

THE CONTINENTAL MISSION IN THE LIGHT OF APARECIDA

MISSION CONGRESS 2010

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30

ALBUQUERQUE, NM

CARDINAL OSCAR ANDRÉS RODRÍGUEZ M. SDB

ARCHBISHOP OF TEGUCIGALPA

Dear Brothers and Sister: I am very grateful to have been invited to address you in this important Mission Congress.

These lands which witnessed the first, intrepid spread of the gospel are a superb setting for reflecting on this essential dimension of the Church.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Document of Aparecida (DA) calls us forth to a MISSION on the continent “*This Fifth Conference,*” the Pope told us, “proposes to define ‘the great task of guarding and nourishing the faith of the people of God and also of reminding the people of this continent that by virtue of their baptism they are called to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ.’” – Benedict XVI (DA10).

Aparecida stresses that we are disciples and missionaries of Jesus. The relation that unites the disciple-missionary with Jesus is not first of all of an intellectual nature; rather, it is a strong commitment in faith to the person of Jesus.

The disciple is one who follows the Lord and makes a total commitment in faith to the person of Christ. This is made clear in the Document of Aparecida (DA 243) where it cites Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “Being a Christian does not begin with an ethical decision or a great idea, but with an encounter ... with a Person.” (DCE 2).

Faith is also the key attribute of the missionary. Pope John Paul II tells us in *Redemptoris Missio*: *Mission is an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us* (RM 11). The conclusion is clear: we must nourish the faith of our flock. Our faith must be integral, that is, it should consist not just in believing in the truths of our faith, but in making a firm personal commitment to Christ. We should strengthen our faith as a loving, devoted commitment to the Lord.

Faith is a decision which commits the whole of one’s life. If we are believers, then we will concretize our faith and make it a believable testimony in our lives. That is what Saint Paul tells us: “You have made your faith manifest in works” (1 Th 1,3). We need to go to the very roots of our religious life, to its inner, originating principle, that is, to faith, in order to strengthen it, renew it, and confess it with our lives.

In the measure that our faith grows we will truly be disciples of the Lord and authentic missionaries, “witnesses of the light” and “prophets of the living God.”

Faith in Christ produces a vision of humankind which confirms human dignity, with its rights and duties, and gives them a new foundation, thereby promoting a more humane human history.

Pope Benedict XVI in his initial discourse at Aparecida stated: “More than anything else, these peoples long for the fullness of life which Christ has brought: ‘I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10,10).” With the help of this divine life, human existence also fully develops in all its personal, familial, social and cultural dimensions (DI 4). For this reason our faith has a social thrust. Our faith must demonstrate how effective it can be in transforming the life of society. Our Christian faith has the task of ordering temporal realities in accord with the Gospel.

The aim of evangelization is proclaiming or proposing Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, so that he is accepted through faith and baptism and so that faith itself becomes real through a Christian life in which the new commandment of love holds sway.

Thus the task of the Church is above all communicating the Christian faith, and it should do so by awakening it, nourishing it, consolidating it, and bringing it to maturity. Saint Peter had these words for the paralyzed man who was begging at the temple entrance: “I have neither silver or gold, but what I have I will give you: in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and walk” (Acts 3,6). The Church, like Peter, must offer people faith, invite them to faith, encourage them to believe, and sustain them in their faith.

This is the meaning of MISSION which is proposed to us by the Document of Aparecida. As Church, we must evangelize; that is, we should awaken and foster the faith of our people, both in our ordinary pastoral work and as part of the New Evangelization.

In our ordinary pastoral work, we should strengthen the faith of practicing Christians and pastoral agents, whether they be priests, religious, or lay people.

In the New Evangelization, we should nourish the faith of non-practicing Catholics.

We should therefore undertake our MISSION as a **Ministry of Faith** which fortifies both the faith of our pastoral agents and that of those who have fallen away.

Faith arises only in the presence of the proclamation, the kerygma: “How are they to believe,” writes Saint Paul, speaking of faith in Christ, “if they have not heard of him? And how are they to hear of him, if no one preaches him?” (Rom 10,14). And he concludes, “Faith, therefore, comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ” (Rom 10,17). Today we have need of such kerygmatic preaching in order to awaken faith where it does not exist or where it is dead. Faith comes, therefore, from hearing what is preached.

It is necessary that the basic proclamation be proposed in clear terms for everybody, keeping in mind that most of the faithful have not passed through a catechumenate or been educated in their faith.

