

## EVANGELIZATION

### Missionary Community for Humanity<sup>1</sup>

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Humanity asks the missionary community, those who have “received the mission of announcing the Kingdom of Christ and God” (*Lumen Gentium* 6): What does the announcement of this kingdom mean for the great problems that threaten humanity? What is the missionary community’s contribution (relevance) to solving those problems? And we, the members of the missionary community, ask ourselves: What are these problems and what solutions can we offer to the world, to humanity, and above all, to the poor? Do these problems have solutions? What does it mean to ‘take the announcement of the person of Jesus and of his Gospel as a light of God and paradigm of humanity (...) through the saving actions of the Church’, as affirmed in the Working Document of this Congress (Working Document 18)? How do we transform our proposal into secular language so that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century understands it as its own – mordant, rooted in its contexts, and at the same time, open to the Transcendent, from where “the goodness of our Savior and his love for man has become manifest”(Timothy 3:4; CAM3 Working Document 19)?

At the end of the second century, a distinguished pagan known as Diognetus asked the Christian community: Who is this God and what is his Good News, in which Christians place their faith? What is your proposal, you Christian missionary-disciples, for a world in which proposals are no longer valid for all? What is your project? What is your secret? And the unknown author of the catechismal Letter to Diognetus responded:

“Christians do not inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a language distinct from others (...). They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. Every foreign land is to them a native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. (...) Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. (...) they are the ones who secure the cosmos” (Letter to Diognetus, 1 – 7).

What does it mean to “secure the cosmos”? Certainly it means to “care” for life in the world, carry on our backs all those whose lives are threatened, “struggle” for the justice of the resurrection, and “trust” in that God who became flesh in this world so that we may “have life abundantly” (John 10:10).

The topic entrusted to me is about the universal mission of the Church. When we speak of “mission” in the Church today, we distinguish between seven or eight different dimensions, considering both the recipient and the doer. Mission can mean:

Witness in the world  
Missionary ministry  
New evangelization  
Evangelization  
Ecumenism  
Inter-religious dialogue

*ad gentes* mission

*inter. gentes* mission

Mission beyond borders

Together, all these missionary activities make up the “mission of the Church in the world”. They are small stones that form the mosaic of the Church’s universal mission. The “missionary community for humanity”, or the “*mission ad humanitatem*”, is directed at all credos - including our own – because, as stated in the Working Document (Ch. 1, point # 20), “evangelization is also directed at the Church itself”. Our mission is directed toward all cultures, nationalities, and social classes.

We may ask, is this topic not too broad? Does its breadth not make us forget our own specific problems? Where is our Catholic identity? Where is the option for the poor, the defense of indigenous peoples? Where is the local Church with the Christian Base Communities? Where are the ministries, the laity, and inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue? Certainly all of these aspects and their fundamental axes (Working Document, ch. 1, point 13) will be explored in the working groups and in other presentations during this Congress.

At this moment, it seems to me that I must show that the ecclesial puzzles have their relevance, or as the Pope has said in his Encyclical *On Christian Hope* (Spe Salvi), their “capital gains of heaven” (Spe Salvi, paragraph 35) for all of humanity. These “capital gains” involve the grace of God as a gift, and our action as duty and response. The General Directives for Evangelizing Action (DGAE) of the Church in Brazil of 2008 warn that the missionary disciple’s sensitivity to specific matters of our Churches’ particular reality “does not excuse him from turning his attention to the larger matters and what they mean for all of humanity. In a globalized world, in which actions and their consequences transcend borders, it is impossible to close one’s eyes in the face of poverty, exclusion, violence, and persecution” (DGAE 207).

Love of God and neighbor are inseparable. It seems to me that my task is to weave that thread that describes a human world as well as a missionary responsibility that is expanding, like the cosmos itself.<sup>2</sup> I am going to present three dimensions of this long road of our missionary responsibility between the local context and the far reaches of the world:

The missionary community’s relevance for humanity flows from the “missionary nature of the Church”.

Precious stones and stumbling blocks along the way to the missionary community’s encounter with humanity.

Our commitment to humanity.

## 1. OUR RESPONSIBILITY

The argument for the “missionary nature” comes from within the Church, which affirms the need for, and permanence of, the missionary paradigm. After Aparecida, the Church called on the baptized once again to undertake their discipleship under a regimen of urgency (Aparecida Document 289, 368, 518). This missionary mobilization should not be seen as something extraordinary, or as the prerogative of one local church or pastoral sector or specific movement. Vatican II declared that the missionary nature is part of the ecclesial *raison d'être*: “The pilgrim Church is, by nature, missionary. It has its origins in the mission of the Son and Holy Spirit, in accordance with the design of the God the Father” (*Ad Gentes* 2).

