

A New Approach to Mission and Evangelization

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Mission and Evangelization: A Paraphrase

Today, one of the most urgent problems that regards the thorny question of mission and evangelization is not that their inner core has changed. That inner core is and remains the turning of the human being to God in Jesus Christ. The problem is the explicitation or the rewording of it in this era of pluriformity of cultures and religions. We have to go courageously in search for a new comprehensive view that is realistic, acceptable and theologically correct. Many Christians, lay people, native priests and expatriate missionaries and other religious persons seem to be paralyzed when asked: "What do you think mission and evangelization really are?" This inability seems to be all the more painful when we point to the fact that Western Europe and North America have become very fast a religious desert, that missionary activity seems to have failed largely in Asia and has created unwillingly strange syncretisms in large parts of Latin America and Africa.

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Being a missionary in Japan and a rather frequent visitor to other parts of the Far East, I share the opinion of many missionary Christians that in one way or another we missed the boat. When trying to bring into many countries *our form* of Christianity, it seems that our religion is not exactly what attracts people. Hence, the question comes up: 'Is it not better to concentrate faithfully and earnestly on the message of Jesus instead of preaching the religion called Christianity—which is western in its present day form—, of seeking numerical and geographical expansion of the Church, saving souls from eternal damnation, etc.?'

Though we should not be focussing too much on what is called a successful career as missionaries, foreign and native, there are a lot of motivations moving us to the innermost core of ourselves; all of us want to be good missionaries. But we seldom ask the question: though 1994 is no more the 15th or the 16th century, why do we stick to the mission theological principles of bygone ages that were once commonly accepted and why should we not move forwards to a new hermeneutical interpretation of the message of Jesus? Why do we not contextualize it better or anew? Are we so blind that we do not even see that the end of the 20th century is indeed no more the so-called golden era of the catholic mission of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century?

Most of the missionary personnel experiences painfully the lack of a clear view of mission and evangelization and this is also the case of Japan that is very much at the same time a modern and conservative country.

In this article, I will try to come to a preliminary new approach without asking my readers too much to accept everything as unchangeable definitions that risk too easily to be elevated to the level of dogmatics or worse to the level of dogmaticism.

The reason why is that dogmaticism has been paralyzing and driving us into theological, pastoral and missiological positions that are by no means defensible today.

The paraphrase I would like to come up with has two parts and runs as follows.

In the first place, mission and evangelization can be considered as a *dialogical encounter process between the message of Jesus Christ about the Kingdom-of-God-for-us*. This encounter calls for a second factor, namely the total human situation. Coming back to the first part

we have this as a statement of faith: Jesus Christ became through his incarnation, his lifestyle, deeds, words, sufferings, death and resurrection the prototype of this Kingdom. In him, it is already realized. He is the *new man* through whose person the Kingdom has become already visible. Proclaiming his joyful message in *whatever way* (not only through words) has to be called evangelization or brings the good news into all the layers of human existence and all the strata of society. Evangelization takes care that people can see in him what they *can become*. In him is realized already what we are *not yet fully*. It follows that mission is then simply to be *sent to evangelize*.

I think that we can find in this approach the answer to the essential questions regarding mission and evangelization today. In this paraphrase we are able to make a considerable shift from a narrow ecclesiocentrism, the salvation of poor souls from hell, the conversion of the whole world, the priority of building up church structures, the conquest of the world by Christianity, etc. The whole missionary endeavor is first of all geared towards the Kingdom-of-God-for-us, human beings.

In the second place, we have to consider the human situation which is always of a cultural nature. At the heart of a culture are sheltering fundamental interior dimensions or in-depth dimensions, especially the sensitivity to an openness to what goes beyond our present day condition: experiences of brokenness, dependence, longings to reach out to a situation that is better than what we are today, expectations of the future, etc. We could call this a religious experience of the Holy or the Sacred or whatever we can think of under this category. Therefore, the religious category is inherently human.¹ It is from these in-depth dimensions that structured religions arise. Once human beings exteriorize their religious experiences —and they always do because of their social nature— they organize them into loose or strict systems; they formulate them in philosophies, ideologies, views of life, etc.

