a problem. The widespread poverty, corrupt government, mushrooming fundamentalism, and many other factors made the situation even more difficult. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, John Paul II rightly remembered that many Christians “are persecuted and denied their rightful place in society.”<sup>5</sup>

In the midst of all these difficulties of being a minority, what can the Church in Asia do? How can the Church carry the mission of proclaiming Christ in Asia? FABC Plenary Assembly in Vietnam, 10-16 December 2012, considering the difficult situation of plurality in Asia, insisted that the mission of the Church in Asia cannot be separated from the effort of building communion. Thus, echoing the message of *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Assembly argued that the motto of the Church in Asia should be: “communion for mission and the mission of communion.”<sup>6</sup> But what does this motto mean? Both ‘communion’ and ‘mission’ are theologically loaded concepts that need to be explained further.

This paper tries to understand this motto. To do so, this paper is divided into three parts. First it will try to review briefly the foundation of the understanding of

communion and mission in Vatican II: the Church as mystery. Second, it will try to elaborate on the concepts of mission and communion themselves in the theology of Vatican II and the reception in the Church in Asia. Lastly, it will try to see the more practical dimensions of mission and communion, namely, proclamation and dialogue. Proclamation and dialogue, however, also demand a certain understanding of truth that in the context of communion can be seen in terms of the ‘family of truth’.

## 2. ‘Mystery’: The Paradigm for Communion and Mission

It is interesting to see how the concept of communion and mission are developed in Vatican II. The development of these concepts is grounded in the renewed understanding of the Church. Among the most profound renewal on the understanding of the Church in Vatican II is the shift from an institutional understanding of the Church to the understanding of the Church as mystery. Yves Congar argued that prior to Vatican II the predominant concept of the Church in Catholic theology was “Christomonism.”<sup>7</sup> The term indicates the privileged attention given to Christological aspect of the Church, and thus to the visible and institutional dimension of the Church. Institutionalism is understood as a system in which the institutional element is treated as primary.<sup>8</sup>

This tendency towards institutionalism started since the time of Constantine when the authority of the Church gained secular power, way up to the time of Gregory VII. With Boniface VIII (1235-1303) the power of Papacy reached its height. In his conflict with Philip the Fair, King of France, he

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news\\_details.asp?NewsID=13726](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=13726).

<sup>4</sup> See EA, 3:2.

<sup>5</sup> EA, 8:1.

<sup>6</sup> Renewed Evangelizers X FABC Plenary Assembly

<sup>7</sup> Yves Congar, “Pneumatologie ou ‘Christomonisme’ dans la tradition latine?” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 45 (1969), 394-416, as quoted by Bruno Forte, *The Church Icon of the Trinity: An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, (Makati: St. Paul Publication, 1990), 17.

<sup>8</sup> See Forte, 17.

declared his Bull *Unam Sanctam*, which was remembered by its assertion that it is necessary for the salvation of every man to be subject to the Pope. For the Pope this necessarily meant that temporal power should be exercised “within, for, and at the direction of the priesthood with the Pope at its apex.”<sup>9</sup> With the concentration of power on the hands of the Pope and the clerics, came the abuse of power. Thus, just before Luther proclaimed his Reformation, the Church witnessed various demands for renewal in the Church, expressing dissatisfaction towards the hierarchy.<sup>10</sup>

As a reaction to the Reformation, this already strong concentration of power on the hand of the Pope is even strengthened with the more emphasis on the visible aspect of the Church. The most notable representative of these writers was Robert Bellarmine. His definition of the Church was expressed in terms of the visible element. He went as far as saying that internal belief is not necessary for one to be included as member of the Church since it was unverifiable. It would be sufficient that one professes his faith externally and receive the sacraments.<sup>11</sup>

With this background the Council took up the tension between the prevalent view of the Church as institution and the growing awareness of the Church as mystery. Vatican II clearly refused any reduction of the Church as purely visible or on the other hand, as totally spiritual. It rather proposed a renewed paradigm of the Church as mystery that springs from the Trinity, as “a people brought into unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup>