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Latin American bishops have taken up this fundamental affirmation on several occasions (cf. SD 12, Aparecida Document 347). The “Third Part” of the conclusive Aparecida Document, dedicated to pastoral action, envisions a Church that lives “in a state of mission” (Aparecida Document 213). Similarly, the General Directives of Evangelizing Action of the Church in Brazil 2008 – 2010 will showcase the dream of missionary discipleship “in a permanent state of mission” (DGAE 47-101). The texts insist on bringing back an everyday missionary aspect to the Church in all instances. Theological discourse also must be marked by the missionary nature of the Church, representing not one discipline among others, but a theology of mission that cuts across all theological subjects. The Theology of Mission is at once fundamental and pastoral theology ..., and discourse that is not only ‘informative’ but also ‘performative’ (Spe Salvi 4). In other words, a discourse that can transform our life and that of others.

The “missionary nature” has its foundation in the order of creation and redemption. It is linked to creation because as “nature” it coincides with the “essence” and “being” of the nature that has been created, of which humanity is a part. It is related to redemption, which Christians interpret as re-creation, because according to Scripture it is based on nature redeemed by the new order of the Risen one who sends his disciples as missionaries to the “ends of the world”. The missionary nature, also sometimes called the “missionary essence”, is lived by persons redeemed by grace who, nevertheless, remain sinners.

The missionary nature of the Church in its expansion, its mediation, or its historical practice is not in dispute nor is it negotiable. It is, however, subject to discernment, discussions, and debate. As that fact is easily verifiable, we can compare, for example, the so called *Coloquios* of 1524 - in which twelve Franciscans introduced indigenous religious leaders who survived the conquest of Mexico to the new Christian order – with the Puebla document of 1979, or the writings of Jose de Anchieta with the diary of Vicente Cañas, who was martyred in 1987 as a defender of the Enawene-Nawe people in the Rio Juruela region of the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil.

The “missionary nature” is “essence” in the metaphorical sense, because it is “principle”, and as such, it is anthropologically part of the origins but also belongs to the time of the Church and is historically

lived. Because it is of the origins, and so as not to exclude any one, it is a universal responsibility directed toward everyone with the project of Jesus, the Kingdom of God. The multiple affirmations of the “missionary nature” of the Church in recent documents does not support the conclusion that that nature has been forgotten. It has been obscured in different eras and regions of the world by the Church’s proximity to power. Power, whether an expression of colonial, imperial, dictatorial or even democratic regimes, has always managed to transform the mission into ideology and neutralize the Church’s presence at the side of the poor, whose existence denounces the violation of their rights and cultures by the respective regimes.

According to Christian faith, the missionary origin and nature have been revealed to us by Jesus Christ. The origins of that mission are found in the mission of the Holy Trinity (“mission of God”) and its purpose for the salvation of humanity: “That they might have life, and have it in abundance.” (John 10:10). That mission continued when the Risen Jesus sent his disciples in the Holy Spirit: “As you, Father, have sent me to the world, I too will send them to the world.” (John 17:18).

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The identities of the historical Jesus and the risen Jesus are distinguished by the wounds on his hands and where the lance pierced his side. The Risen Jesus “showed them his hands and his side, and the disciples exalted at having seen the Lord” (John 20:20). Jesus of Nazareth, “he who was sent by God” (John 20:21) fully “assumed human nature” (*Ad Gentes* 3). The missionary nature of the Church finds its identity in this origin of he who was sent by God and assumed human nature. The identity of Jesus before and after the Resurrection signals the identity of the disciples’ mission and of the missionary nature of the Church, whose kerygmatic nucleus – according to St. Paul – is the scandal and madness of the “crucified Christ” (1 Cor 1:23). The path of the missionary community is marked by poor signage: emptiness, opening, partition, rupture, the way, the cross, and the sacred Host. The manger and the tomb are empty. The door to the upper room where the disciples are gathered is open. The genealogy of Jesus is interrupted by the Holy Spirit. The Church is servant, pilgrim, host, instrument, sign.

## 2. OUR ENCOUNTER

The pilgrim and missionary Church was founded on the feast of Pentecost, the feast of the gift of the Law on Mt. Sinai for the Jewish people, and for Christians the feast of the New Commandment, therefore, of new ethics and practices. On this feast, the disciples – both men and women – were sent in mission in union with the Holy Spirit. Beginning with Pentecost, the ecclesial community learned that its task is to prepare, call, and send servants of the Kingdom and Witnesses of the resurrection. But the disciples were still very rooted in Jerusalem, the Temple, and the traditions of the Jewish people and their families. Then something unexpected happened: the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70. Pentecost, destruction, and expulsion mark the beginning of the universal mission of the Church, which from then on no longer had its own homeland or its own culture.

Through the Holy Spirit, the missionary community is sent to unite

universally peoples and cultures in a great network (John 21:11) of solidarity, diversity, and unity. From this act of sending are born the Petrine communities that seek to contextualize the utopia of the first day of the new Creation. And from those communities is born the act of sending. Mission is the heart of the Church. And that heart has two movements: sending and summoning: sending to the periphery of the world, and summoning from that periphery for the liberation of the center. Under the sign of the Kingdom, it proposes a world without periphery and without center.

