

MISSION IN OUR NEW GLOBAL CONTEXT

If anyone had any doubts about the reality and outreach of globalization, the recent meltdown in the financial markets all across the world is sufficient to clear them. The event that started it – the credit crunch – was local, in the United States of America. But when American banks collapse they drag down with them the banks of the whole world. This shows how they are networked and interdependent. It also points to the dominance of the United States of America in the world. When a decade ago Japan and the South-East Asian economies like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia were in recession, they did not drag down the world economy with them. Malaysia even closed its economic doors to the world and pulled itself up without the liberal medicine of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The Phenomenon of Globalization

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. It started with colonialism in which some countries exploited others, impoverishing them while making themselves rich. This economic exploitation was helped by political and military domination. Political colonisation had ended. But the economic exploitation and military domination continue. There are international organizations like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. But we know who dominate them and make use of them, ignoring them if it suits their goals. Slaves and indentured labourers are no longer imported. But labour migrations and the brain drain, which is the importation of skilled labour, continue. While there is overall economic growth, the gap between the rich and the poor, both locally and globally, is increasing. Here is our first lesson: globalization seems to go hand in hand with polarization.

Globalization is triggered off by communication. The internet, cell phones and the audio and visual media are the icons of its contemporary forms. The speed and ease of movement help to humanize communication and transfer goods. The sharing of knowledge and services and the money markets are the present drivers of globalization.

The globalization of the markets seeks to globalize a consumer culture making use of the media. But humans do not live by bread alone. Culture touches human and social identity. People who are economically deprived and enslaved may feel culturally rich and independent. Under British colonialism, for example, the Indians felt spiritually superior to them. Faced with economic and political pressure they will fight to

preserve their cultural identity. A key element of culture is religion. So there is growing cultural and religious self-assertion all over the world. Looking at the many movements for cultural and religious autonomy, even with overtones of fundamentalist violence, one can also speak of fragmentation. Globalization and fragmentation are not opposed to each other. They are two poles in tension. I do not think people are against globalization as such. They enjoy its benefits. But precisely because of its experience there is an increasing desire for equality and participation, justice and community. People are not against cultural and social interaction. But they are ready to resist domination even with self-defensive violence.

Globalization therefore is both an opportunity and a danger. It offers us the means to build up a global human community with the possibilities of an easy sharing of goods and services and of increasing social and cultural interaction, including the religious dimension. But if it tries to be the domination of one corner of the world seeking to remake the globe in its image in order to facilitate exploitation, it is bound to provoke resistance and lead to violence. The globalization of knowledge and experience and the facility of communication and networking tend to provoke and organize the resistance.

The Globalization of the Church

Perhaps without wanting it, the Church too has become globalized in its own way. The aim of mission, especially in the colonial period, was the Church a global presence. Its focus, of course, was spiritual. It was to communicate to everyone the benefits of salvation. As a matter of fact, the Church is now established in most places in however small a way. The Church became experientially aware of its global nature at the Second Vatican Council, as theologians like Karl Rahner have pointed out. It was not merely a physical fact that there were more than 2400 Bishops of all colours and cultures present at the Vatican. The Church in council exercised its global awareness in two ways. Internally it became aware of its being a communion of local Churches. It affirmed the collegiality of the Bishops, collectively responsible for the Church and the world, under the coordinating leadership of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. It discovered itself as the People of God at whose service there was a body of priests, hierarchically ordered. Thanks to communications and large scale migrations of Christians it is experiencing its catholicity in new ways. The Church in the United States of America, for instance, cannot ignore the Hispanics and the Asians. The periodic synods of Bishops,

however celebrated, are an ongoing reminder of its universal character. The use of the peoples' languages in worship and the project for its inculturation under the leadership of the Bishops' conferences were meant to mark its diversity in unity.

The Church also became global in a second way by opening itself up to the world. It acknowledged the dignity of the humans, created in the image of God, in recognizing their freedom to follow any religion according to their consciences. It went on to appreciate the good and holy elements in them, calling for dialogue with them. It wished further to dialogue with the modern world, acknowledging its perspectives of growth, without ignoring its sinful shortcomings. Symbolically, following the leadership of the Blessed John XXIII in his encyclical *Peace on Earth*, it spoke, not only to the members of the Church, but to everyone in the world. John Paul II further globalized the Church by his travels across the world and by his recognition of the presence and action of the Spirit of God among all peoples, their cultures and religions. This globalization has led to developments in the vision and practice of mission which are important for us. I shall come to these later.