There is something more to be said about this encounter process. People always tend to take their culture as a vantage point from which they can determine themselves and the others. They see themselves as

¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a world theology. Faith and the comparative history of religion*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1981, 47-55.

members of a community whose language they speak and whose style of life they accept. They give names to this attitude of measuring everything by their own standards; they say that they are Japanese, Chinese, Frenchmen, etc. This allows us to speak of ethnocentrism as an attitude common to all human beings and it is clear that we cannot do so without referring to cultural relativity. Consequently, there does not exist a world culture as if this were embraced by everybody and, by the same token, a world culture is not in the making. The totality of the human communities embraces a multitude of cultural forms in which ethnocentrisms come to express and to oppose themselves.² We may not forget, however, that when the term ethnocentrism is used here, it has no negative meaning at all. It simply expresses the different ways that many peoples use to perceiving and expressing the reality.

It follows that the encounter process must have a strong dialogical character; the message of Jesus and the specific Japanese, Korean, Chinese, etc. total cultural situation with their respective religions and philosophies must really meet each other and compenetrates each other. If a real encounter process takes place, inculturation follows all by itself. As a matter of fact, the message will gradually re-unfold itself from within the in-depth dimensions of each particular culture and the result will be a new reality or a new Japanese, Korean, Thai, etc. experience of christian life.³

Encounter of religions

Are our traditional views or definitions of what we call religions still valid? Are these definitions still useful tools in the midst of this world where traditional religions, all kinds of philosophies and new views meet each other at the crossroads of life? Gone are the days that being a christian in Western Europe was a natural social phenomenon. Half a century ago, in Europe everybody was a christian and this has contributed to the continuation of the validity of the idea of infant

² Wilhelm Dupre, "Ethnocentrism and the challenge of cultural relativity," *Concilium*, 135 (1980), 3-13.

³ Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the whole society on inculturation," *Studies in the International Apostolate of the Jesuits*, 7, n.1 (1978), 1-2.

baptisms. It was taken for granted that a baby, when growing up into adulthood, was constantly surrounded, fed and instructed by means of the Christian heritage, the life and the ideas of christian relatives and of the larger society.

This is no more the case today. Infant baptism is still a fact but for many parents it has become a transition rite devoid of religious meaning. It is very well possible that the newly baptized baby will no more come in contact with the Church or the christian community before its first holy communion or later with solemn communion; it is equally possible that marriage and funeral will be blessed by a christian ritual. Transition rites are still more or less accepted but their meaning has been emptied. Really, being a christian in the West means to belong to the diaspora, the remnant. But this diaspora idea is a myth when it comes to Asia where the Church was never overwhelmingly present, except in the Philippines. Asia was and is always a melting pot of many religions and philosophies; it is also more religious than Europe and North America. And nowadays, these continents come into nearer contact with Eastern ideas. Also the traditional Asian religions, their New religions and many other religious groupings are travelling all over the world.

If westerners are still attracted to religion, they can make a choice among many possibilities. The religious market place has many shops! It is indeed true that for the first time in history religions and philosophies are squarely facing each other. They are present at all the crossroads of the world.

I think that also today the time has come to reconsider the notion and the meaning of religion. We should certainly not define it in terms of monotheism that fit only Judaism, Christianity and Islam; also not in terms of the two great monistic systems of Buddhism and Hinduism. A new paraphrase is needed which I do not know how to name it. The reason why is that there are lots of philosophies, like Confucianism and Taoism, that should be included in a new understanding of the religious phenomenon.

If there is one historical period that can be clearly discerned as having a multi-religious character, then it is certainly ours. I would propose that any view of world, life, and the ultimate issues of life is of a religious category and can enter into the dialogical encounter process with the message of Jesus.

All the religious phenomena mentioned above, are ways of salvation. They are not just human inventions and human rebellion against God. They have their origin in God and belong to the category of divine revelation. To be more concrete, God calls upon human beings in many ways and human beings answer to this call from within their own ethnocentric cultural context. A continuous going back and forth between call and answer, answer and call, is going on, even unconsciously. And when we do not answer to the call but prefer to remain silent, God even calls through our silence.