The vocation of the Church is expressed clearly in the first phrase of the constitution: *Lumen Gentium*, to become the “light of the nations.” Christ is the light of the nation and in Christ the Church is the

light of the nations. As the light of the nations, the Church is in the nature of mystery or translated into Latin, *sacramentum*. We should distinguish the two senses of the word sacrament. The narrower sense applied to the seven sacraments, which has been in general use since the scholastic period. The wider sense goes back further during the Patristic time that designates the Church as the universal sacrament of unity. In the final text, Vatican II adopted the ancient usage of the word and ascribed to the Church, “the value of a sacramental symbolism and instrumentality in the whole of the divine economy of salvation for all mankind and its history.”<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Vatican II derived the nature and history of the Church from its ultimate cause, the Trinity. The Church owes its genesis from the Trinity, modeled after the Trinity, and journeys towards a Trinitarian fulfillment in history.<sup>14</sup> In *LG 2* we see that the Church is born from a free act of God’s grace, from his election and his sovereign gift of grace. It is the Father himself who wills man to share in his own divine life. Since the beginning of creation, therefore, the Father had willed the existence of the Church. *LG 3* provides the Christological basis of the Church. Christ inaugurated on earth the Kingdom of God and revealed the mystery. The Church, therefore, signified the whole economy of salvation, which is the eternal plan and decree of God, to bring the world into the fellowship of salvation with himself in Christ.<sup>15</sup> *LG 4* emphasizes the importance of Pentecost as the second foundational event of the Church. Uniting the Church to Christ, the Spirit makes the Church a community of worship, and makes it one through *koinonia*, fellowship, and through the accomplishment

<sup>9</sup> David Stagaman, *Authority in the Church* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 100.

<sup>10</sup> See *Ibid.*, 107; Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964), 44-58.

<sup>11</sup> See Forte, 18.

<sup>12</sup> *LG*, 4:2.

<sup>13</sup> See Aloys Grillmeier, “The Mystery of the Church,” in *Commentary on the Document of Vatican II*, vol I, ed., Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Burns & Oates, 1967), 139-140.

<sup>14</sup> See Forte, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Grillmeier, 141.

of service.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Understanding Communion and Mission

The profound view of the Church as Mystery replaces the more institutional perspective of the Church and provides a basis to develop the notion of the Church as communion. This view, moreover, moves the fathers of Vatican II to see mission in a more profound view. This paper shall evaluate both concepts and points out their connections.

#### A. Communion

Building up on the notion of the Church as Mystery, communion emphasizes the Trinity as the foundation of ecclesiology. The Church is the very life of God, and since God's life is Trinitarian, the Church is also fundamentally Trinitarian. In the life of the Church, therefore, there should be unity, not in uniformity, but in diversity. Pneumatology, in particular, serves as a foundation of this communion. Communion is formed by the fellowship of the members of the Church animated by the Spirit. The Spirit penetrates the life of members of the Church without violating their freedom. He fosters communion among persons "by respecting and even stimulating their diversity."<sup>17</sup>

Communion in the documents of Vatican II means both, communion with God and communion among human persons, vertical and horizontal. On the vertical sense, the faithful are called to communion with God who is Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> On the horizontal

sense, communion is the internal bond between the faithful, brought about by the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> All the gifts, which serve as the aid to sanctification and truth given to the Church, are forces impelling communion.<sup>20</sup> The communion among the faithful is expressed through the "union and unity in the teaching of the apostles, and fellowship in the breaking of bread and prayer."<sup>21</sup> This communion does not lie in uniformity, but in diversity within the Church on different levels, wherein each part contributes for the good of the whole Church.<sup>22</sup> This communion forms the Church, the Body of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

In 1971 Paul VI declared that the Church as communion is "the definition that is most accessible, essential and moral."<sup>24</sup> On other occasion in 1978 Paul VI pointed out that "the Church is a communion. It is a community '*sui generis*', at once spiritual and visible."<sup>25</sup>

The Synod of Bishops of 1985, which was convened to evaluate the reception of Vatican II after twenty years, strongly emphasized the importance of the notion of the Church as communion. The Final Report of the Synod describes communion as "the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents."<sup>26</sup> This Synod stresses the reality of unity in diversity, or in the word of the document, pluriformity. For the Church to be truly Catholic, there is a need for pluriformity, wherein variety becomes a source of richness and fullness, rather than oppositions. Communion calls for participation and co-responsibility at all levels of the Church's life. This should be understood and applied in diverse ways and in diverse areas. Various segments of the Church should foster collaboration in view

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<sup>16</sup> See Grillmeier, 142.