But who is the recipient or target audience of the missionary community? Who is the “world”? Who is “humanity” today in 2008? What are their problems and what is our good news that makes it worthwhile to leave father and mother, home and homeland, that we can offer, not always as a solution but as a new outlook that gives sense to what we find, believe, and experience? How can one be happy in the midst of a suffering world? Or, as our singer Gonzaguinha used to say:

To Live!

And not be ashamed of being happy (...).

Ah, my God!

I know, I know

That life should be better and it will be.

But that does not keep me from repeating

It is beautiful, it is beautiful...

Our missionary optimism does not flee from reality, suffering, and the poor, victims of the five great crises of our planet Earth, which are:

Crisis of the economic model

Social crisis

Ecological crisis

Cultural crisis

Democratic crisis

Humanity’s central problems that emerge from these multiple and connected crises today at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are the following:

a) The economic polarization of global society at a tremendous rate, where the winner is not he who is most human, but he who can produce cheaply. Growth and expansion will become magic words, supported by more and more sophisticated technology used to replace workers.

b) Those who produce the cheapest are those who subject themselves to conditions of difficult, arduous work that machines and computers are not yet able to perform. Such difficult and short-term work is accompanied by undignified compensation, without any guarantee of social rights, education for one’s children, or housing. The privileged recipients of the missionary kerygma are the poor, the unemployed and underemployed, emigrants, those who die before their time they have no sanitary services that protect them.

c) Irrational exploration does not only concern our working, indigenous, or emigrant brother, but affects our sister Nature as well. The dilapidation of nature and the devastation of our forests and biodiversity “endanger the lives of millions of people”, especially “peasants and indigenous peoples who are pushed toward non-productive lands and to the big cities where they live on top of each other in belts of misery” (Aparecida Document 473).

d) The cultural crisis manifests itself as a crisis of sense, on the one hand, and on the other and as fundamentalism with all of its ramifications in the great religions and political and philosophical ideologies. The dissolution of a sense of human history into a mere natural history, and the affirmation of ‘one way’ of thinking as a refusal or failure to recognize others and different ways of thinking ... represent a permanent potential for war and violence.

e) After wars were waged to implant democracy, today the liberal democracy is in a profound structural crisis due to ethics and a confusion of powers (executive, legislative, judicial). Liberal democracy does not permit the satisfactory participation of the people, above all the poor and excluded. Those with economic power managed to reduce the State to a minimum State that does not interfere in their interests, favors the elite, and does not control corruption, the accumulation of capital in the hands of a few, or the media which spreads the “cost-benefit” ideology as if it were the first commandment of an ethically correct code.

f) Justice in our countries has become a formal, slow and expensive justice that often takes place far from where the injustice occurred and does not ensure the basic rights of the poor, who may not understand the legal processes or be able to afford competent lawyers.

Facing this mountain of problems, each society, State, and government must resolve or balance five tasks:

1. Create or sustain a certain level of economic (material) well-being for all citizens. Humanity’s debts have grown (including those of the World Bank and IMF), to the point that it is impossible to fulfill those obligations within the system of neoliberal capitalism.

2. Promote cohesion and internal social solidarity, which are trampled by the global market that feeds off the exclusion, not the integration, of citizens. Exclusion, redistribution, social integration and participation in profits will become new problems for the judicial power (much like human rights) which is unprepared for the task.

3. Guarantee the cultural recognition (ethnic, religion, gender) of others in a pact of tolerance, based not only on facts but on rights (human rights, human dignity).

4. Defend and protect liberty and political participation for all in a democratic system whose functioning does not depend on the influence of big capital.

5. Finally, it is necessary to create a legal system that applies the law fairly to all and inhibits all forms of corruption, even in the judicial apparatus itself. It is not easy to incorporate so-called clientelism (*clientelismo*) based on familial clans, a legacy of the patriarchal system, into the rules of a modern State. (See the problem of corruption, also in Africa!)

Admittedly, balance among these tasks is difficult to achieve. Consider, for example the balance between economic well-being, social solidarity, and a truly democratic system. There is no government in the world that has achieved that balance for an extended period of time. There are some political models that are able to emphasize at least one of these aspects and that periodically enter into crisis:

The Anglo-Saxon model, which incorporates a neoliberal ideology and favors expansion and economic well-being for a considerable group of its citizens, has decreased institutional solidarity for the poor.

The socialist model, which emphasizes equality and the social well-being of its citizens, to the detriment of a prosperous economy and political liberty.

The Asian model (the so-called Asian tigers, Singapore), which achieves social and economic prosperity at the cost of democratic rollbacks and state control.

The indigenous and peasant model, which may be the model that best manages to balance the aspects of territory (collective and familial) – that is, land for living and not for making large profits – and of political power as service to the community. We can learn a lot from the indigenous communities, but it is not possible to copy them. Our national and transnational societies are much more complex due to industrialization and the sheer multitude of people who live in them.

For a moment at the beginning of the second half of last century, it seemed possible to tame capitalism within a social and democratic system in the central countries. But that balance came at the cost of outsourcing the misery of those countries to the periphery of the industrialized world. A wall emerged between the First World and the Third World. Having verified the failure of that balance and discovered the trick by the central countries who live at the expense of the countries on the periphery, movements grew especially in the Third World that attempted to balance the three poles, placing more emphasis on social solidarity to the detriment of political liberty. Together, they failed just the same.

Today, in a globalized world without geographic or even political borders, misery has nowhere left to go. All countries reproduce the First and Third World within their own borders. That allows and also obliges us to strengthen solidarity and to search together for alternatives. Our own Third American Missionary Congress (CAM 3 – Comla 8) is an expression of this willingness to collaborate more between North and South, expand hope, and affirm that alternatives exist. The problems that have arisen are not natural. They were created by humanity, which gives us hope that humanity itself is able to solve them.

We affirm that another world is possible, because the clash of economic growth, social security, and political democracy does not work,

nor does it offer a universal perspective. Balance among capitalist accumulation (growth), social integration, and democratic legitimization, when passed through the sieve of cost-benefit analysis and return on investment calculation, cannot work. And we must not enter into a game of perverse alternatives, such as: democracy with hunger and misery; or material well-being without participation, without political liberty, and without horizons of sense; or economic prosperity in a country with dictatorship and hunger (where the country does well but the people do poorly); or political and economic prosperity for the elite and misery for the rest.

Today, few rulers have the audacity to make promises in their political discourse about the integrity of social structures and the promises of modern democracy in the face of the commercialization of global society. This merchandise-society destroys natural resources to produce ever more unnecessary products and devours the moral resources of democracy, which should feed off of collective solidarity.

The vision of a transnational society of citizens that is not subject to the imperatives of the market ..., that forges a participatory democracy to regenerate solidarity on a global scale, is the challenge of our times. The only weapon to cure the wounds of Modernity is Modernity itself. We need the venom to develop the vaccine. There is no magical formula against the grave faults in our democracies – the legal system, the broken down economy, the non-recognition of others. They cannot be corrected by pre- or post-Modernity.

What can we missionary-disciples do? What can we propose? We are all merely apprentices in the face of the gravity of these problems. We do not have an immediate prescription or another world we can choose for our mission aside from this one, in which we can always travel about with new attitudes, with the light of the Gospel, and with the reason for our hope.

### 3. OUR COMMITMENT

The victims of the logic of expropriation and exclusion do not ask us for technical solutions, but for participation in the missionary action of the Church, which could become a rehearsal for even broader transformations. They ask us for signs of justice and reasons for hope. Our task as missionary-disciples is that of pilgrim prophet, who denounces and announces, and lives by other values (sharing, solidarity, gratitude) and guides us to another world that is possible, which for us is based on the Kingdom of God. Our dreams, our vision of the world, and our hope have an impact on the universal world, because through dreams, vision and hope we are capable of “securing the cosmos”, as stated in the Letter to Diognetus. To strengthen our shoulders for the task, we need to be careful about our identity. There are four pillars that can help us secure the cosmos of our missionary nature. Let us live that nature universally contextualized, in the plural unity of the Holy Spirit, in the gratitude and hope of - and with - the poor.

#### 3.1 UNIVERSALLY CONTEXTUALIZED

How do you situate yourself in the world, between isolation and *aggiornamento*, between deprivation and enrichment? How to translate the articles of faith, signs of justice, images of hope, and practices of solidarity for the interlocutors of the modern world? The theological

foundation of the mission's context is found in the proximity of God throughout the history of salvation and in following Jesus, who by virtue of the incarnation drew closer to humanity. (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 22). The God of the history of Judeo-Christian salvation is a God near to his people. As Saint Irenaeus has said, God is close to each human person through His two extended hands, which are the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> The historic and contextual mediation of God's work makes history and context a sacrament of its presence. Mission inserted into the heart of the history and culture of each people "is an imperative for following Jesus and is necessary to restore the disfigured face of the world"(Santo Domingo document 13b). The analogy between the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth and the contextual proximity caused missiological reflection to debate the paradigm of inculturation. With inculturation, the Church becomes "a more transparent sign" and "a more apt instrument"(Redemptoris Missio 52) to announce the Gospel, not as an alternative to cultures but as their profound fulfillment. Let us live inculturation universally contextualized.

There are two opposing dimensions of universality: the universality of oppression and the universality of liberation. Universality as hegemony, meaning political, economic or cultural power, places itself above all others. It opposes the causes of the poor and of others who try to free themselves from that hegemony. Others' allegiance to the poor is anti-hegemonic. Universality as hegemony excludes large portions of humanity from progress and social well-being. Universality of the causes and alliances gives way to the participation of all in the patrimony of humanity.

Because of its universality, all of the causes of the Kingdom represent the challenges of intercultural communication with those who are different: with popular and lay wisdom, with religious experiences, with different temporalities (linear time and circular time), with different geographies (local, regional, and international projects), with different hierarchies (ancestral, patriarchal, community, functional, democratic), with different visions and values with respect to economic productivity. Only by saying good-bye to a mono-cultural, regional, and de-contextualized theological vision can we realize the complexity of the missionary nature.

With universality (non-exclusion, participation of all, ends of the Earth), it is important not to forget the differences of contexts. There is nothing more contextualized and more universal than the suffering of the poor. In the balance between the universal and contextual is the possibility of a communication in favor of the multiple causes included in the cause of the Kingdom. Solidarity, which is universal, must be built from the river, and from the street, and from the peoples themselves. The hegemonic project, which imposes regional values, objectives and outlooks, is the enemy of contextual universality. Contextual universality of the poor presupposes the long road of building a common, shared project. Without that project, mediated by universally agreed upon values such as justice, solidarity, equality, liberty, participation and tolerance, the historical projects of each socio-ethnic group lose the characteristics of a "cause" that can be defended by all.

As for the universal project, "the more it promotes and embraces the unity of humankind, the better it respects the peculiarities of diverse cultures." (*Gaudium et Spes* 54). Universality grows with proximity, which is "cognitive" in its memory, "sensitive" in what it sees and

hears, and "emotional" in its compassion. Universality and proximity structure the paradigms of inculturation and liberation. The goal of inculturation is liberation, which itself needs inculturation. The paradigm of liberation aims toward non-exclusion, that is, toward the participation of all and the universality of justice, solidarity, and love. Efforts for liberation gain depth when rooted in context. The universality of the causes of the Kingdom can be understood as an alternative to the discourse and projects that emerge from economic globalization (competition, profit, consumerism), as bringing together multiple projects of life, which unites universal responsibility for all of humanity and the planet Earth. The announcement and universal practice of a greater love and the announcement of the Kingdom as "liberation from the captivity of corruption" (Romans 8:21; *Lumen Gentium* 9) is anti-systemic and, therefore, it is for everyone.

### 3.2 UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Through new topics such as "local Church", "contextualization", "insertion" (inculturation), and "dialogue", Vatican II allowed us to rethink many suppositions about the universality of the Church. The unity of mission is a unity in the diversity of the Holy Spirit. The multiple responses of cultures are not an accident, but they should be positively interpreted as participation in the creation of the world. And in that world, peoples and individuals defend their identity in contrast to alterity (otherness). From that contrast is born the imperative of plurality in unity. This unity is not that of metaphysics or humankind's ontology, but unity built through reason, truth, and the ultimate meaning present in multiple projects of life that are manifested in multiple voices. Life is not generated through an encounter with oneself, but through an encounter with others.

Cultural pluralism is mirrored in religious pluralism. Vatican II's explicit recognition of religious freedom, through the declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, is presupposed in mission. There is a consensus among the majority of Churches and the majority of the faithful that religious alterity (otherness) is irreducible. And that alterity calls for interreligious dialogue. As an instrument of understanding, respect, and peaceful co-existence, dialogue in the context of pluralism always has "the traits of testimony, within the maximum respect for the person and for the identity of the interlocutor"(Puebla 1114).

Pluralism and dialogue, as interdisciplinary instruments of communication, have a universal, attractive, and responsible horizon with regard to those who do not participate in the respective dialogue. Everyone should participate in discussions of the great causes of humanity (justice, equality, solidarity, and peace). Unity is the center of universality. Building unity means knocking down "walls of separation" (Cf. Ephesians 2:14). "announcing the Good News to the poor" means tearing down one of the many walls of separation that society allowed to emerge not only between countries, but also within each State and each person. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25), told in response to a question about what one must do to obtain eternal life, Jesus proposes demolishing not only the ethnic wall between Samaritans and Jews, or between *mestizos* and pure Jews, or the clerical wall between priests and lay people, but also the wall between marginalized sect and official religion, between the just and the sinners, between discourse and praxis, be-

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tween truth and love.

According to the parable, following the “false” religion of the Samaritans does not prevent one from living truth before God. The certain and important thing for eternal life is not belonging to a certain group, but practicing a greater justice and charity, embracing non-exclusive diversity, and overcoming exclusive differences.

Knocking down walls marked by the “corruption of sin” means recovering the face of God in human faces and the free communication between those who are equal and different. In that process that relegates the order of redemption to the order of creation, the historical and post-resurrection Jesus places himself at the side of the Samaritan, the emigrant, the leper, the poor, the “other”, and the sinner. He builds unity beginning with an assumption and articulation of a mutilated humanity in their contexts and in the confines of their worlds.

All the walls fall in the face of the “suffering appearances of Christ” found in humanity’s appearance in “situations of extreme poverty”(Puebla 31), where the deprivation of the incarnation and redemption assume their historic and saving relevance. It is important to remember: Jesus was not a bricklayer. He did not build walls. He was a carpenter. He made doors and windows.

Vatican II speaks of a new way of belonging to the “catholic unity of the people of God.” “To it they belong... whether they are faithful Catholics, other believers in Christ, or finally, all men in general who are called to salvation by the grace of God”(*Lumen Gentium* 13d). Mission contributes specific tasks on those three levels. *Ad intra* works on the identity of the faith and the way in which faithful Catholics belong to the Catholic Church. The *ad intra* work unfolds in the practice of its *ad extra* responsibility, which leads not to the corporatist integration of others in the Catholic Church, but to the sharing of the gifts each person has received for the service of others (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 13c) and the building of universal peace. Religious pluralism is an expression of “Catholic unity of the people of god”, which is unity in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the “principle of unity” (*Lumen Gentium* 13a). The Catholic Church is part of the “catholic unity” but is not identical to it. Other believers in Christ and all of humanity also belong to the “catholic unity”. The justice of the resurrection is not the privilege of one Christian denomination or another. By the universal saving will of God, we “must admit that the Holy Spirit offers to everyone the possibility of associating themselves...to this Pascal mystery” (*Gaudium et Spes* 22). Alterity is not complementary to identity, but rather its condition of being.

Definitive unity between Christians and humanity...should be seen in a scatological horizon. “Anyone who expects the dialogue between religions to result in their unification is bound for disappointment. This is hardly possible within our historical time, and perhaps it is not even desirable”<sup>4</sup>, wrote then Cardinal Ratzinger some years back. What was considered yesterday to be “idolatry”, “heresy”, “fetichism”, or “perfidy” is today courted as religion with “flames of that truth that illuminates all men (*Nostra Aetate* 2b). In other Vatican II texts, non-Christian religions are considered “evangelical preparation” (*Lumen Gentium* 16, cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 53), “pedagogy for God” (*Ad Gentes* 3a), or “seeds of the Verb” (*Ad Gentes* 11b; *Lumen gentium* 17). The topics of preparing the Gospel in non-Christian cultures and of the origin of all that is beautiful, good, and true of the Holy Spirit are commonplace in the Catholic tradition (Cf. *Ad Gentes* 15, 17; *Gaudium et Spes* 22:5, 26:4, 38, 41:1, 57:4). It is not non-Christian religions that are transitory, but our understanding of them.

The International Theological Commission affirmed in 1972 that “Orthodoxy is not consent to a system, but participation in a walk of faith”<sup>5</sup>. When we are overtaken by the desire to yank out all the weeds from history, the Gospel reminds us of the scatological horizon of the harvest (Matthew 13:24-30).

### 3.3 GRATUITY

In the competitive and exclusive world, where value is based only on market price, mission is linked to defeating the kingdom of necessity (“Cost-benefit”) and recovering alternative spaces and projects based on the non-market and gratuity. The missionary community trusts in the attraction of its free testimony. Its “marketing” dispenses with propaganda and weapons. The spaces of gratuity inherent to Christianity are spaces of resistance to those that have been made into territories of profit. Profit particularizes and privatizes. The market is not for everyone.

In Aparecida, the Church called itself “house of the poor” (Aparecida Document 8, 524). Its space is an alternative space, formed by the gratuity of the cross of Jesus of Nazareth and the Pascal experience of his disciples. That gratuity of the cross is not the preface to the history of liberation and emancipation, but its permanent axis: “Love freely given, as a solution to conflict, must be the radical cultural axis of a new society” (Aparecida Document 543). “The generosity of God is manifested in the generosity of missionaries, the gratuity of the Gospel appears in the gratuity of the apostles” (Aparecida Document 31). The Church, the “house of the poor”, is a poor Church. From the poor it receives the gift of gratuity and proximity to the Holy Spirit, who is the “father of the poor” (Pentecost Sequence) and “protagonist of mission” (Redemptoris missio 21b).

In the procedures of justice, the Church is not a judge between parties, but an “advocate of justice for the poor” (Aparecida Document 395, 533). It is partial. It defends one party in the proceedings. That is its pneumatological mission, to be “consoler”, “intercessor”, and “advocate”: introducing and representing the “Spirit of Truth” (John 14:17 ) that comes from the Father and gives witness before the “father of lies” that disturbs the social order. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, not because of any doctrine, perfect law, or superior morals, but because truth occurs in Him in the generation of life: in the practice of the new commandment and of greater justice in favor of the poor.

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church weaved a guiding thread for its missionary action that illuminates the most profound dimension of its “missionary nature: the preferential option for the poor. That option is preferential because it must “cut across all our structures and pastoral priorities” (Aparecida Document 396). The origin of the “missionary nature” is in the “Mission of God”, which is the mission of the Word incarnate, “who emptied himself and took the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7), and of the Holy Spirit, sent to the poor: “All that is related to Christ is related to the poor, and all that is related to the poor cries out for Jesus Christ” (Aparecida Document 393). In the Holy Spirit, the carpenter’s son was confirmed as the “beloved Son” on the occasion of his baptism in the River Jordan. It as the Holy Spirit who led Jesus “to the desert to prepare himself for his mission” (Mark 1:12, Aparecida doc. 149). In the Holy Spirit Jesus was anointed the Messiah “to evangelize to the poor” (Luke 4:18). After his resurrection, Jesus sent his disciples to preach the Good News of the Kingdom with the strength of the Holy Spirit (Aparecida Doc. 276).

It has been 40 years since Pope Paul VI, who worked to transform the documents of Vatican II into pastoral reality, declared as the opening of the second Latin American Bishops Conference in Medellin: The Church finds itself today facing the vocation of the Poverty of Christ. (...) The indigence of the Church, with the honorable simplicity of its forms, is a testament to evangelical fidelity; it is a condition, sometimes indispensable, for giving credit to mission itself; (...) it represents an exercise, which strengthens the mission of the apostle.

The structure of this Church of the poor is Trinitarian. This, the "People of God", "Body of the Lord", and "Temple of the Holy Spirit", is born and reborn in the communities impelled by the Holy Spirit, and "becomes edified as the Church of God when it does not place itself at the center of its concerns, but the Kingdom it announces as the liberation of all" (DGAE 1995, n. 64). In the Eucharistic remembrance, the Christian community recalls the gratuity of its salvation and, in remembrance of the washing of the feet, brings up to date the reasons for its service, which is part of a logic that subverts relationships of domination (Mark 10:42). Being thankful in the consciousness of liberation that is received as a gift, and serving in fulfillment of the new order ("*¡entre vosotros sea diferente!*"), are aspects that give structure to mission. The gift does not dispense effort, and our efforts do not dispense grace. "Life is free from God, a gift and task that must be taken care of (...)" (Aparecida Doc. 464).

Gratuity necessarily promotes institutional simplicity. Only light structures allow us to think about gratuity. Heavy structures are very expensive. Walking in the Spirit is to walk unarmed and stripped bare. Authentic conversion and transformation make people simpler. And simplicity represents a response to the increasing complexity of the world. "When I sent you out without money belt, bag or sandals, you didn't lack anything, did you?" (Luke 22:35).

Gratuity, micro-structurally lived against the grain of the capitalist system, points toward the possibility of a world for everyone, and also for systemic disconnections, shifts in mentality and ecclesial structures. The Holy Spirit, which is a gift and which gives life, lives in the Verb incarnate, in the Word fulfilled on the cross and in the Resurrection. The Holy Spirit, who is the life of the Verb, also lives in the Word of God fulfilled in the faithfulness to its mission, in the sharing of what little we have and in the causes of the Kingdom we defend.

### 3.4 REASONS FOR OUR HOPE

Dominant discourse today affirms that there is no alternative to capitalism, that utopias no longer have meaning and that we are at the end of history. Such is the discourse of self-salvation and despair directed against the poor. It generates pessimism and depression. Hope is born when the victims begin to speak, act, and organize themselves on their own; when missionary-disciples make themselves present in the midst of the people, reject their own protagonism, give up the advantages of their social class, accompany the processes of organization, help to drive out feelings of incapability, and work to transform alienating desires - which expect everything

from the providence of God or from the promises of politicians – into historical hope.

Hope is a central message of Biblical faith (Spe Salvi 2). The message of the Kingdom and the resurrection of Jesus, which is a promise of definitive justice, is a promise to be fulfilled in the resurrection of the dead when "all are raised up in Christ" (1 Cor 15:22). We believe in the risen one and we announce his Kingdom ... in the eschatological plentitude of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). The *Diosconozco* is always the God who walks ahead of us and our encounter. He is the absolute future for humanity. Hope, which is the interior strength of faith, allows us to trust in God and in the future He promises. Because of hope we are able to comprehend the unknown of God, not as absence or abandonment, but as His condition of being and as the center of the world, in the faces of the emigrants, the refugees, the alienated, and those who live in the streets in big cities, the landless farmers and indigenous, and those of African descent who fight for recognition in racist societies (Aparecida Doc. 58, 65, 72, 88, 402, 427, 439, 454). The cry of these people reminds us daily of the presence of God and of human injustice, which dominates the world like a malignant cancer. God hears the cry of His people. He not only witnessed the people's suffering, he also participated in it. He is in the cry of His people. God is the cry of the poor. God does not suffer for us, but He has compassion for us. And we can expose ourselves to the suffering of others, because in them we experience the compassion of God.

**The cross  
does not belong  
to the prehistory  
of the struggles  
for liberation.  
It belongs  
to their  
permanent history.**

Recognizing God as both subject and author of history and of mission lessens the burden of the missionary community (*la misionariedad*) without freeing it from responsibility. He is the Good Shepherd of the missionary-disciples. Therefore, we must ask God not for this or that, but for the gift that is God Himself. To ask for God means asking for open ears, outstretched hands, a life that is given, and a prophetic voice that does not keep quiet.

God, who hears the cry of the poor, who is at the center of conflicts, sends us in mission. Being sent by God is preceded by a call to exodus. He calls us to leave our enslavement. That slavery takes multiple forms of servitude and submission. In the origins of every enslavement is the hijacking of the memory of the poor. The experience of the exodus and the recovery of that memory is fundamental for the missionary announcement. Mission, that proposes to be and to announce the "Good News" to the poor, necessarily tries to detach itself from the system that produces the poor's suffering, works to disintegrate the system and, positively, recover the memory of the oppressed. The God who calls us to exodus also puts an end to our exile. Zechariah ("the Lord is memory"), the post-exile prophet, promises to liberate "the captives of hope (...) from the cistern where there is no water" (Zechariah 9:11). The captives of hope will be sand in the entrails of the system based on exclusion, exploration, and privilege for the few (Aparecida Doc. 62).

He who leaves his homeland, like Abraham, or the land of others where he has been enslaved, like Moses, does not know where he is going. In the final instance, hope is trust in God, it is utopia, the place that does not exist, an absolute promise. A first departure is in leaving, in the exodus. Mission lives and proposes that exodus toward a new world that we welcome in the metaphor of the Kingdom of God. Hope gives us reasons and the strength to decide between the present – convenient

and comfortable – and exodus to an unforeseeable and risky future. Living in hope has its dangers and risks.

The systemic rupture does not depend on the Church, but it is practicable for the Church. Its significant gestures – signs of justice and images of hope – cut across all its sectors (formation, theology, catechesis, ministries, liturgies) and its junctures with sectors that transcend the ecclesial realm. The Church, through its agents, is present in the diverse social movements that attest to the possibility of another world. Its mission is to “awaken hope in the midst of the most difficult situations, because if there is no hope for the poor, there is hope for no one” (Aparecida Doc. 395). We need to get down on the ground of the poor and wounded people to form leadership in their midst and in their struggles, where “Christ Himself becomes pilgrim and walks resurrected” (Aparecida Doc. 259). The resurrected Christ is the crucified Christ. The cross does not belong to the prehistory of the struggles for liberation. It belongs to their permanent history. And in that history we define the stages, priorities, and goals of “another possible world”.

Feeding the hope of the poor requires the presence, vision, and intervention of missionary disciples as social actors. The apostle exhorts us to “always be ready... to give the reason for our hope, (...) with gentleness and respect” (I Peter 3:15). Still, we are not the ones who produce that which is new, but it would not come to be without our participation. Nor can we predict the new world which we await. Together with the poor, who are messengers of hope, we assume the poverty of our knowledge about the exact form of the future we await. In any case, we know that the transformations that inspire hope start with the participation of the poor (others) in the construction of that world and of the Church, with the redistribution of the riches that are concentrated in the hands of a few, with the recognition of that which is different, and with the gratuity lived by the missionary community.

The Church in Latin America and the Caribbean faces three alternatives:

1. To fearfully bury the many talents it has received (Matthew 25:14);
2. To insert itself in the capitalist system and promote small improvements; or

3. To intervene with signs of justice in an unjust world and launch the seeds of the Kingdom.

The Church of Aparecida opted for that intervention and rupture as service to the poor. It promoted being not only an advocate for the poor, but the house of the poor. As the house of the poor, the Church will be a house of hope.

*This document has been translated into English through the generosity of the Mission Office of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. All other documents about the CAM 3 / COMLA 8 can be retrieved through [www.cam3ecuador.org](http://www.cam3ecuador.org).*

<sup>1</sup> Original version in Portuguese, translated into Spanish by O.M.P. Brazil, Cam3 Comla 8 Executive Secretariat. English translation by Jay Gutzwiller This submission presented at the third American Missionary Congress (CAM3 Comla 8) in Quito, Ecuador from August 12-17, 2008, is based on the documents of Vatican II (Pastoral Constitution “The Church in the World Today” - *Gaudium et Spes*, and the Decree on the “Missionary Activity of the Church” - *as gentes*), the Aparecida Document (AD 406), the Working Document of this Congress (Working Document 18-21), and the General Directives on Evangelizing Action of the Church in Brazil (DGAE-2008-2101, n. 207-209.)

<sup>2</sup> On June 16, 2008 it was reported that the telescope “Silla” in Chile had discovered three “super” planets that measure 4.2, 6.7, and 9.4 times the size of Earth.

<sup>3</sup> IRINEU DA LIAO. *Contra as heresies*. São Paulo: Paulus, 1997, V, 6, 1

<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. *Der Dialog der Religionen und das Jüdisch-christliche Verhältnis*. First published in: *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 26 (1997) 419-429. Also in: IDEM, *Die Vielfalt der Religionen und der Einen Bund*, 3. ed., Bad Tölz: Ur-feld, 2003, p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> L’unité de la foi et le pluralisme théologique, 1c., Preposición.

Periodic Papers are published by USCMA

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