Some countries are really rallying points of religions. More than any other nation, Japan has been having contact with many of them and the interesting fact is that most of them are still present and blended with each other. Japan has built Shinto upon its pre-historic religious consciousness of shamanism, ancestor and nature worship, etc. much of which it has in common with Korea; it absorbed into it gradually Buddhism, Confucianism, philosophical and popular Taoism and even elements of Christianity. In their turn, religions and philosophies of non-Japanese origin swallowed up basic Shinto ideas. The net result is that the basic religious attitudes of the Japanese are of a varied and mixed nature. Japan in the past accepted everything, captured it, reinterpreted it and is still continuing to do so with modern religious influences. It has become famous for its ability to keep together and to honor continuity with its own tradition and modernity.⁴

The example of Japan shows the necessity of a total dialogue with people of many different faiths. Could then mission and evangelization not become something like offering honestly and humbly Jesus' message to people of other faiths and accepting the values of their religions and philosophies? This leads to being evangelized when evangelizing. Mission and evangelization become a mutual enrichment, a gracious interrelatedness with non-Christians and leads directly to inculturation. In the future, this is going to change Christianity on a worldwide scale and very surprising but beautiful ways of being Christian and being Church will be coming up in non-western situations. There is no need either to be afraid of syncretism. This term and its use have been heavily burdened in the West with negative connotations.

⁴ Hori Ichiro, *Folk religion in Japan. Continuity and change*. Univ. of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, 1968.

Some Important Questions with Regard to Mission and Evangelization

Pope Paul VI's fine apostolic exhortation "The evangelization of the men of our time" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*) has led to a more frequent use of the word evangelization than mission. However, let there be no misunderstanding. The two terms do not cover each other perfectly. Personally, I have no objection to the inter-changeable use of both terms on the condition that we do not forget that mission refers more to the fact of being sent to evangelize and that evangelization refers directly to the content of the message of Jesus that has to be spread.

With this in mind, together with other changes in modern Vatican and post-Vatican mission theology and in our understanding of the cultural situation of the peoples, we can proceed now to point out some urgent questions that emerge when engaging in missionary activity. Not many explanations are needed. The questions speak for themselves.

Firstly, a new view of mission and evangelization is needed. The major shift is from ecclesio-centrism to christo-centrism and theo-centrism. The goal of mission is not the Church but the Kingdom of God that appeared in Jesus Christ and that has to be realized for God's glory and our glorification.

Secondly, mission and evangelization do not find their origin in the Church but in the trinitarian God who sends his Son into this world; this Son is Jesus of Nazareth who proclaims, dies and resurrects. Father and Son bestow us with the Spirit who pushes Jesus' mission forward to completion.⁵

Thirdly, the Church has no mission but is mission. She receives from Jesus Christ as first and most important task to continue his mission in the power of the Spirit.⁶

Fourthly, each christian who is taken up into the community around the Risen Lord Jesus is a missionary christian. He/she must

⁵ Decree on the Church's missionary activity, 2-4; Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 1-4.

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the power of the Spirit. A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*. Harper & Row, New York, 1977.

proclaim in whatever way the joyful tidings of the kingdom of God. Catechetical instruction, homilies, other explanations of the christian faith have to emphasize this. Just like mission is not an appendix of the Church but her core, in the same way being a missionary in one's own situation is not an additional task but belongs to a normal christian life.

Fifthly, mission and evangelization have as goal to attract others more deeply to Jesus so that communities around his Risen person, the ideal and perfect *new man*, come to life. This process asks for conversion or *metanoia*. It does not mean that the prospective christian has to reject everything that belongs to his past. On the contrary, conversion means a change of mind, a turning to God's Kingdom that has come and is always coming in Jesus. In this turning to, all the values of one's previous situation do not have to be rejected but have to be brought into the explicit acceptance of Jesus Christ. These values were already under God's revelation and should not be rejected as bad but are avenues to build up a more beautiful christian life.