<sup>17</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. II (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 17.

<sup>18</sup> See *GS* 19:1, *UR* 7:3, 15:1.

<sup>19</sup> See *LG* 13:2, *LG* 4:1, 8-9; *GS* 32:4; *DV* 10:1; *UR* 2:2.

<sup>20</sup> See *LG* 8:2.

<sup>21</sup> *LG* 13:1. See also on Eucharist and Communion, *LG* 3:1, 7:2; *UR* 2:1.

<sup>22</sup> See *LG* 13:3, *LG* 7:3.

<sup>23</sup> See *GS* 32:4.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI, "General Audience of 21 July 1971," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30, 174 (1971), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Paul VI, "General Audience of 28 July 1978," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 32, 436 (1976), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Final Report, II, C.1. in Pedro Achutegui, *The Extraordinary Synod* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 1986), 107.

of service to the Church. The hierarchy, on the other hand, should foster their involvements.<sup>27</sup>

CDF also came up with a document addressing the issue of communion in 1992. In a letter to the Bishops regarding communion, CDF said that the concept of communion “appears with a certain prominence in the text of the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>28</sup> It saw the concept as “very suitable for expressing the core of the Mystery of the Church, and can certainly be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology.”<sup>29</sup> For the CDF, it is the task of every member of the Church, especially the Pope and Bishops, to foster unity because all are called to build up the Church.<sup>30</sup>

In the final analysis, the concept of communion views the Church as both divine and human. It does not reduce the Church to a merely human society, since communion is originated from the Trinity: the Church is “a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> “The Church comes from the Trinity, is fashioned after the image of the Trinity, and journeys towards Trinitarian fulfillment of history.”<sup>32</sup> At the same time, communion is not merely a spiritual reality that ignores the human element of the Church. Institution plays an important role as the manifestation of God’s grace. Like the incarnation, where God assumed human form to save humanity, the Church takes the form of human society to be present in the world. Analogous to Christ who is the fundamental sacrament, the Church too is in the nature

of sacrament. The Church is a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all men. This sacramentality of the Church lies at the heart of communion ecclesiology.<sup>33</sup>

## B. Mission

Prior to Vatican II, the Church tended to view mission in terms of planting the Church in the foreign soil. The word mission itself seems to have first appeared in a letter of the second Jesuit general J. Laynez (1558). During that time, the mission of spreading the Gospel was associated with the secular power. Salvation was seen exclusively in terms of the actual membership of the Church, the narrow understanding of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.<sup>34</sup> There were great missionaries who travelled thousands of miles away to convert the native into Catholicism, like St. Francis Capillas to China, or St. Francis Xavier to Moluccas. Aside from preaching Christ, missions were also done in terms of education and healthcare.

While this perspective regarding mission is good, it was not without danger. This perspective easily leads to juridicalism and clericalism. Juridicalism views the “authority in the Church rather closely on the pattern of jurisdiction in the secular state, and greatly amplifies the place of law and penalty.”<sup>35</sup> Clericalism views “all power is conceived descending from the pope through the bishops and priest, while at the base the faithful people play a passive role.”<sup>36</sup> It is not a surprise then that the schema on mission at the beginning of

<sup>27</sup> Final Report, II, C.2, in Ibid., 107-108.

<sup>28</sup> CDF, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church understood as*

*Communion* 1, <http://www.tcrnews2.com/cdf.html>, 1992. On Communion, the letter refers to these documents of Vatican II: LG 4, 8, 13-15, 18, 24-25, DV 10, GS 32, and UR 2-4, 14-15, 17-19, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>30</sup> See Ibid., 15.