Side by side with this globalization, polarization and fragmentation are not lacking in the Church too. The tension between the centre and the periphery has not disappeared and the centre is seeking to reassert itself more strongly than ever. Unity is sought in cultural uniformity and effective inculturation in being discouraged, if not blocked. But this has not stopped people from seeking to live their faith in their own way. Such people either migrate to other denominations or live at the margins of the Church. Fortunately, such questions of identity have not led to violent conflicts within the Church, as it happened in the past in Europe.

The Globalization of Mission

I suggest that we keep in mind both these global contexts, of the world and of the Church, as we reflect on our mission today. Together with globalization let us also take into account the polarization and the fragmentation and the consequent marginalization. All these are factors of globalization. As I have indicated earlier, I would also like to stress that the globalization of the Church at and after the Second Vatican Council has also led to a globalization of mission, its vision and its practice. I would like to explore this in terms of three paradigm shifts.

From the Mission of the Church to the Mission of God

What makes mission global is not only that the Church is found everywhere today, but the fact that mission is not primarily the task of the Church, but of God. The Church is only at the service of God's mission, which englobes and transcends it. The Council, in its document on Mission said:

The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This plan flows from "fountain-like love," the love of God the Father... God in his great and merciful kindness freely creates us and moreover, graciously calls us to share in his life and glory. He generously pours out, and never ceases to pour out, his divine goodness, so that he who is creator of all things might at last become "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28), thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our happiness. (*Ad Gentes, 2*)

The englobing and transcendent nature of mission is also affirmed in the document on The Church in the Modern World.

For, by his incarnation, he, the son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man... In him God reconciled us to himself and to one another... All this holds true not for Christians only but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. (LG 16) For since Christ dies for all (cf. Rom 8:32), and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery. (*Gaudium et Spes, 22*)

What this means is that the Word and the Spirit of God are salvifically reaching out to every human being in ways unknown to and independent of us. Pope John Paul II will say that this happens, not only in their hearts, but also through their cultures and religions. This is indeed the global nature of mission, God reaching out to everyone, everywhere.

The goal of this mission is also global. It is not merely saving some by making them members of the Church. Paul says that God wants to save every one (cf. 1 Tim 2:4) and also gather all things in Christ so that God is 'all in all'. (cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Eph 1:3-10; Col 1:15-20) According to John the Word in whom everything is created is enlightening every one coming into the world. (Jn 1:9) In the book of Revelation John points to the fulfilment of God's plan when God will make all things new. (cf. Rev

21:1-5) This is the cosmic mystery revealed to us in Jesus that we are called to serve. We are called and sent on mission in the world to discern God's work and to collaborate with it, not to work at cross purposes. That is why the first task in mission is to contemplate how God is present and active in a particular situation and to collaborate with it. This is what the Council meant by "reading the signs of the times".

From Mission as Anti-Religions to Anti-Evil

Jesus started his public life by announcing: "The Reign of God is here; be converted." (cf. Mark 1:14-15) By conversion he meant turning to God. Turning to God involved turning away from selfishness and sin. The sins that Jesus condemned were the pride and self-righteousness of the Pharisees, the legalism and ritualism that ignored God's covenant, the attachment to wealth and power that marginalised and exploited the poor, the selfishness that was blind to the needs of the other. He praised the faith of the Roman centurion, the sinful Samaritan woman and the persistent Canaanite woman.

It is a quirk of history that the struggle between God and Satan that is taking place in our hearts, our cultures and in our societies became a conflict between Christianity and other religions. The Church, probably when the Roman empire became Christian, identified itself with the eschatological Reign of God that Jesus has proclaimed and began to struggle, not against the evil in ourselves and in our socio-economic and political and even religious structures, but against groups and religions outside the Church. The proclamation of the good news became a religious and a political project. "Compel the people to come in" (cf. Lk 14:23) became the watchword of missionaries in Latin America. Saints were still preaching against the sins of humanity. But the missionaries identified God with the "Christian God" and fought against what they thought were the false gods of other religions.

Today the Church is becoming aware that God is present and active also in other religions and cultures. Therefore we need not look on them as enemies, but as our allies in the promotion of the Reign of God. The true enemies of this Reign are not other religions, but Satan as the personal principle of evil and Mammon as the power of money. All religions agree in condemning selfishness and sin in its many forms.