Sixthly, the encounter process of the message of Jesus with the total situation results in the re-unfolding of the message from within the in-depth dimensions of the cultures. As said already, inculturation becomes a fact in all its aspects. The way of being together around the Risen Lord is no more imported from the West but grows at the spot; catechetical and theological reflection will be no more Western but Japanese, Zairian, Latin American, etc. Do we know what exists already in this field in Japan?⁷ Personal and social moral attitudes are not prefixed in the West but are valued from within the existing cultural pattern in a critical way. The message of Jesus acts like a catalyzer. Liturgical symbols change where western symbols have been imported and remain too easily accepted by ordained ministers and faithful. Also in Japan, we have still a long way to go from western liturgical texts and symbols to prayers and signs that emerge from the Japanese sensibility. Another example is social and personal moral responsibility. The Japanese group consciousness praises harmony and peace and rejects hard opposition and contradiction. The individual is not strictly speaking an *Ego* or a subject that faces other *Egos*

⁷ Ernest L. Piryns, "Japanese Theology and Inculturation," *Journal of ecumenical studies*, 24:4 (Fall, 1987), 535-556.

or objects. There is not so much an I versus a You but there is first of all the We or the group. All the relationships are relationships from subject to subject and this can take away the sense of personal responsibility and bring instead collective responsibility. Catechesis and counseling can correct this moral group consciousness by a more personal responsibility.

Seventh, empathic knowledge and in-feeling of the native culture, religions and philosophies are necessary. Are expatriate missionaries conscious enough that the Japanese people are the silent witnesses to the shinto-buddhistic background with its admiration for natural beauty, the shinto optimistic tendency to ever growing perfection, human frailty and contingency coming from Buddhism, the inclination to authoritarian discipline of the confucian heritage and even the sometimes mystical inclination due to contacts with philosophical Taoism? These feelings are perhaps not so directly visible among the youngsters and more present among the older generation. But both youngsters and older people participate in the same heritage. Continuity, so typical for Japan, lives in all of them. Could a certain lack of knowledge and sensitivity not be one of the factors that prevents the christian message to become accepted more easily?

Eighth, all of us, Western and Japanese missionaries should be more conscious of our Western educational upbringing. Our seminary formation, our philosophical and theological studies are Western. We should be able to take a certain cautious distance from Western categories. Terms like secularization, materialism, lack of spirituality or too much attention to the spiritual reality, naturalism, amoralism, etc. have not the same background in East and West. How can we say that Japan is a secularized society in the same way Europe and North American are secularized when the conditions to bring about this phenomenon were absent or least not fully present? An interpretation, starting at the spot itself and not with foreign imported categories could reveal very surprising results.

Nineth, Japan is modern and conservative at the same time. This undeniable conservatism has very deep roots in Japanese history and the Japanese psyche. The negative side of this conservatism is a great sense of pride, narrow particularism and sometimes even racism. The message of Jesus becomes here the critical factor in order to overcome narrow particularism and to contribute to the bringing about a greater sensitivity to universalism.

Tenth, Japanese and foreign missionaries are in need of more mutual respect. The foundation for a greater mutual acceptance is the theology of the communion among the local Churches. Real inter-Church assistance seems to be a rather difficult thing.

Mission: Emphasis on Dialogical Encounter

Missiology and missionary activity must inculcate the pre-suppositions, motivations, methods and ways to spread the message of Jesus about the Kingdom through the Church and the Christians.

It is amazing how Catholic mission theology has changed since Vatican II and many more changes are in the making.⁸ The council itself has reaffirmed the position of the Church in the midst of a world in full transition and it is impossible that our mission theological reflection should not be affected by this evolution. As said already, a good number of old views of mission have disappeared. Above all, a new attitude towards the other religions has been developed. Important documents, giving a lot of support to this new attitude are the "Dogmatic constitution on the Church" (*Lumen gentium*), the "Decree on the Church's missionary activity" (*Ad gentes*) and the "Declaration of the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions" (*Nostra Aetate*).

The result is a renewed understanding of mission and evangelization. It centers no more directly on the Church but on God and the Kingdom—theocentric and Kingdom-centered. This has led us already to a new paraphrase of mission and evangelization in the first paragraph of this article. There is no need to repeat this here. However, the two major aspects of our paraphrase have to be focussed upon a little bit more: the message of Jesus and the dimensions of the human situation. The connection between the two demands a real dialogical encounter. It is this element that I want to discuss now.