<sup>31</sup> LG 4:2.

<sup>32</sup> Forte, 29.

<sup>33</sup> See LG 1:1; Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 81

<sup>34</sup> See Christopher O'Donnell, *Ecclesia* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 304.

<sup>35</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 1987), 39.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Vatican II was more “a summary and some revision of Canon Law as it applied to mission rather than a theological reflection on mission.”<sup>37</sup> *Ad Gentes* (AG) the final document of Vatican II on mission, presents a different perspective of mission, which is based on the notion of the Church as mystery.<sup>38</sup> This grounding on mystery has several important consequences on the understanding of mission.

First, in AG, following the path set by LG, mission has its foundation on the Trinity. AG asserts that the Church, by its very nature is missionary. It is something new, because mission, then, is not seen only as something that the Church does, but is at the heart of the Church. Parallel with LG 2-4, AG 2-4 sees the Church as willed by the Father, and has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Second, AG meaningfully presents mission as an obedient respond to God who continuously extending His invitation for man to share in His life. Vatican II in its various documents sees revelation not only as a set of truth, but primarily of truth that is alive, God wanting to communicate himself to man. “God decided to enter into the history of mankind in a new and definite manner.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, *Dei Verbum*, points out:

In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which, through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature.<sup>40</sup>

Not only that He reveals himself through incarnation, He also sends His Spirit through Pentecost that He may remain with man forever.<sup>41</sup> The Spirit leads man to be

closer to Him by “moving the heart and converting it to God who opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.”<sup>42</sup>

Third, in relation to the how of the mission, AG encourages missionaries not only to teach but also “to give example of life”, so that the Church can be “fully present to all men.”<sup>43</sup> Mission, therefore, is not only about the proclamation of *truth about God*, but more deeply, mission is about inviting the people to experience God through the presence of the Church. *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, the exhortation of Pope Paul VI on mission confirms this. Mission is “first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, to bear witness that in his Son, God loved the world.”<sup>44</sup>

### C. Communion for Mission

At this point, we have clarified both concepts, communion and mission, and from the clarification, we can see how the two concepts are fundamentally related to one another in several ways. First, the renewed concepts on communion and mission are grounded on the new awareness of the Church as mystery that is Trinitarian. Second, communion is both vertical and horizontal. The communion with God entails the responsibility of building communion with others. Thus genuine communion leads to mission. Third, mission is rooted not so much in the desire to expand the influence of the Church as an institution, sometimes perceived also in terms of secular power, but more in the desire to truly become a universal sacrament of salvation. Mission in its deepest reality is an opportunity to share in the life of the Trinity who always seeks unity with man.

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Bevans, *Church Teaching on Mission*. Internet.

<sup>38</sup> Several theologians like Yves Congar, Joseph Ratzinger, Karl Rahner, under the leadership of SVD Superior General, Johannes Schütte worked out the draft of the final document. See *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> AG, 3:1.

<sup>40</sup> DV, 2:1.

<sup>41</sup> AG, 4:1.

<sup>42</sup> DV, 5:1.

<sup>43</sup> AG, 5:1.

<sup>44</sup> EN, 26:1.

*Ecclesia in Asia* (EA), under a chapter entitles, “Communion and Mission Go Hand in Hand”, captures the connection between communion and mission clearly:

It is an essential demand of life in Christ that whoever enters into communion with the Lord is expected to bear fruit: "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (*Jn* 15:5). So true is this that the person who does not bear fruit does not remain in communion: "Each branch of mine that bears no fruit [my Father] takes away" (*Jn* 15:2). Communion with Jesus, which gives rise to the communion of Christians among themselves, is the indispensable condition for bearing fruit; and communion with others, which is the gift of Christ and his Spirit, is the most magnificent fruit that the branches can give. In this sense, communion and mission are inseparably connected."<sup>45</sup>

The above passage clearly says that communion should result in mission. A truly spiritual person will have positive impact on the persons around him. The vertical communion produces effects on the horizontal communion. Communion without mission is not a genuine one. It is a superficial relation with God, where religion gives good feeling but having no horizontal relevance. Karl Marx, then, can be true in the sense that religion is a kind of opium that makes some addicted and cannot live in the reality of the world.