We should recognize that some of the new ecclesial movements have provided many young people and adults with the opportunity to hear the kerygma and experience a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. We should ask ourselves whether the same process is taking place also in our parishes.

The proclamation of the kerygma should hold a key place in our Sunday preaching and in all the important moments of Christian life, such as death, sickness, the birth of a child, etc.

II. MISSION AS A CONSTITUTIVE FEATURE OF THE CHURCH

An essential objective of the Continental Mission is becoming aware that the missionary dimension is a constitutive aspect of the identity of the Church and of the disciple of Christ. Thus, with the kerygma as a foundation, the Church seeks to vitalize the encounter with the living Jesus Christ and to strengthen the sense of ecclesial belonging, so that baptized Christians move from being evangelized to being evangelizers and so that, through their witness and evangelizing activity, our Latin American and Caribbean peoples come to possess the fullness of life in Christ.

In order to reach that goal, all of us who are baptized are summoned to “begin again from Christ,” that is, to recognize and follow his presence with the same sense of realism and novelty, and with the same force of affection, persuasion, and hope that was experienced by his first disciples when they met him on the banks of the Jordan 2000 years ago – and that was experienced as well by the “Juan Diego’s” of the New World. Thanks especially to that encounter and that following, which soon become familiarity and communion overflowing with gratitude and joy, we are rescued from our sense of isolation and go forth to communicate to everybody the true life, joy, and hope which it has been our blessing to experience and enjoy.

The concluding document of the Fifth Conference in Aparecida, recalling the command of the Lord to go and make disciples of all nations, seeks to awaken a strong missionary impulse in the Church of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is without a doubt one of the principal conclusions of this great ecclesial gathering. This missionary impulse focuses on four practical consequences:

- taking the best possible advantage of this hour of grace;
- earnestly requesting and living a new Pentecost in every Christian community;
- awakening the missionary vocation and missionary activity in all baptized persons, and giving support and encouragement to all the vocations and ministries which the Holy Spirit gives to the disciples of Jesus Christ in the living communion of the Church;
- going forth to meet individuals, families, communities, and peoples, communicating and sharing with them the gift of our encounter with Christ, which has filled our lives with “meaning,” with truth and love, with joy and hope.

The Holy Spirit goes before us in this missionary path. For that reason we are confident that our witnessing to the Good News constitutes, in turn, a strong impulse for Church renewal and social transformation.

III. THE CONTINENTAL MISSION IN THE DOCUMENT OF APARECIDA

The Fifth Conference in Aparecida, recalling the command of the Lord to go and make disciples of all nations, was not content with offering us a Final Document, but decided rather to inspire a great missionary impulse in Latin America and the Caribbean with the aim of putting the Church into a permanent state of mission. This invitation involves all of us, and no community is exempt from such a mission.

Most importantly, this Fifth Conference invites us to rediscover our essential vocation as disciples of the Lord. And if we are disciples, we cannot help but be missionaries in the manner of Jesus. For that reason, undertaking the Great Continental Mission in the spirit of Aparecida gives us a great opportunity for:

- being missionary disciples of Jesus Christ
- on the basis of an experience of encountering the Lord
- personally and in community

- in order to begin again from Christ
- in the spirit of the first community
- in such a way that our people have life in Him.

To this end we desire to:

- foster a dynamic encounter with the Lord on the personal and community levels, an encounter which makes missionary disciples of everyone in the Church,
- form communities of faith and shared life which are the fruit of this hour of grace and the new Pentecost which we seek for the Church,
- encourage all the vocations and ministries which the Spirit grants to the disciples of Jesus Christ in the living communion of the Church,
- go forth to meet individual, families, communities, and peoples in order to communicate and share with them the gift of the encounter with Christ which has filled our lives with “meaning,” with truth and love, with joy and hope.
- be available for living a process of personal, pastoral, and ecclesial conversion so as to awaken the spirit of service in the whole Church,
- help transform society and human relations with the vital force that comes from the Gospel of the Lord.

1. What is the Continental Mission of Aparecida?

The Continental Mission is the Lord Jesus Christ’s sending (“mission”) of each one of us personally and as a member of the Church, a sending animated by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of sharing the Gospel of Life with all people, beginning with those who have fallen away from the community of the Church, but also offering the Gospel even to those who claim to be agnostics or atheists.