It is usual today to oppose proclamation of the good news to dialogue with other religions. I think that it is misconceived. Proclamation is a prophetic condemnation of the forces that are against

the Reign of God. Dialogue brings us together with all those who are struggling with us against the power of Evil. Every religion has its own perspectives regarding the way it looks at the world and the means it adopts in fighting against evil. We believe in the way of self-sacrificing, sharing and serving love of Jesus. We also believe that because Jesus is divine he is present wherever people are struggling against evil. We welcome people who wish to become disciples of Jesus in his struggle. But we respect God's freedom and the freedom of others if they do not recognize the presence and action of Jesus in their midst for reasons known to God. This does not stand in the way of our collaboration with them in our common struggle against evil.

The Church: from a Safe Haven to Salt and Leaven

We used to think of the Church as a safe haven in a wicked and sinful world. Its aim was saving souls. Its focus was on the sacraments: Baptism as an entrance rite and Reconciliation and the Eucharist when possible. The Christians did involve in some social ministry as an expression of their charity. Mission was meant to make this haven of salvation available to as many as possible. Outside this haven were sinners and idolaters. The Church was often persecuted. It became self-defensive and further closed itself in. As a young boy, celebrating the Mission Sunday, I remember presenting the Church as a boat buffeted by the raging waves in a stormy sea. The Church was the 'City of God' in conflict with the 'City of Satan'. History was a tale of these two cities, as St. Augustine had described it.

The Second Vatican Council brought a change. Blessed John XXIII threw the windows of the Church open. As I had mentioned already, the Church, not only became aware of being global, but also realized the need of entering into dialogue with the secular world, with the other Christian communities and with other religions and ideologies. In the 70s of the last century we began speaking about the challenges of 'inculturation'. The Church has to follow the incarnational way of Jesus himself. Just as the Word of God became human in order to make the humans divine, as the Greek Fathers used to say, the Word of God and the Church today have to become incarnate in the cultures of the world so as to transform them from within. Or to change images, the Church has to become salt and leaven. It has to get involved in the world. It is called, not only to help the needy with its charitable assistance, but to change the socio-economic and politico-cultural structures that make people poor. It has to enter into dialogue with and collaborate with all people of good will,

whatever ideology or religion they may profess. There is still some tension between the objectives of such dialogue. Some would think that its aim is to bring everyone eventually into the Church, while others suggest that to build a more free and just human community is a worthwhile goal in itself, since it is already the realization of the Reign of God in the world.

Getting involved in the world and dialoguing with others, of course, brings many risks with it. We do not stand apart as the 'perfect society'. We share the tensions and pains, the uncertainties and confusions of the world. There are the dangers of watering down or relativising the truth or becoming more conformed to the world than to the Reign of God or of compromising strategies. The borders between the Church and the world will no longer be clear. Our identity and even our safety in the stormy sea will be threatened. Reaching out to save the others we too may drown. But the risk has to be taken. Unless the seed dies it will not produce fruit. This is the self-emptying way of Jesus. We must indeed deepen and protect our identity. The salt cannot afford to lose its savour. But we cannot be the salt of the earth if we choose to stand apart from it. The leaven cannot transform the dough if it is not mixed with it. The salt and the leaven keep their identity. But they do not protect it with borders. Our identity is defined by what we are, not negatively by what we are not. It is our rootedness in the Spirit who animates and guides us that should protect our identity, not the walls we build around ourselves.

In a world of humans who are free, the world can be transformed only through dialogue that respects the freedom of the other. But the dialogue has to be transformative and therefore prophetic. The context and goal of the dialogue is to transform the world itself into the Reign of God, which may not have Christian trappings. We are not seeking to create a new Christendom, but 'a new heaven and a new earth'. The focus of our dialogue, therefore, will be life at all levels: personal and social, economic and political, cultural and religious. Religions too, including our own, affected as they are by human limitations and sinfulness, need transformation.

Let us now come back to our globalizing world. What are the challenges of mission in this new global context. If we look around our world it is easy to make a list. The poor and the marginalized are always round us. Today they may take new forms like the people affected by HIV-AIDS, the refugees and migrants, the child labourers and warriors and so on. Human rights, political, economic and social are not

respected. Extreme forms of liberalism ignore the common good. Africa continues to be the forgotten continent, rich in material and human resources, but exploited and impoverished by the Multinationals and their local collaborators. The women are oppressed and marginalized in various ways in poor as well as rich countries. They seem to become the special targets in any inter-human violence. Ecological destruction on a large scale, driven by consumer greed, is ruining not only the earth but also the humans who depend on it. The need for energy in a world that is rapidly developing is driving us to explore alternate, more eco-friendly, sources of energy. We are aware of all these problems and we also know, at least somewhat, about what can do to confront them. I do not wish to rehearse these. What is new in the global world is that the poor, thanks to the media, are no longer ignorant and passive. They have started to demand their rights and to agitate. They need to be empowered and supported. I do not think that I have anything terribly new to say on these matters. I would like rather keep to my focus on the 'new global context' of my title.