First of all, the message is all about the Kingdom of God; he *reigns*. It is fashionable today to say that the Kingdom of God has to be identified with this world as such. Kingdom and world are thus said to be the same. But we may not forget that Jesus, being totally

⁸ Gerald H. Anderson, *Christ's Lordship and religious pluralism*. Orbis Books, New York, 1981, 110.

concerned with us, is first of all concerned with God's Kingdom and is *therefore* siding with us.⁹ The emphasis is on God's Kingdom because it is God's way of reigning for us. The identification of the Kingdom and the world makes the proclamation of the message unnecessary. As a matter of fact, what sense is there in making efforts to realize the Kingdom if it is already fully with us? In that way, we would empty the Kingdom of its meaning and its content and we risk to reduce the message to an ideology without religious meaning. On the other hand, the traditional theology and the present day fundamentalistic trend want to see the Kingdom as coming only at the end of times. Kingdom and world become each other's enemies. In the meantime, we have to wait patiently till the angels open up the clouds and announce with their golden trumpets the last judgment. The Kingdom is here a totally transcendental reality; it is still far away, but we are expecting it courageously till this valley of tears of our present day world will be swept away. Kingdom and world have no connection whatsoever with each other.

However, the Kingdom has *already* been inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and we ourselves and the whole cosmos are on our way towards its final fulfillment. We are living *in between the already and the not yet* and the tension between the two moments is a tension of hope. Saying that the future is already fulfilled in the past amounts to a regressive eschatology and a radical conservatism. The future is also not fully far ahead and completely different from the present; therefore, we do not stand for a radically progressive eschatology. The future is on its way of being fulfilled.

The Church is the symbol and sign of the kingdom. With Christ at its center, she points to its fulfillment, though she herself is sinful. To be a symbol means that the Kingdom projects itself in this world through her; it shines through her and she herself invites the others to seek the Kingdom.¹⁰

Second, the message has to penetrate the total human situation. Therefore, mission and evangelization are holistic, multidimensional

⁹ Hans Küng, *On being a christian*. Collins, London, 1977, 214.

¹⁰ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Image Books, Garden City, N.Y., 1978, 81-93.

and global: the whole message is destined for the whole world in all its aspects. It goes without saying that not every christian, foreign and native, is able to exhaust the whole reality of mission. Each situation is culturally defined and thus limited and the priorities in mission are different according to the situation. Missiology itself is above all concerned about these priorities in *frontier situations* where the message is not yet known, not yet enough known or profoundly impoverished. Many dimensions do not require that everybody, every christian community, every local Church and religious congregation does a little bit of everything. Realism and prudence must be recommended.

Maybe a few recommendations could be made for exclusively missionary societies working in Japan:

Everybody knows since many years that parish work is not over-successful. Most of the parochial communities are small groups with some but not with abundant life. Why do we continue to say that every missionary has to be involved in parish work, at least for some time? Why are most of the directives of a good number of missionary societies geared at parish work, even when more than half of its personnel is not active in parishes? Japanese parishes in general tend to remain small and a good number of priests tend to become individualistic lonely workers. Would it not be better to create a method to serve all these little groups in a more organized way so that more personnel can be freed for other tasks? Moreover, are the parishes not too much organized according to juridical principles that belong to canon law and are purely Western? This legalistic setup coincides with the confucian mentality of subordination with is also typical for the one-sided hierarchical framework of the Church.

It could also be recommended that special attention be given to greater parishes in the cities. It would be good to consider the possibility not to turn over any better or more successfully established parish to the local bishop. Agreements could be made to keep some of them in the greater centers in order to animate them as real mission-oriented parishes and to offer to younger christians the possibility to enter the priesthood or to join religious communities and to go to other non-Japanese cultural situation. This would be a nice way to continue the policy of exchange of personnel. This kind of parishes should not be too numerous because, as a principle, when a parish is well-established, full pastoral care must go over into the hands of the Japanese priests.

Going to and taking up the priorities and finding back the missionary track is a challenging and promising task. Among important priorities are certainly the following things: keeping up good schools with highly motivated teachers who must not be necessarily all catholics, research centers with qualified personnel, catholic correspondence courses, mariners' apostolate, etc. Up to now, the Japanese Church seems to be inclined to remain at a safe distance from its qualified people.