The Continental Mission is therefore:

- a missionary impulse of the whole Latin American and Caribbean Church;
- a missionary impulse whose main objective is putting the Church and all its members in a permanent state of mission. This means progressing from pastoral ministry which is simply preservative to pastoral ministry which is decidedly missionary; it means helping all of us in the Church to be committed servants of Life;
- a missionary impulse which uses the methods of Jesus himself: questioning, listening, and offering an experience of encounter with the Lord which fills our lives with joy and meaning.

This Mission means going forth from our churches, rather than remaining in them and hoping that people come; it means showing people that the Church is a welcoming home, a mother who goes forth to meet others, a permanent school of missionary communion.

- The Mission involves personal, pastoral, and ecclesial **conversion** and demands spiritual, pastoral, and also institutional reforms. That is to say, it requires **profound changes** in our ways of living the faith, of organizing our pastoral ministry, of administering the Church, and of serving the world. It requires us to leave aside the outmoded structures that hinder our forward movement.
- The Mission involves ecclesial and social transformation, for the Gospel imparts New Life to persons, communities, and cultures. Therefore the Continental Mission proposes to offer our evangelizing service to society itself.

Finally, the Mission has an ecumenical character and does not seek to proselytize, for the Gospel spreads through an overflowing of joy and spiritual contagion, never by proselytizing. For that reason it is suggested that we invite our brothers and sisters of other Churches and Christian communions to accompany us in prayer during this missionary process; we are even encouraged, where possible, to take on some joint actions in solidarity with them.

2. What is the novelty of the Continental Mission?

We are frequently asked what is new about this “Great Continental Mission” and how does it differ from the “missions” that we have always had or the “general missions” which we have organized in the past and which have done good work.

This new missionary impulse differs from the “missions” we have customarily given in the following ways:

- it seeks to put the whole Church and all its members in a permanent state of mission; it therefore does not have a fixed limit but extends indefinitely in time;
- it is undertaken in dialogue with the world in which we live, and it seeks out **interlocutors** rather than “addresses” – that is, persons we speak **with**, rather than **to** – in order to share with them our experience of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ;
- its aim is to offer, share, and impart the Christ-Life as the Life of humankind, the Life of the world – both for persons and for society as a whole;
- it seeks to be carried out at all levels of the Church and not only at the parochial or territorial level; it seeks to involve parishes, schools, universities, monasteries, religious congregations, secular institutes, apostolic movements, and new communities;
- it is taking place in a cultural context in which the freshness of the Gospel is our best contribution to the integral development of each country.

In the words of Aparecida:

“The Church is called to rethink profoundly and to re-launch with fidelity and boldness its mission in the new circumstances of Latin America and the world. ... It is a matter of confirming, renewing, and revitalizing the freshness of the Gospel as it has taken root in our history, and of doing so on the basis of a personal and communitarian encounter with Jesus Christ which produces disciples and missionaries. This undertaking depends less on great programs and structures than on new men and new women who incarnate that fresh tradition as disciples of Jesus Christ and missionaries of his Kingdom, as protagonists of new life for a Latin America that seeks to be recognized in the light and the strength of the Spirit” (DA 11).

In effect: “The pastoral ministry of the Church cannot prescind from the historical context in which its members live. Their lives are situated in very concrete socio-cultural contexts. These social and cultural transformations naturally represent great challenges for the Church in its mission of building up the Kingdom of God. That is why the Church must, in fidelity to the Holy Spirit who guides it, renew itself in ways that involve spiritual, pastoral, and also institutional reforms” (DA 367).

“This firm missionary commitment should pervade all the ecclesial structures and all the pastoral plans of the dioceses, parishes, religious communities, movements, and other institutions of the Church. No community should excuse itself from undertaking decisively, with all its might, the constant processes

of missionary renovation and of leaving behind the outmoded structures which do not favor the transmission of the faith” (DA 365).

The Fathers of Aparecida are aware that, more than a message, what we possess is **a living Person**, the Lord Jesus, who is true Life for a world which looks for life in a thousand ways but fails to find it.

Chapter VII of Aparecida is profoundly inspiring, for it identifies the mission with the proclamation of life, the giving of life, the sharing of life, and the caring for life. There is rich meaning in the two laws which are found in Aparecida: the first is that **life grows and develops in a community that is just and fraternal**; the second is that **life is the only reality which is attained and which matures in the degree to which it is surrendered** in order to give life to others – that is to say, which increases even as it is shared.