Priorities of Mission

For some people 'mission' still means 'foreign mission'. Nearly thirty years ago (1979) an international mission congress in Manila declared that every local Church is responsible for mission in its own territory and co-responsible for mission in the world. But we are still living in a centripetal Church. I think the need today is to free and enable the local Churches to become responsible for their mission. In a globalizing world mutual interaction becomes necessary and inevitable. This should involved global networking. Contemporary media makes this possible. Travel and human contacts and sharing of goods are necessary. But the local people should not be seen as objects, but agents. They should participate in the making of policies and programmes. If the Christians in India or Iraq are persecuted, a continuing international media focus that will make the local and national governments to take appropriate action, because they are sensitive to international opinion, is more important than rushing people and funds there. While catastrophes like the Tsunami do create emergencies, the rapid transfer of aid and some international involvement in making sure that aid is properly used can be productive. But local initiatives must be supported. Inter-cultural exchanges, exposures and training programmes, especially for young people, can create a growing sense of international solidarity and fellowship. Today such exchanges can also be inter-religious. Such international networking across countries, cultures and religions is already

happening. We need to encourage and improve it further. We should also get involved in international organizations to lobby for causes in which we are interested. Our networking will be with all people of good will, but contributing our own Christian perspectives, helped by the social teachings of the Church. This is where the real challenge is. A vague humanitarianism and relief work are easy. But today we should move beyond it and stand for justice and human rights in all its dimensions.

Secondly, the area of concentration in our mission is shifting. The service of faith and justice remain the overall goal. But today the work for justice has to move beyond relief and liberation work among the poor. While agriculture and technology remain important, the motors of development today are the areas of knowledge and services. The areas on which they have their biggest impact are the sectors of finance and trade. The Doha round of negotiations around the regulation of trade between nations has been going on for a decade without success. The recent financial crisis has shown how money can make more money through playing the speculative market without any roots in real wealth. The only motif has been greed without any concern for the common good. The politicians have followed a liberal hands-off policy, without bothering about the good of the people, especially the poor. This seems to have been true even of the politicians of Europe with various socialist pretensions. How can we promote justice today without getting involved in some way in the world of knowledge and services, trade and finance? The exaggerated claims of intellectual property rights will be one area to look into. This will demand special training and resources. But the question is whether we are ready to face the real challenges of today or satisfied with finding easy targets for our mission. Are we rushing to help the victims without bothering about the victimizers? Are we also profiting, perhaps unconsciously, from the structures of oppression set up by the victimisers like the banks and the stock markets in their present form? What are we called to do? This will be an important challenge for mission in the immediate future. If the world is looking for a new financial order, what have the Christians to say about it? Do the rich Christians often tend to be on the wrong side of the spectrum?

As I said at the beginning, our globalizing world is also heavily polarised. Our former superior general, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, had personally experienced the first atom bomb at Hiroshima. Reflecting over it after thirty years he said the following. I think that his remarks are still relevant today.

Atomic energy in destroying matter discloses its instability, while making the spirit stand out with its features more strongly pronounced. Now yet another explosion is breeding in the womb of time, as millions die from hunger and sub-human existence... Clearly, the present world order is based neither on justice nor love, but almost always on personal and national interest. The balance of power is a balance of terror...One hears the candid statement that only two possibilities exist: either a striking personal conversion of those who have most influence to bring about the needed changes, or the violent tearing down of unjust structures. My own conviction is that violence is not the right way to get positive results. If that is true, the only thinkable alternative is the other: namely, the personal conversion of those who have power and influence. (1975)

In the context of liberating mission we often speak of an 'option for the poor'. This is necessary and fundamental. We have to look at the world from the place of the suffering poor to see what is wrong with it and what should be done to set it right. But if we wish to change that world we have to make an 'option for the non-poor' – I do not say 'the rich', but the 'non-poor' because this group includes also artists, intellectuals, leaders of religious and social movements and politicians, that is people who can bring about change. Many years ago I had suggested that if we speak of a priority for mission today it is the First, so called Christian, world and not the poor Third world in Africa and Asia. Even from the point of view of saving their souls the poor, including those who belong to other religions, have a deep faith in God, who is their only hope and consolation, while the largely secularized rich do not seem to believe in anything or adhere to some fundamentalist forms of Christianity. Do these need the gospel more urgently than the others? If we wish to solve the problems of Africa, we certainly have to tackle their rich and corrupt leaders, but also the Multinational corporations who exploit their rich resources with the support of the leaders and the rich nations that sell them arms.

The Special Role of the Religions

Talking about globalization I mentioned that one of its manifestations is the fragmentation of cultures and religions, leading to affirmation and defence of identity and consequent conflicts. All religions have fundamentalist groups. At the same time, as Hans Kung has said, we cannot have peace in the world without peace between religions. Conflicts may have economic, political, social, cultural and even religious

causes. But only religions speak about the values of peace. In a world of many, open or hidden, conflicts, peace-making is an important and essential dimension of mission. In a situation of conflict, peace-making involves conflict-resolution and reconciliation, which supposes forgiveness. Jesus proclaimed: "Blessed are the peace makers." He not only mediated to us a forgiving God, but also told us to forgive each other and love our enemies. Mutual forgiveness is only a dimension of his new commandment to love one another. Forgiveness and reconciliation are, therefore, important and integral dimensions of the good news and of our mission to witness to it. The experience of Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa lays particular emphasis on the pursuit of restorative, not retributive, justice and forgiveness. Forgiveness is not merely a healing of personal hurt and memories, but also reconciliation with the other who has hurt us and the restoration of fellowship. One cannot forgive another unless the other recognizes his/her guilt. Restitution has also to be made in some form. The process has both personal and social dimensions. Truth Commissions and Institutes for Peace Studies have multiplied across the world. But doing anything at the ground level is difficult. Recently some persecuted Christians in India have forgiven their persecutors. But it is not yet reconciliation. Similarly there have been inter-religious peace committees that restore peace after a conflict. But it is simply a papering over the conflict by the leaders that does not have a real impact on the people who have been involved. At that level wounds continue to fester. Here there is a challenge that the Church can undertake in collaboration with other religious leaders and people of good will. Underlying inter-religious conflict is a wrong appreciation of other religions. I think that religious exclusivism is a mild form of fundamentalism. In the Church there has been a development of a positive appreciation of other religions as capable of facilitating salvific divine-human encounter. But this view still remains unofficial. The religious freedom that the Church accepted at the Second Vatican Council was a civil freedom. Though John Paul II recognized the presence and action of the Spirit of God in other religions and cultures, there seem to be efforts to set limits to the Spirit's freedom. All this makes it difficult for us to promote peace, except at a purely civil level.

We have already evoked the contemporary financial crisis. It is only the last event in a history of financial domination and exploitation that goes back to the colonial period. Globalization has only extended its outreach. Financial problems have to be solved by financial strategies. There is a welcome realization that the governments too have to be involved to protect the interest of the people and the common good. But

the common good may unfortunately be limited to the good of the citizens of one's own country and not understood globally. Anyway, when the reform of the financial system has to be discussed, after the immediate crisis has passed we will have to evoke the importance of ethics in business. Religions certainly can make a contribution to any discussion on business ethics. In a multi-religious society, religions through dialogue can converge on a common business ethic, even though each religion justifies it in terms of its own beliefs and perspectives. Recent social encyclicals insist on the need for inter-religious collaboration, though we do not yet have a mechanism to promote such collaboration. In today's global society, this would be a priority. This could be done both locally and globally, even through international institutions.

The goal of mission is conversion, a change of heart and mind. A change of economic and socio-political policies and a change of values depend on a change of hearts. The change of heart is, not only, but also a religious process. A religious orientation and commitment certainly facilitates a change of heart. I have already spoken of the need for converting the non-poor who can bring about change in society. But maladies like consumerism and greed affect not only the rich, but everyone, including the poor, who may become exploiters at their own level. Everyone needs conversion. (People with a certain perspective of mission may distinguish between evangelization of people of other religions, re-evangelization of the dechristianized and pastoral work for the believers. But these are all integral dimensions of mission and an ongoing process.)