Finally, the local Church has to rediscover herself in the encounter process. The *Decree on the Church's missionary activity* says clearly that the local Church is missionary by her very nature.¹¹ She *has* no mission but she *is* mission. To have a mission means having something additional that is peripheral but not necessary. The *Church is mission* brings the latter into the heart of the Church. Refusing to accept this means refusing to be Church. Therefore, in the encounter process the Church plays a very important role; she becomes the missionary factor in her own situation. In how far, however, is a local Church, a parish or a smaller part of the local Church conscious of this truth? It is rather easy to check this out. The homilist could in his Sunday homily bring in at least a few words on mission and evangelization, on witnessing to Christ, on the value of the christian presence at the workplace, etc. Does he or the catechist also do so during the many weeks of catechetical instruction before baptism? And what about the private conversations between priest and lay christians, between the priest and parish committees? A lot of possibilities can be explored and actualized to build up a missionary mentality. Being a missionary, each in his/her own way belongs to the heart of being a christian.

Positive and Negative Approaches of the Religions and Views of Life

Catholic theology and certain streams in protestant theology have oriented themselves towards a positive vision of the other religions and views of life. This vision undergirds what we said about mission and evangelization in a dialogical context. There is no need to

¹¹ *Decree on the Church's missionary activity*, 2.

develop here a positive theology of the religions which is a rather new branch of our theological workplace, very young, fresh and daring. A short summary may suffice. A renewed study of the Old and New Testaments reveals a rather positive attitude to individual people of other faiths who do not adhere to the Jewish religion and do not follow Jesus with his apostles. But the general attitude to the other religions is negative.

The same is valid for the early Church Fathers and apologists. A good number of them recognize the presence of God's Word (*Logos*) in the heart of individual philosophers but not in their religions. These positive ideas became obscured after Augustine and a negative trend developed, that lasted till Vatican II. A few exceptions were unable to change this negative view, but they were lonely birds. Vatican II rediscovered the *Logos*-doctrine and produced the "Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-christian religions" (*Nostra Aetate*). This was then followed by renewed theological studies, papal encyclicals and exhortations, especially Paul VI's "The evangelization of the men of our time" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*).

At the present moment, theology has come to the following conclusion: God is at work in the heart of all peoples, their religious experiences, their religions and their cultures since the beginning of creation. The whole cosmos is penetrated with the redeeming paschal mystery. Therefore, all human beings possess a common base that makes them brothers and sisters among each other and that gives them all access in the Spirit to God, the Father of Jesus-Christ who is the Word of God made man.

This theological principle might be amazing because it demonstrates an ever growing openness to peoples of other faiths, from individuals to their religions and cultures. All this makes it possible to develop a wonderful view what regards mission and evangelization as an encounter process in dialogue between the message of Jesus about the Kingdom and the total concrete situation of the people in whose heart God's Word or Jesus Christ is at work. Mission and evangelization make explicit and conscious what he is doing as *Logos* or God's Word in the heart of humanity.

This positive approach is greatly different from what happened in the past and from certain actual currents rejecting the dialogical encounter process. Christianity has been imposed too much as if its

Western form were the final elaboration of the message of Jesus. The result is that it is often looked upon as a foreign religion, especially in Asia, the continent of the other great world religions.

Among certain catholics and protestants a certain fundamentalistic and exclusivistic theology remains alive. It refuses to accept that the other religions are ways to salvation and contain real values. Another radically opposed trend is a certain relativism that sacrifices essential elements of the christian faith in order to open itself more to the other religions. There is also the syncretistic tendency that simply swallows up the other religions to the point of distorting completely the core of them. All these approaches underestimate or overestimate all the religions and produce a false image of mission and evangelization.¹²

Instead of these negative currents, we can firmly say that all the religions are directed towards God from within. They are ways to salvation and their adherents become saved through them. This does not mean that everything in them is good and correct. Any religion, Christianity included, needs the message of Jesus as a catalyzing factor. It enhances what is good, criticizes what is wrong and heals what is deficient. Above all, as a principle, religions, philosophies and views of life should not exclude each other. Because of the divine presence within them, they are related to each other and can enrich each other.

Inculturation from Within

Inculturation is the result of the dialogical encounter process. The message must re-unfold itself from within the in-depth dimensions of each religion and culture. In that way, people can become gradually attracted by Jesus whom they accept as savior.

They will create togetherness around his risen person and become christian community or Church. They will express their faith in his message through the filter of their own culture and new forms of beliefs, creeds, etc. will come about. They worship him and his Father through their own liturgical rituals and not translated forms of Western rituals.