This Mission also invites us explicitly to keep before our eyes always – and transversally – the poor and the excluded. In reality, an important aspect of the Continental Mission is the decision to highlight each year one sector of the suffering persons mentioned by the Fathers of Aparecida, especially the sick, the imprisoned, the drug-dependent, the migrants, the homeless, the shut-ins, etc.

3. Why are we undertaking the Continental Mission at this time?

Because we are in a time of grace: we are in the midst of great cultural transformations that we cannot undergo simply passively, much less reluctantly. Rather, we need to ask for the grace of a new Pentecost. We Christians are not dry leaves driven by the wind, nor are we people who submit passively to cultural changes; we are believers who are ready to create a new culture and become key actors on the stage of history.

We are the heirs of the first community, which had to bear witness to their faith in the Roman Empire; we are the heirs of the Church Fathers who knew how to inculturate their faith in societies that were diverse and sometimes adverse; we are the heirs of those mothers and fathers of the Latin American Church who have kept pace with the times in this Continent of Hope and of Life. We refer especially to the General Conferences of Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, and Santo Domingo, and to the Synod of the Americas and the Conference of Aparecida.

We need to go forth to encounter other persons and cultures, not with a defensive attitude, but **with a proposal**, convinced that the Spirit of the Lord is directing history, and persuaded as well that crises yield fruits when they are confronted and so transformed into **opportunities**.

The Fifth Conference, recalling the command to go forth and make disciples (cf. Mt 28,20), desires to **awaken** the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean for a great missionary drive.

- We cannot lose out on this hour of grace. We need a new Pentecost!
- We need to go out to encounter individuals, families, communities, and peoples so as to communicate and share with them the gift of our encounter with Christ, which has filled our lives with “meaning,” with truth and love, with joy and hope!
- We cannot sit back and wait passively in our churches. Rather, we must move out in all directions to proclaim that evil and death do not have the final word, that love is strong, that we have been liberated and rescued by the Lord’s paschal victory in history, that he calls us to become Church, and that he wants to increase the ranks of his disciples and missionaries for the building up of his Kingdom on our Continent.

4. Who are the agents responsible for carrying out the Continental Mission?

The agents responsible for carrying out the Mission are the missionary disciples, and that means everyone in the Church. This is not the time just for priests, or just for religious, or just for lay people: **it is the time for the whole Church**, a moment to be lived and offered in Church, that is, **in communion**.

- The Document of Aparecida does not have many chapters dedicated to the different church ministries and charisms, but it encourages us to promote them intensely and enthusiastically.
- This has surprised not a few people who were expecting a chapter on religious life and another on ministerial life or on lay life.
- This document confirms our vocations and charisms in all their richness and diversity and insists on the full participation of lay people, men and women, in the discernment, the decision-making, the planning, and the execution both of diocesan pastoral projects and especially of the pastoral endeavors of the Continental Mission.

So that this spirit of communion will flourish, our pastors warn us both about the danger of clericalism, which often impedes and obstructs pastoral growth, and about those lay people who take refuge in Church communities so that they are incapable of transforming by their witness the prevailing social life and structures. What we need today are missionary disciples in **a Church that is ready for changing times**.

Communion is the great prophecy that the Church can offer our times. That is why Pope John Paul II and the Document of Aparecida summon us to be “a home and a school of communion” through the variety and richness of vocations, charisms, and ministries which the Spirit awakens in us. The Church must be able to assist and encourage the development of all the gifts which the Lord bestows upon its members. For that reason, it is all the more urgent that we live a spirituality of communion.

5. Who are the principal interlocutors (“addressees”) of the Continental Mission?

In this Mission we prefer to speak of interlocutors rather than addressees or an audience, words which suggest passivity. To be an interlocutor, on the other hand, means having a great deal to say and share. We are not missionaries who “carry” the Truth, but rather we share the truth we have, always willing to give reasons for our hope, even while we learn from the truth we find in others. This was the style of Jesus, who marveled at the faith of the centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman and who commended the charity of the Good Samaritan.

That is why there is much insistence on the evangelizing method of Jesus in his relations with the first disciples, with the Samaritan woman, with Zacchaeus, with the good thief, and so many others. The same method is evident also in his conflict with the Pharisees and the doctors of the law who “impose” heavy burdens that they themselves will not lift a finger to move.