On the other hand, true mission is always rooted in a certain communion with God. True mission is born not only out of personal desire, but also more importantly, out of love of God and His people. Mission

without communion is not a genuine mission. This points to those who use religion simply to satisfy their personal desires. Missionaries then could see mission as a certain way to satisfy their personal needs, sometimes selfish, and see mission as a personal achievement, or a career, hungering even for the worldly recognition. Communion and mission “interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, so that *communion represents both the source and fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.*”<sup>46</sup>

#### 4. Contextualizing Communion and Mission

In the Asian context, communion and mission are two concepts, which are not easy to apply considering the situation. In this part, this paper shall take into consideration particularly the diversity of religions.

##### A. Proclamation and Dialogue

At the heart of mission is the proclamation of Jesus. This is a mandate of Jesus himself. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (*Mt* 28:19) In the context of Asia, this mandate becomes even more important since only about 3% of the total Asian populations are Catholics.<sup>47</sup> Before Vatican II, mission is seen primarily in terms of converting people into Catholicism. It was a conviction then that one should be a Catholic in order to be saved.

Vatican II comes up with a more appreciative understanding of non-Christian religions. It makes some positive statements about other faiths. LG asserts

<sup>45</sup> EA, 24:3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> James H. Kroeger, *The Future of the Asian Churches* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 4.

that, “those who have not received the gospel are related to the people of God in various ways.”<sup>48</sup> It explicitly states “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart...may achieve eternal salvation.”<sup>49</sup> Vatican II ‘*semina verbi*,’ the seed of the Word: “truth and grace among peoples are a secret presence of God, so to speak.”<sup>50</sup> “Whatever good and truth is found in them is considered by the Church as the preparation of the gospel.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy in these religions.”<sup>52</sup>

These affirmations point to the presence of some salvific elements even in other religion. Robert Schreiter argues that these salvific elements were indeed posited and affirmed, yet not really explained. Thus, it remains a debate, which has not yet reached its conclusion.<sup>53</sup> This understanding, however, poses a serious question in Asia. Considering the tensions, divisions and conflicts caused by the plurality in Asia, plus the desire of the Asians to live harmoniously with each other, some Asians pose the question whether mission need to impose Catholic identity on people who has their own beliefs and cultures? Does mission need to proclaim Christ, and thus to impose our truth on their truth?

*Redemptoris Missio*, 25 years after Vatican II, an encyclical of Pope John Paul II, responds to this situation, “to clear up doubts and ambiguities regarding missionary activity *ad gentes*.”<sup>54</sup> While affirming the teaching of Vatican II, the possibility of salvation outside of explicit faith in Christ,<sup>55</sup> the Pope is strong in emphasizing the centrality of Christ:

No one can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ's one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey toward God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.<sup>56</sup>

In many parts of the encyclical, Pope John Paul II elaborates the importance of Christ in the history of salvation. Chapter II of RM explains the essential connection between the Kingdom of God and the mission of Jesus. The Pope insists, “Christ not only proclaimed the kingdom, but in Him the kingdom itself became present and was fulfilled.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, while the Spirit is “indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church’s mission,”<sup>58</sup> the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, “the same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church.”<sup>59</sup>

The Spirit, moreover, leads us to a better understanding of responding to the presence of other religion. Thus, there is a need of dialogue with other religions that is based on twofold respect: “Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man.”<sup>60</sup> Dialogue, therefore, has an important place in the

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<sup>48</sup> LG 16:1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> AG 9:2.

<sup>51</sup> LG 16:1 see LG 17, AG 3.

<sup>52</sup> NA 2:2.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Schreiter, *Challenges Today to Mission “Ad Gentes”*, [http://sedosmission.org/old/eng/schreiter\\_1.htm](http://sedosmission.org/old/eng/schreiter_1.htm)

<sup>54</sup> RM 2:4.

<sup>55</sup> See RM 10:1.

<sup>56</sup> RM, 5:4.

<sup>57</sup> RM, 18:2.

<sup>58</sup> RM, 21:2.

<sup>59</sup> RM, 29:2.

<sup>60</sup> RM, 29:1.



proclamation of Christ.<sup>61</sup> But dialogue should not be confused with the proclamation of Christ. The Pope elucidates this matter:

In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.<sup>62</sup>

In the context of Asia, dialogue is highly esteemed. In the Asian Synod in Rome, 1998, various Bishops of Asia stresses the fact that Asian's inclination towards harmony cannot but see dialogue as the means for mission. Bishop Teodoro Bacani of Manila said, "Evangelization must begin within the context of true dialogue which flows into mutual service of the common good."<sup>63</sup> Cardinal Paul Pham of Vietnam pointed out, "The evangelization of Asia is primarily a dialogue of life with all believers, the experience of which already bring them closer to God."<sup>64</sup> Cardinal Peter Seichi of Japan argued that the orientation of integral evangelization in Asia is dialogue.<sup>65</sup>

## **B. Towards a Family of Truth**

Truth has always a special place in the life of the Church. Jesus himself says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John 14:6)

Truth is supposed to be life giving, truth is supposed to liberate, truth is supposed to help people find meaning. The Church sees itself as having the responsibility of the *diakonia of the truth*.<sup>66</sup> Yet, it is not an easy task, especially because different people, culture, or religion, claim to possess different truth. Thus, truth that is supposed to unite, often times become a source of division. There were occasions when the Church too was not free from approaching truth in a fundamentalist way, not having a listening ear for those who are different, the non Catholic religions. There were times when disputes over the claim of truth led to the impositions of power. The schism between the east and the west, or of Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism serve as witnesses the dark history of disputes over the claim of truth.

It is important, therefore, for the Church to develop a way if looking at truth in such a way that--without being compromising--is more open to the claim of truth of other religions. It is an on going process. But at the moment, there are positive signs that make us hopeful of finding a more open way of looking at truth. Michael Fuss speaks of a possible way of understanding the different strains of truth called "family of truth."<sup>67</sup> Taking family as the main analogy, the family of truth allows people to be different from one another, and yet, there is a situation of mutual respect.

*Gaudium et Spes* uses the idea the whole human being as one family when it speaks of the effort to understand those who are different from us: "let us take pains to pattern ourselves after the Gospel more exactly every day, and thus work as brothers in rendering service to the human family. For, in Christ Jesus this family is called to the family of the sons of God."<sup>68</sup> This vision, after all, is rooted in a deeper

<sup>61</sup> The Pope speaks clearly and elaborately on dialogue. See RM 55-57.

<sup>62</sup> RM 57:1.

<sup>63</sup> James H. Kroeger, *Asia Church in Mission* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1999), 70.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> FR, 2:1.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Fuss, *Dialogical Theology of Religions*, 2.02

<sup>68</sup> GS 92:3.

belief that “the different ways in which God, acting in history, cares for the world and for mankind are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they support each other and intersect. They have their origin and goal in the eternal, wise and loving counsel whereby God predestines men and women “to be conformed to the image of his Son”<sup>69</sup> The Spirit, after all, works in each person in various cultures yet all are belonging to one human family, summoning everyone to the same destiny of salvation.<sup>70</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Being a Church with an Asian face? Certainly it is a face, which is full of colors, not always bright, not always in harmony, but one that is hopeful. It is hopeful not so much because the Church sees Herself with all Her great achievements, but because the Lord is present in Her. It is only out of communion that the Church can confidently continue journeying, carrying the responsibility entrusted to Her to proclaim the good news of Christ.

Church in Asia rightly has chosen the motto of “communion for mission”, indeed communion and mission cannot be separated, for they interpenetrate each other. Fostering communion and mission is indeed a huge task, especially in the context of Asia. Yet, as the Bishops in Vietnam says, “The “small flock” of Jesus should not be timid or fearful among Asia’s billions, more than 60% of the world’s population...He journeys with us just as he did with his disciples on the way to Emmaus.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> VS 45:2.

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