¹² Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. Orbis Books, New York, 1985.

They reflect upon the message of Jesus, express it systematically and new theologies and catechisms born at the spot originate. In other words, inculturation produces a whole process of liberation from the Western way of being a christian. Already now, non-Western ways of being christian and of being Church become visible and the future looks very promising. The more inculturation takes place, the more the diversity and plurality of the one and same universal christian faith will manifest itself.

The inculturation process is slow, but necessary and very natural. Jesus himself stands as the model. His message has spread first in the jewish particular context; then it spread through the Greek-Roman world that became the Western context which is certainly not the final and definitive one.

In this whole process we cannot go back to a so-called non-inculturated christian message; it has never existed. The inculturation process has to pass through a number of frictions with the non-western cultures and religions, but little by little the expression of the christian faith will move along the line of consonance with non-western insights.¹³ Throughout the whole process a good number of ambiguities will become visible and we should not be afraid of them. Any transplantation process shows these ambiguities that ultimately ends up in a crystallization that expresses the real message but this time from within a new context. And even then, a continual updating within all cultures will be necessary, because they are living realities and not immovable rocks.

What are then some theological foci for the inculturation process? In the whole Far East and South East Asia, the category of wisdom and interiority is deeply honored. Much more than rational knowledge, intuitive wisdom and silence prevail. In Hinduism there is the all-pervading Absolute Brahman that turns the whole cosmos into one enormous sacred reality. In Buddhism we come across the experience of transitoriness, emptiness of Self, contingency and frailty. Islam praises the power and the greatness of Allah to whom we must abandon ourselves. Confucianism supports personal and interpersonal discipline, filial piety and respect. Philosophical Taoism stands for quiet-

¹³ Desmond Crowe, "Consultation on inculturation," *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 18, n.2 (1981), 149.

ness, stillness and contemplation of the order of the cosmos (*Tao*). Popular religion knows its own forms of devotions, piety and prayer.¹⁴

Christianity has to offer its own treasures. Most important is the Kingdom of God that is being realized and that transforms the whole cosmos into the image of the resurrected Lord in the power of the Spirit. There is also the christian view of the human person, time, history and future, the world as the stage of total salvation, spiritual and material. There is also the value of the community or becoming togetherness around the Risen Lord, the community or the Church where, ideally, the Kingdom should be more visible.

All these very basic values may and will not get lost in the inculturation process but can be related to the message of Jesus and vice versa. In this view of mission and inculturation there is no place for exclusivism that condemns the others beforehand; there is plenty of place for related inclusivism. A wonderful exchange of values, truths and experiences takes place.

Does Christianity have to surrender its claim for the uniqueness and the universality of Jesus Christ? In no way do we have to drop these claims. Some might object that the other religions shelter the same claims and also they should not be dismissed.

But instead of excluding each other, we better relate to each other and offer to each other our own treasures, respecting each other's freedom to accept or to decline the offer. And there is nothing wrong in hoping that the non-christian will accept what is offered like the non-christian has the right to hope to the christian will accept what he offers.

Conclusion

This is the dream of mission and evangelization for today's world. It is a dream that can be realized and that we have to keep alive in our hearts. The guarantee of the realization of the dream is Jesus Christ himself.

¹⁴ Michael Amaladoss, *Making All Things New. Dialogue, Pluralism & Evangelization in Asia*. Orbis Books, New York, 1990, 20-30.

Respect and influence for the organized Church may have declined considerably the last decades, reverence for Jesus Christ has grown. All along human history so many portraits of Jesus have been made.¹⁵ From the beginning in the gospels up to now his titles are: the truth, the light, the way, the life, the *rabbi*, the light of the gentiles, the cosmic Christ, the Son of Man, the true image of God, the crucified Lord, the monk, the bridegroom of the soul, the divine and human model, the universal Man, the mirror of the eternal, the prince of peace, the liberator. All these images show that there is more in him than that is dreamt of him in the philosophy and the christology of the theologians. Within the Church and far beyond its walls, his person and message are always a beauty ever ancient and new. The Man Jesus and his message about the Kingdom today belong to the world.

¹⁵ Yaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the centuries. His place in the history of cultures*. Harper & Row, London, 1987, 232-233.