Our first interlocutors should be those who have left the Church more because of our own attitudes than because of the contents of the faith. And in cases where the estrangement is due to the contents of the faith, the reason might be less the contents themselves than our inability to communicate them better, or it might be that they were communicated in a moralistic or overbearing manner and without

dialogue. Our interlocutors should also include those who profess to be agnostic or atheist; with them we would want to share respectfully the joy of our faith.

The spirit of dialogue implies identity

- For that reason, dialogue should not be confused with a lack of convictions or of personality.
- The person who dialogues best is the one who has the greatest clarity about his/her own faith.
- That is why the formation given to missionary disciples is so important, especially the formation of those who have the mission of bearing witness to the Gospel in the heart of the world.
- We are not, nor can we be, “amateurish” with regard to the Gospel.
- As missionary disciples, we are called to play in the big leagues of faith, hope, and charity.

To obtain this objective we need solid itineraries of formation, putting ourselves in the School of Mary, living memory of the Church, in order to pass through the pedagogy of encounter and of the “places of encounter” with the Lord. We should take good advantage of the pedagogical potential that is found in popular Marian devotion. We find there an educational path which cultivates personal love of the Virgin, the true “educator in the faith.” Such a path leads us to become ever more like Jesus Christ and fosters a progressive adoption of her attitudes.

The places of encounter are not independent of one another; they are linked together in the logic of faith, since they lead to one another and open up as a true spiral in the life of faith of both individuals and communities. In this way we progress from faith to faith and from grace to grace, until we find ourselves face to face with him in the fullness of life and of history.

Also among the interlocutors of the Continental Mission are:

- those **groups of primary interest** (for example, educators, those who serve the poor, public servants, social communicators);
- **specific sectors** to be attended by the Mission, such as families, young people, schools and universities, workers, business people, artists, etc.
- other social or pastoral groups which we may decide to focus on in the course of the Mission.

IV. THE PEDAGOGY OF ACTION IN THE CONTINENTAL MISSION

In the process of forming missionary disciples, we would stress five basic aspects which take different forms at each stage of the process, but which are closely connected with one another and nourish one another:

- the Encounter with Jesus Christ
- Conversion
- Discipleship
- Communion
- and Mission

This means:

- knowing the desires of the persons – and peoples – that God confides to us, and leading them to an encounter with the living Jesus Christ,
- who fosters in them an attitude of conversion,

- and the decision to follow in the footsteps of Jesus,
- so that, by their living in communion with Christ and being called by him within the communion of the Church, a sense of ecclesial belonging grows strong and generates life,
- so that they undergo a process of formation that is integral, gradual, kerygmatic, permanent, diversified, and community-oriented – and includes spiritual accompaniment,
- so that baptized Christians assume their missionary commitment and progress from being evangelized to being evangelizers, to the end that the Kingdom of God becomes actively present among our Latin American and Caribbean peoples and that they thus have fullness of life in Christ.

We can explain these dimensions of the process with words we find in the Gospel itself, words which describe the manner of encountering, forming, and sending those persons who receive the vocation to be missionary disciples so that all peoples might have life in Christ:

Everything begins with a question: “What are you seeking?” (Jn 1,38). The Document of Aparecida comments on this (279):

- a. “Those who will be his disciples are already seeking him. We need to discover the deeper meaning of this seeking and encourage the encounter with Christ which gives rise to Christian initiation.” (Seeking)
- b. The disciples, who want to meet Christ, ask him: “Teacher, where do you live?” (Jn 1,38). Jesus invites them to go through an experience: “Come and see” (Jn 1,39); “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14,6). (Encounter)
- c. When Jesus meets Philip, he says to him, “Follow me.” Later, beside the Lake of Galilee, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, amazed at the Teacher’s words and the miraculous catch, “left everything and followed him.” (Conversion and Discipleship)
- d. Jesus called them “so that they would be with him” (Mk 3,14) and “remain in his love,” forming a community of disciples that would later be known for its solidarity and for its union in prayer, in the breaking of the bread, and in the teaching of the apostles. (Communion)
- e. But the call of Jesus to discipleship is inseparable from the missionary vocation. Already in the encounter on the shores of the lake, Jesus makes clear to them his purpose: “I will make you fishers of men,” and when he calls the twelve he says explicitly that he is calling them in order to “send them to preach” (Mk 3,14). And before ascending to heaven, he sends them “to make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them ...” (Mission)

To accomplish this process and win back those people who have fallen away, we have to strengthen four aspects of our Church:

- a) **personal encounter** with Jesus Christ, as a profoundly intense religious experience, a kerygmatic proclamation, producing the personal witness of the evangelizers, which leads to personal conversion and an integral change of life;
- b) **living together in community**, since our people desire communities where they are warmly welcomed. It is important that our faithful feel that they are really members of a church community and that they have responsibility for its growth and development;

- c) **training in scripture and doctrine**, based on experience and oriented toward community, is necessary to help religious experience mature. It is a basic, essential tool for attaining spiritual, personal, and community knowledge.
- d) **missionary commitment** of the whole community, which goes forth to meet those who have fallen away and takes an interest in their situation in order to re-enchant them with the Church and invite them to return to it.

We should be aware that missionary disciples will arise only insofar as our communities dedicate themselves to evangelizing and accompanying those baptized persons who are not conscious of being disciples, so that they can mature gradually toward a desire to serve and thus respond to the mission which the Lord gives them through the Church.

In this process, the ongoing personal and pastoral conversion of the pastors and all religious is an indispensable element for making a **coherent testimony of life** the basic pedagogical foundation.

Paths to the encounter with Christ.

An authentic proposal for encountering Jesus Christ should take into account the following elements:

- a) Experience of the presence of Jesus Christ in the personal and community life of the believer: in the reading of sacred scripture in liturgy and personal meditation; in the celebration of the Eucharist, inexhaustible source of the Christian vocation and limitless font of missionary commitment; in the dynamism of a community life that is participative and fraternal; and in service to the poor and the excluded.
- b) A new appreciation of popular piety, which is a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church, and a manner of being missionary that puts us in touch with the deepest vibrations of the heart of America.
- c) A increased feeling of nearness to Mary, the finest image of faithful following of Christ, and mother and educator of the missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.
- d) Rescue of the witnesses of the Gospel in America, of the men and women who lived their faith heroically on the path of sanctity, along with those who shed their blood in martyrdom.

Furthermore, we should develop a pedagogy of encounter and communion.

Pedagogy of encounter:

The mission should be carried out within the dynamic of the pedagogy of all the encounters which happen between persons, between families, between communities. Since every pastor – and likewise every missionary – should reflect the Good Shepherd, it is evident that our pastoral ministry has to be interwoven with conviviality, simplicity, cordiality, solicitude, and attentiveness and service to others. In this evangelizing effort the church community makes itself know through pastoral initiatives as it sends forth its lay and religious missionaries, especially to the homes in the most marginalized urban and rural sectors, seeking to dialogue with everybody in a spirit of understanding and loving kindness.

Pedagogy of communion

It is important that this Continental Mission be carried out as a great expression of communion. Communion with God should be made manifest in universal prayer which invokes the Holy Spirit with Mary, the mother of Jesus, to bring about unity with the Pope, among the bishops' conferences, and

among the local churches, so that they help one another reciprocally, especially in sharing personnel and resources.

Every local church should open itself generously to the needs of others. Collaboration among the churches, through a genuine reciprocity that prepares them both to give and to receive, is also a source of enrichment for all of them, and it should include all the various sectors of church life. In this regard, the declaration of the bishops at Puebla is exemplary:

“Finally, the hour has arrived for Latin America to project itself beyond its own borders, to the nations. The truth is that we ourselves need missionaries, but we must also give out of our poverty. ... The mission of the Church is much greater than ‘communion among the churches’: this communion, besides helping toward the new evangelization, should also have a special orientation of a specifically missionary nature.”

V. THE PRIVILEGED ROLE OF LAY PEOPLE

Any missionary effort requires, in a special way, the active and committed participation of the lay faithful in every stage of the process.

- Today the whole Latin American and Caribbean Church seeks to put itself in a state of mission. The evangelization of the continent, Pope John Paul II told us, cannot be realized today without the collaboration of lay people.
- Lay people must play an active and creative part in the elaboration and execution of pastoral projects for the community’s benefit.
- This requires, on the part of the pastors, a greater openness of mind, so that they will understand and welcome the reality and the action of lay people in the Church, who by their baptism and confirmation are disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ.
- In other words, lay people must be taken fully into account in a spirit of communion and participation.

VI. FORMATION OF MISSIONARIES

Aparecida made a clear and decisive option to give formation to the members of our communities for the benefit of all baptized persons, whatever their function in the Church’s development.