A Renewed Church

We do not encounter Jesus directly today. We come to know him and hear his good news through witnesses. A crucial need for a witness is credibility. We have many examples of heroic individuals in the Church. But is the Church as a whole today a credible witness or does it need refounding. In a globalizing world, the Church is probably one of the few institutions that is a strongly centralized, supported by a certain sacralisation. I shall limit myself to a few comments on my own Indian Church. In keeping with the principle of incarnation in mission, which I have mentioned earlier, the Church has to become Indian if it wishes to transform Indian culture and society. But this does not seem possible today. The Hindus call the Church in India a foreign religion. Given our cultural, structural and financial dependence on agent abroad we cannot indignantly deny it. Thanks to a certain level of personal freedom in the

area of spiritual practice and theological reflection and to a very active popular religiosity the situation is not too bad. But the focus again is on the sacraments as transcendent realities and so independent of local socio-cultural conditionings. The Church is not able to free itself from the social inequalities of the caste system, the patriarchal practices that oppress women and linguistic and ritual divisions. The social fragmentations are very much alive. We do not give the example of an institution in which the global and the local are in active and healthy tension. We need a Church that is universal, but a communion of local Churches, not a monolith. On the one hand we have to become more global and inclusive and transcend our fragmentations; on the other we have to become more local and relevant.

I said that the Church has to move from being a haven to being a leaven. A consequence of that would be that the Church focuses on life rather than on the sacraments. I shall take the example of the Eucharist. It is the source and summit of Christian life. But it supposes that there is an active Christian life. Otherwise it will be without foundation. In St. John's gospel we do not see Jesus celebrating the last supper. He washes the feet of the disciples and gives them a new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you." Love and service focus on life. Where there is a community that is knit together by mutual love and service, the breaking of bread becomes its living symbol in which Jesus becomes presently bodily to further unite it. If But people are in conflict with no effort at mutual love the symbol is empty. It can even be sacrilegious, as Paul warns the Corinthians. (1 Cor 11:27) Jesus had said earlier: "The Sabbath is for the humans, not humans for the Sabbath." (Mk 2:27) On another occasion he quoted the Prophet: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." (Mt 9:13) The Church can use all the latest techniques of the mass media to announce the good news. But if it does not witness to the good news by its life its words will be empty. In a globalizing world an active Christian life must go beyond personal morality and the practice of charity to playing an active role in the transformation of community especially in the areas I have indicated above. Only then the Church can be said to be on mission.

If the mission of the Church is to be fully involved and active in the world, then the principal agents of this mission will be the people, not the clergy. In the Second Vatican Council, the document on the Church, after evoking the mystery of the Church, spoke about it as the People of God, before indicating the serving roles of the Clergy. But the Church has not encouraged and developed this awareness. If mission is focused on

building up communities with sacraments, then the clergy become its principal agents. But if the stress is on life and if the Church has to be involved in the media and the financial and political world then the people will have to take the leadership. They have to become the face of the Church in the world. I am not here talking about a dichotomy that assigns the clergy to the Church and the people to the secular world. I am saying that the People of God are the Church and the clergy are part of it and at its service in the world. Anyway, when the focus of mission was on saving souls through the sacraments then the clergy played an indispensable role. But if mission is to transform society and to build up communities of the Reign of God, then the People of God have the key role. Some of the male mission Congregations, as their priest members drop in number, take on the people as associates. We may evolve to a situation where the people take the leadership with a few priests to help them. The challenge is that we do not use the people as quasi-priests, but let them play their proper role in the Church and in the world. This may be a big paradigm shift for the Church, forced also by historical circumstances, but providential in the plan of God for the 21st century.

Conclusion

The globalization both of the world and of the Church is both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity to realize better God's plan to gather all things in Christ so that God will be 'all in all'. It is also a challenge because in order to do this the Church has to be involved in the world in new ways focusing on the world rather than itself, on life rather than the sacraments, on the people rather than the clergy, on the change of hearts rather than merely the structures, on the change-enabling non-poor rather than on merely the poor, on the world of knowledge, finance and politics, on promoting the global common good, on reconciliation and peace-making in a world of conflicts and finally on re-founding the Church so that it can be an appropriate, adequate and credible agent of this mission. We are proud to celebrate the 200 years of The United States of America becoming a local Church. But when will it become a truly autonomous local Church linked in communion with the other local Churches in a universal Church? We are happy to commemorate the 100 years of our becoming a Church on mission. Should we reset its focus and priorities? We praise and thank God for the 50 years of our Association. Is it time to rethink our tasks and structures? Every anniversary is a moment, not only to remember the past, but also look to the future. Our mission is a journey of hope. God, who is our goal and the guarantee of our hope, may be calling us to change directions. God is

also the light leading us along new paths. I suggest that we spend our days here together to ask each other in what ways God wants us to change. Cardinal Newman said: "To live is to change. To have lived long is to have changed often." Let us pray with Newman: "Lead, kindly Light!"