- The formation should be suffused with missionary zeal, which is an impulse of the Spirit energizing all spheres of existence, penetrating and configuring the specific vocation of each person. Thus, the spiritualities proper to priests, religious, parents, business people, catechists, etc., each take on their proper form and develop accordingly.
- Each of these vocations has a concrete, distinctive type of spirituality, which gives depth and enthusiasm to the concrete exercise of their different tasks. Thus, life in the Spirit should not shut us up in comfortable intimacy, but rather should make us into generous, creative persons, joyful in our proclamation of the Gospel and our missionary service.
- Our vocation commits us to considering the just claims of our social reality and enables us to find profound meaning in everything we do for the Church and the world. The Spirit weaves bonds of communion among the diverse vocations, so that all together, as complementary members of a single Body, they accomplish a single mission.

VII. CRITERIA FOR MISSION

Personal and pastoral conversion

This mission necessarily requires pastoral conversion, both in persons and in the very structures of the Church. We must recognize what structures are outmoded and seek the new forms that are demanded by our changing times.

- Pastoral conversion of our communities requires us to move beyond pastoral ministry which is simply preservative toward pastoral ministry which is decidedly missionary.
- This will make it possible for the unique program of the Gospel to be introduced persistently into the history of each church community with new missionary ardor, thus helping the Church to manifest itself as a mother who goes forth to meet people, as a welcoming home, as a permanent school of missionary communion.

Paying heed to cultural signs: inculturation and presence in the new Areopagus

We must keep in mind how complex and varied is the reality of our continent: it has its megalopolises and its vast urban peripheries, and also its huge farming, mining, and maritime spheres. Nor can we forget the hospital, the prisons, the rehabilitation centers, or the peculiarities of the churches themselves in the different regions.

The mission, even though a single, unified effort, should at the same time be diverse. It is therefore necessary to pay heed to the cultural signs of the epoch, so that all the new and different expressions and values become enriched with the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this way we will have more success in uniting faith with life and will also contribute to a more expansive catholicity, one that is not only geographic but also cultural.

Using new languages: communication

In our mission we must take fully into account modern-day culture, which should be studied, evaluated, and in a certain sense adopted by the Church, so that we use a language understood by our contemporaries. Only thus will Christian faith appear to be a pertinent, significant vehicle of salvation. At the same time, Christian faith should offer present-day society alternative cultural models.

- Our using new language will help us communicate the values of the Gospel in a positive, creative way. There are many people who claim to be unhappy, not so much with the content of the Church's doctrine as with the form in which it is presented and lived.
- In the mission we must use of the Church's communications media to good advantage, making them more effective and relevant, whether for communicating the faith or for promoting dialogue between Church and society.
- Another important task is giving our missionary proclamation a pronounced presence in the general mass media, as well as in cyberspace, which the new generations use with frequency. Just as we already have experience of educational programs about the faith on radio and television, so also an interactive website might be a useful option for helping to move our mission forward.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In the context of normal pastoral action

- The carrying out of a continental mission should inject dynamism into existing pastoral plans, with whatever renewal of structures that may be needed.
- A firm missionary commitment should pervade all church structures and all pastoral plans of dioceses, parishes, religious communities, movements, and other institutions of the Church.
- No community should excuse itself from entering wholeheartedly and energetically into the constant processes of missionary renewal, nor should it refuse to abandon those outmoded structures that no longer favor the transmission of the faith.

And I conclude with the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

“Christian faith will not be able to withstand the ravages of time if it is reduced to baggage, to a list of norms and prohibitions, to fragmented devotional practices, to selective and partial adhesion to the truths of the faith, to occasional participation in some sacraments, to repetition of doctrinal principles, to bland or curt moralisms which do nothing to change the lives of baptized Christians.

“The greatest threat facing us is the gray pragmatism of the Church’s daily life, where everything apparently proceeds normally, but where in reality the faith gets worn down and degenerates into meanness.

“We all are obliged to begin again from Christ, recognizing that being a Christian does not begin with an ethical decision or a great idea, but with an encounter with an event, with a Person who provided life with a new horizon and so with a decisive orientation.” (Ratzinger, J., *Present Situation of the Faith and Theology*. Conference given at the meeting of the presidents of the Latin American episcopal conferences for the doctrine of the faith, held in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 1996. Published in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 1 November 1996, DCE 1).

OSCAR ANDRÉS CARDENAL RODRÍGUEZ MARADIAGA, S.D.B.

ARZOBISPO DE TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS