REFLECTIONS ON REDEMPTORIS MISSIO

Here a dozen leaders reflect on the implications of John Paul II's eighth encyclical. From many points of view, they all agree that this document has wide-ranging implications.

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This Encyclical is a remarkable document, and well worth the study of all concerned for world evangelization whatever their churchmanship or theology. My response is as a committed Evangelical.

Some observations on the document.

- 1. The worldview similarity to present Evangelical perspectives in missions is notable. Many Protestants would be in less agreement with what I would regard as John Paul II's biblical stance to the world.
- 2. The missiological convergence with the main stream of global Evangelical missionary endeavor is plain; the terminology used, areas highlighted, and vision expressed for world evangelization. Above all, I was delighted by the clear affirmation of the centrality of the preaching of Christ crucified and risen in the life and message of the Church to the non-Christian world. How few Reformed and Evangelical denominations have made such a clear missiological statement! All people do indeed have a right to hear as this document clearly states. The one area where I have caution is on the place of dialogue 'with brothers and sisters of other religions', for though much was said that was good in the vexed area of interfaith dialogue, I believe there are implied presuppositions that lay the practitioner open to compromise. I also found some statements on contextualization which could give an open door to license and dilution of the Gospel-but this is as

much a danger for us all.

- 3. The theological narrowing between the traditional entrenched Catholic and Evangelical positions. I warmed to the clear enunciation of the uniqueness of Christ, the primacy of proclamation of the gospel, the priority of pioneer missions to the unreached, the necessity of a personal appropriation of salvation and the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit in missions. However other aspects of doctrine that are specifically Roman Catholic such as the essentiality of baptism for salvation, the place of the Virgin Mary in missions, etc. are barriers still.
- 4. The strategic parallels—the emphasis on urban missions, reaching the unreached, youth, and migrant millions, the mobilization of the laity and the endorsement of missions from the younger churches are striking.
- 5. The divergence on the nature of the Body of Christ. The Encyclical is addressed to the worldwide Roman Catholic Church, and, of course, must be sympathetically seen in that light. However despite the lowering of barriers with the wider Christian Church over the last few years, a missionary endeavor outside the Roman Catholic Church is not adequately recognized or approved. Recognition is given to the area of lifelessness the Church, and evangelization of vast populations in nominally Catholic countries, but that that life could come form other Christian bodies (or sects, so-called) is derided. The 'separated brethren' are recognized, but the term itself reeks of condescension. Such attitudes cannot but perpetuate the polarizations and competition in missionary activities and hinder meaningful discussion in areas

where cross-fertilization of ideas and even cooperation would hasten world evangelization.

6. The agreement on personal holiness. I was in full accord with the closing challenge to missionary spirituality, with the clear call to the lifetime missionary call, sacrifice, agape love, holiness and prayer. If we all heed this call, there will be much more cooperation between us all—at the foot of the Cross, and the consummation of God's plan in the world evangelized, and Christ returning.

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The papal encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* is one of the most important documents of the Christian Church as it approaches the end of the second millennium of its existence. It looks at the supreme task of the church—the conversion of all nations and peoples—a task that is far from complete. Yet as the encyclical points out, missionary activity specifically directed ad gentes is on the wane. The clarion call of the Great Commission is growing fainter as the clamor of secularism and pluralism grows.

In one sense the encyclical is a futurist document but at the same time it is a reaffirmation of the ageless truth on which the church is founded—the universality of salvation through Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ alone. If this was not so there is no reason for converting anyone. It is this vision that shines clearly through the entire encyclical.

For me the crux of the encyclical is in

the statement that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization. The battle is not ours but the Lord's. It is by the Holy Spirit that we can go forth to claim the world—not certainly by our might or power and not through our plans or our programs.

There is certainly no shortage of plans. Over the past 20 centuries, according to researchers David Barrett and James Reapsome, some 780 plans have been devised by Christians to evangelize the world. The very multiplicity of these plans and the fact that most of them have died on the vine tell us something about the task. Christ gave only one commission; He did not give plans. The plethora of plans has produced a situation similar to that in a theater of war where every infantryman devises his own plan of battle. Not merely have these plans become extremely far-fetched and visionary (and what is worse, very expensive), they have also tended to emphasize tools and toolmanship rather than goals. It is as if their ultimate end is not so much the harvest itself but the production of more sleek and gleaming harvesting machines and threshers.

There is a military maxim that applies even more forcefully to Christian evangelization: "No battle plan survives contact with the enemy." Indeed, one of the historical constants of missionary work is the opposition to it, and opposition that periodically erupts in open persecution, but is present constantly in every culture. In fact, there are six countries in the world where there are no known native Christians, but there is no country in the world without enemies of the Gospel. It is therefore important to understand the nature of this opposition, and the source of this opposition, before we can define the task of evangelization.

Christ did not use the term "harvest" along with, or as part of, the Great Commission, yet the two have become closely associated. However, the term harvest suggests that there are millions of stalks out there patiently waiting for the imminent sickle. True, the stalks are out there—millions of them white and perishing—but the ground is the enemy's. Before the harvest can take place the ground has to be seized from the enemy and the "strong man" has to be bound. The Gospel is not marching into a vacuum or virgin land; it is going

into enemy-held and enemy-owned land. The Great Commission was as much a declaration of war against the prince of this world as a call to duty to Christians. The Great Commissioners—as all Christians should properly be called—are conscripts in a war that has lasted 2000 years.

The great bimillennial question is: Why is it that after 2000 years Christians make up only 33% of the global population, and committed Christians (active Great Commission Christians) some 10%? To answer this question, it is important to look at not only the nature of the enemy but also the nature of conversion which is the heart of the Gospel.

No human being is ever born saved. Through original sin every person at the point of birth is already a chattel of the enemy, indentured for life. His or her mind is not a tabula rasa, but is already written over with the message of the anti-Gospel and the vessel of his or her being brimming full with the spirit of disobedience. As everyone knows, it is not possible to pour water into a full cup. The cup has to be emptied first and then the refilling can take place—a process known to Christologists as kenosis. Similarly, it is not possible to write on a slate which has been written over. The original writing has to be erased first and then a new message can be written on it. This is a process known to papyrologists as pentimento. Indeed the degree of erasure is quite important; otherwise, as in many ancient parchments, the old writings tend to resurface after a few years, an unfortunate phenomenon with many obvious spiritual parallels. Again, it is relatively easy to fish in the open sea, yet is is never possible to catch fish that is already in someone else's net. That net has to be cut first; the captives have to be set free before the Gospel can be preached to them.

It is against this background that we begin to understand the old phrase, "winning souls." A soul is the spolia opima, a victor's prize. There are spiritual battles to be fought before the Great Harvest can ever begin. Therefore, I have always felt that missiology should be listed under military science rather than theology. And if The Revelation of John the Divine tells us anything, the bloodiest battles of the 2000-year war still lie ahead of us.

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"Christianity is only one generation away from extinction," says Father Donald Wodarz of the Pacific Mission Institute near Sydney, Australia. If this is even remotely true, it is no wonder Pope John Paul II calls for increased missionary activity in his recent encyclical.

The Pope not only encourages missionary work but he encourages it through open dialogue with people who follow other religions. In fact, the Pope even acknowledges that spiritual truths will be evident in other religions.

According to Bishop Charles Chaput of Rapid City, one such spiritual truth lies in the religion of the Native Americans. Chaput states that in the book and the movie "Dances With Wolves" Native American Indians show "a sense of the harmony and oneness in the world that God has given us and the importance of knowing our place in it." When a Bishop calls on us to learn of God from a religious group whose doctrine does not include Jesus Christ's message of salvation, a bit of confusion is thrown into our mindset of missionary work. If this group knows of God's truth, why should we try to save them? Acknowledgment of spiritual riches in other religions causes many Christians today to believe, as the Pope states, that "one religion is as good as another." It is no wonder then that the call to missionary work is "passed over in silence."

However, the Pope's attitude toward "mutual knowledge and enrichment" with peoples of other religions reveals his implicit trust in Christianity's authenticity, that Christian beliefs will not be shaken by receptivity to another religion's spiritual truths. And he of course points out that these religions contain "gaps, insufficiencies and errors."

Yet openness to other religions brings up that incessant question many Christians have regarding frontier missions: What about the people who never have the chance to accept or reject Christ's offer of redemption?

Christians, who know of God's overwhelming love, struggle with the implication that millions of people are burning or will burn in the firey tresses of hell. The Pope himself, throughout the entire 28 page letter, avoids the subject of damnation for the unsaved. He does reiterate the gospel message that "salvation can only come from Jesus Christ," but makes little mention of the fate of that "majority of mankind" who have never "received an initial proclamation of Christ."

He does touch on the issue indirectly when he acknowledges that "God loves all people and grants them the possibility of being saved". Does this imply that each person has the possibility of being saved without knowledge of Christ because of God's love? Since we all would like to believe this, we then ask ourselves, why push Christianity? Why work to bring the gospel to a remote tribe in Africa when God will judge each person in His just and loving way regardless of what we do? Why upset the culture and family life of a Muslim youth? Shouldn't we focus on humanitarian aid, work for justice and freedom?

Most of us don't know how to deal with this ever difficult question of "Who is saved?" And when we convince ourselves that a blanket damnation for non-Christians does not fit into what we know in our hearts about God, the urgency to offer salvation is diminished.

the Pope addresses quandary by focusing on the presentand not the mysteries of the hereafter. He refers to the "kingdom of God" as life with God now. We should spread the good news, the Pope says, so "each one can live out in its fullness his or her proper calling"-a "calling" for the present. We should spread the good news "as an antidote to dehumanization" and fill the void that all people have for relationship with God. We should spread the good news because it is Christ at work in our hearts "animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole world to this end." We should spread the news because all people should know that "they are loved by God and are capable of loving". We should spread the good news so that all people may know the "riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

As an adolescent, I once asked my

father if he ever doubted the existence of heaven and hell, if people really went to one place or another. Much to my surprise he shared my doubt, but he also said that even if such a place didn't exist, living a Christ-like life was the best way to live. Perhaps that is reason enough to be missionaries of Jesus Christ, to share with others the kingdom of God, a life more full, more human, a life of love, a life full of the joy that comes from following Jesus.

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At the World Council of Churches Assembly in Canberra in February 1991, the Orthodox participants criticized the WCC. They stated, "In dialogues with other religions... the biblical faith in God must not be changed... Some people tend to affirm with very great ease the presence of the Holy Spirit in many movements and developments, without discernment."

The blatant fuzziness of the WCC, the naive enthusiasms of some Pentecostals and Charismatics, or the narrow biblicism of some Evangelicals, need the discernment the Orthodox quite rightly ask for. Pope John Paul II provides some of it in this document Redemptoris Missio.

In the section "The Holy Spirit, principal agent of mission" (chapter 3) the Pope's discernment is shown when he expounds the Scriptures on the theme "the missionary mandate." He shows the common threads and distinctives of each of the four Evangelists. From the Acts of the Apostles he shows the importance of Pentecost, and the way in which the Spirit inspired, directed and empowered the early Christians.

But he also relates the action of the Spirit closely to the Church, which should please the Orthodox. He shows how the Holy Spirit has made the whole Church missionary. He sees the Spirit as the agent in forming the first church as a community. So he avoids the error of detaching the Holy Spirit from the Church.

Yet he does not limit the action of the Holy Spirit to the Church. He sees Him acting as the agent to open people to the Gospel. In this section he shares about other religions. The WCC's "wider ecumenism" seems to deny the Trinity, as if the Holy Spirit is an alternative to Christ. The Pope rejects such a view. "He is therefore not an alternative to Christ nor does he fill a sort of void... existing between Christ and the Logos" (Section 29).

In commenting on the Assisi meeting with the leaders of other religions he sees all true prayer, even non-Christian, as prompted by the Holy Spirit, "who is mysteriously present in every human heart." That may go further than some of us are prepared to go, but in seeing the ultimate action of the Spirit as leading all men to Christ, he will please a lot of people.

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December 7, 1941, marked the embroiling of the Pacific in World War II. Fortynine years later, a symbolic year of Jubilee for the children of Israel, saw the launch of a papal encyclical on missionary activity: *Redemptoris Missio*. The scope and import of this message is appropriate to the scope and import of world evangelization, a Jubilee call back to the basic mandate of the people of God.

It is a paradox of immense breadth and depth packed into an amazingly compact space. Pope John Paul focuses the universal need and scope of salvation in the particularity of Jesus Christ, the universal Savior. Incarnate in Christ is both the Kingdom of God and the mission of God. The church is sign and agent of the Kingdom as empowered by the Spirit. The sequence of mission begins with witness, leading to conversion, baptism, formation of church that produces both vocational and lay missioners who engage in whole gospel/whole church/whole world mission.

The highlighted note of the encyclical is the middle chapter on the vast horizons of the mission ad gentes. John Paul II specifically gives high visibility to the peoples who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. No matter that they may live in limited access areas so far as mobility of mis-

sioners is concerned—they are being denied a basic right due to all peoples to know of a creator-redeemer God.

By giving a clear call to established churches and those newly formed, he sounds a priority for the church worldwide that none is exempt from the task of world evangelization. Implicit and explicit is the call for cooperation within the body of Christ to make known to all the salvation available in Christ. My prayer is that those of us who do not channel our commitment through Catholic conduits will nevertheless take seriously this letter as an invitation to more serious reflection, dialogue, and ultimately the kind of action that bears witness to a call to unity around the person and mission of Jesus Christ.

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Every Christian with a vision for world evangelization should applaud the appearance of *Redemptoris Missio* promulgated by John Paul II. This important document is further evidence of the Holy Spirit's call to all Christians to bring Christ to the world in this generation.

Redemptoris Missio can only be understood in relation to the Apostolic Exhortation promulgated by Paul VI in 1975 entitled Evangelii Nuntiandi. Issued on the fifteenth anniversary of the earlier document, Redemptoris Missio completes and amplifies the position of the post-Vatican II church in relation to evangelization.

In Evangelii Nuntiandi, Paul VI defined the nature of evangelism and stated the famous phrase, "The Church exists to evangelize." It was a position paper which defined the nature of evangelization. John Paul II in Redemptoris Missio takes up where the prior document left off. As Tom Forrest says, Paul VI told us what evangelism was, while John Paul II now says, "Evangelize or else." Thus, rather than a theological tract, it is a call to arms, a call to action.

Those familiar with other evangelization efforts among Protestants, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals/Charismatics will recognize among Catholics the same understanding of the unfinished task. Although major differences between the Christian communions still remain unresolved, there is growing evidence that the Holy Spirit is calling Christians of all the churches to spend their energies in bringing Jesus Christ to the billions of people in the world who have never yet heard His name in a spirit of unity.

Peter Steinfels

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Over the centuries, Christians in scores of countries have launched more than 780 plans to convert the world to their faith. David Barrett and James Reapsome, the Evangelical researchers who tallied these efforts, found that most such plans expired within a few years, but that more than 50 "multimillion-dollar megaplans" are still afoot, many of them setting the year 2000, the new millennium, as their deadline.

Christians have been propelled by what many call the "Great Commission," Jesus' final command to his apostles, as recounted in St. Matthew's Gospel, to "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." But in recent years this evangelistic drive has coexisted uneasily with a growing interest in forming bridges between High-power religions. different campaigns to win new members have contrasted with initiatives in which Christian and Buddhist monks share monastic life and Jesuit priests become swamis.

This tension between evangelization and interreligious understanding was an important theme of the encyclical on missionary work issued last month by Pope John Paul II, who warned that the dialogue between major religions, although highly valuable in itself, was no substitute for efforts to convert non-Christians and plant new churches throughout the world. This issue was also a major current at the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra, Australia last February.

How religions relate to one another has obvious consequences for world peace and presents a crucial new test of how each faith understands itself. This is doubly so in the case of Christianity, which historically has probably made the strongest claims that it is the one true faith.

With all the usual reservations about oversimplification, those engaged in this discussion have identified three patterns defining Christianity's attitude to other religions: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.

The exclusivist attitude prevailed throughout most Christian history: Only through explicit faith in Jesus and membership in his church could anyone be saved.

Although medieval Catholicism officially taught the doctrine "Outside the church there is no salvation," primarily to condemn heretics but later to rebuke pagans and Jews as well, theologians it, especially after the qualified discovery of the Americas revealed whole populations that had been cut off from any contact with Biblical revelation. It was concluded that those who through no fault of their own lacked the possibility of accepting the Gospel but who nonetheless acted conscientiously expressed a spiritual longing that was an implicit form of baptism.

From the Second Vatican Council in 1962-5 to the recent papal encyclical on missions, *Redemptoris Missio*, official Catholic statements have increasingly recognized not only salvation outside the church but also the positive working of God in other religions, even if faith in Jesus and incorporation in the church remain the "ordinary" way to salvation.

Among Protestants, the exclusivist position is firmly maintained by many Evangelicals, Fundamentalists and Pentecostals. They feel both bound and energized by New Testament passages like Peter's testimony in the Acts of the Apostles that "there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

Christian theologians have always found exclusivism difficult to reconcile with the idea that God wants all humans saved. But during the last two centuries, it also clashed with the growth of accurate knowledge about other faiths. By World War I the awareness that missionary work had been closely linked to political domination and cultural disdain convinced many church leaders that Christian hu-

manitarian service, not conversion, was their first obligation in mission territories. Other leaders condemned that shift, opening a debate that continues today.

In the last decade some Christian leaders have called for a pluralist theology that would consider all religions as possessing an independent validity. Christianity, they say, must shift from a Christ-centered view to a God-centered one.

Many pluralists frankly state that they are calling for a radical "paradigm shift" in Christianity's outlook, comparable to the Copernican revolution that replaced an Earth-centered theory of the universe with a Sun-centered one.

Squeezed between exclusivism and pluralism is *inclusivism*. Inclusivists ardently favor interreligious dialogue and recognize God's saving activity in other religions. But this presence, they insist, is ultimately, though perhaps mysteriously, ascribable to Christ. Most fully and definitively revealed in Christianity, Christ remains the Logos—the divine plan—and the mediator of salvation wherever humanity finds it.

Pluralists respond that inclusivism still tries to assimilate other religions Christianity's framework, strategy that can appear condescending. John Hick, who teaches philosophy of religion at Claremont Graduate School in California, compares inclusivist efforts to maintain a Christ-centered theory of other religions to the epicycles concocted by astronomers to explain discordant observations without making a clean break with Ptolemaic, Earth-centered system.

But pluralists face serious criticism as well. Born out of a desire to counter Western pretensions to religious or cultural superiority, pluralism is none-theless an undeniably Western concept and project. Inclusivists say pluralism may hold up a culturally limited standard to other religions just as surely as Christianity did.

Despite the labels of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, positions in these discussions remain highly fluid. As one scholar put it, the world's great religions have not only "provided different answers to the same questions" but "also asked different questions."

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In his eighth Encyclical, released at the end of January, pope John Paul II surprisingly and clearly enunciates the nature, continuing validity, and urgency of the church's mission task.

While recognizing that there is "diversity of activities in the church's one mission," he clearly and repeatedly states that to "preach the Gospel and to establish new churches among peoples or communities where they do not yet exist," is "the first task of the church," the essential dimension of the meaning of mission ad gentes (to the nations/peoples).

In regards to world evangelization, the pope distinguishes between three situations; 1) peoples or sociocultural contexts without Christian communities "able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups," requiring "missionary activity proper," 2) peoples in which the church is clearly established, requiring pastoral care, 3) situations in which existing churches "have lost a living sense of the faith," requiring re-evangelization.

The "proper sense of the term missions" (as required in the first situation above) must not, he cautions, "become an indistinguishable part of the overall mission of the whole people of God and as a result become neglected or forgotten."

The pope also acknowledges that in these modern times people ask whether missionary work is still relevant, interreligious dialogue more appropriate, and human development a more adequate goal of the church's mission. In response he refers to the ongoing urgency of witnessing for Christ "the one mediator between God and mankind." "The number of those who do not know Christ... is constantly on the increase," he writes.

Elsewhere he comments on "dialogue" and "liberation": "While respecting the beliefs and sensitivities of all, we must first clearly affirm our faith in Christ." He warns of the "gradual secularization of salvation" in which man is reduced to merely his horizontal dimensions, and mission focuses on humanity's earthly needs while remaining "closed to the transcendent." "True liberation," he writes, "consists in

opening oneself to the love of Christ."

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An Evangelical Protestant will quite understandably be wary of this encyclical. not only due to what Catholics may make out of it or the ways in which it may in practice be interpreted by Catholics, but by the very context in which it is written. But one could say the same thing about an otherwise excellent translation of the Bible coming from Catholic sources. The fact is, the plain language here on paper, apart from a few regrettable references such as those to Mary at the very end, one must admit in sheer honesty, is a remarkably clear and Biblical statement on mission to the unreached peoples. Indeed, to my knowledge no Protestant communion in recent years has ever produced any statement on mission with the detail and thoroughness or the decisiveness and Biblical authenticity of this one. But it is like the Bible. It all depends on who reads it and reads into it, and what they do with what it is effectively trying to say.

For sheer simplicity and power let me try out just four paragraphs on the reader, words which undertake to distinguish between "evangelization" in general and the specifically missionary activity which this massive document tries to highlight:

First, there is the situation which the church's missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups and sociocultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is mission ad gentes in the proper sense of the term.

Second, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. In these communities the church carries out her activity and pastoral care.

Third, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots and occasionally in the younger churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith or even no longer consider them-

selves members of the church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "reevangelization".

Missionary activity proper, namely the mission ad gentes, is directed to "peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ", "who are far from Christ," in whom the church "has not yet taken root"... It is necessary to ensure that this specifically "missionary work"... does not become an indistinguishable part of the overall mission of the whole people of God and as a result become neglected or forgotten (Sections 33-34).

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This is an excellent Encyclical: theologically sound and biblically grounded. Thanks are due to the Pope for it, in which he voices the convictions of many Church traditions. In this sense it is an ecumenical document, highlighting central themes of Mission and giving us plenty to bite, chew, and digest for a long time. Nevertheless, I venture a few comments.

- (1) The use of statistics about the Church in the world today, could strengthen many points raised in the Encyclical. There is plenty of such statistical information, thanks to the tireless work of scholars like D. B. Barrett.
- (2) While the document rightly addresses all Christians as (potential) participants in Mission, there looms in it a male hierarchy which surfaces in expressions like: "My brother bishops are directly responsible, together with me, for the evangelization of the world" (Section 63), "diocesan Priests for the Universal Mission" (Section 67 ff.) and "the missionary is the 'universal brother" (Section 89). Yet the document ends with "the Virgin Mary". That is not enough. Equal prominence in mission should be given to women. In the open spirit of this encyclical, there should be not just "brother bishops" but also "sister bishops and popes"; not just "the universal brother", but also "the universal sister"; not just "the male diocesan priests" but also "the female diocesan priests".
- (3) It is regrettable that not a word of confession and repentance is said, about major (past) sins committed in the name

of Christian mission. There are plenty of these "sins" in Church history, e.g. the treatment of lews in Europe, the subjugation of indigenous peoples in Latin America, racial discrimination, participation of missionaries despising and destroying native cultures, customs, and the soul of many tribal peoples in America, Africa, and the Pacific. Some of us still bear today (1991) the scars of wounds inflicted upon us by missionaries, however much we pay tribute to their love, sacrifice and dedication as a whole. By honestly naming past evils and weaknesses of missionaries, we would be better placed to avoid perpetuating or repeating them.

- (4) The document gives me the impression that mission is carried out only by those with power. It says nothing about mission by the powerless, the hungry, the oppressed, the refugees, the underprivileged, the voiceless and the marginalized. These should (and do) participate in mission as free subjects and not just as patronized objects. The first rehearsing of the themes of Redemptoris Missio was made in the spirit of the poor and the powerless: "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics", Jesus told the Twelve (Luke 9:1-6; cf. 10:1-12). The power of money and ecclesiastical positions (privileges) today needs to be reexamined, to see inter alia how they (might) obstruct
- (5) The Encyclical speaks of "a great springtime for Christianity" (Section 86) and "a new missionary age" (Section 92), as we enter the third millennium. That is wonderful, if also triumphalistic. But on what objective (academic) basis, can we speak of such an age? The calendar year 2000 is surely like any other year; it does not automatically or mystically usher in a "new age" or a "springtime", either in human history or in mission. Generations begin and end every day and every year; and every generation is ripe for mission.

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While there is much to applaud in this Vatican statement on the mission of the

Roman Catholic Church, any serious student of church history has cause for concern. The clear and biblical call to urgency of the missionary task, and the reaffirmation of the uniqueness of Christ as the only Savior of our pluralistic world, are certainly to be welcomed by all true Christians. Likewise, the call to servanthood, sacrifice, and holiness, as the essential characteristics of both the missionary church and its messengers, is well stated—even inspirational.

There will certainly be much discussion and debate over nuances of meaning within the Encyclical. But what causes concern to this writer is its historical context. The Roman Catholic Church has shown itself as the premier practitioner of syncretism within the Christian tradition. Whether one looks at the 16th century efforts of Francis Xavier and the Jesuits in Asia, the work of the White Fathers in West Africa, or the centuries of Catholic history in Latin America, one sees a consistent pattern of reshaping and remolding the dogma and practice of the Church to accommodate the religious patterns of the people. In Latin America the practice was so well developed that a new term was coined for it-Christo-paganism.

But, one may argue, this was the old Catholicism. Why can we not embrace as "Great Commission Christians" the new Spirit-renewing and charismatically active Catholicism of our day? The reason is that the evidence is far stronger for a new wave of the ancient Catholic art of syncretism than for genuine structural renewal. That is not to say there are not many individual Catholics who make the leap in personal faith renewal, but that the Roman Catholic Church, as Church, is still playing the syncretism game.

One wonders how this same Pontiff, John Paul II, in 1987 could call a conference of world religious leaders at Assisi to pray for world peace, and admonish them at the same gathering to walk forward in the long path toward religious ecumenism, promising that that conference would only be the beginning of a great and sustained new effort. This does not compute well with the more clearly missionary stance of Section 55, "Dialogue With Our Brothers and Sisters of Other Religions."

One is also aware of the great religious changes taking place in Latin America today. As David Martin has pointed out in his book, Tongues of fire: the explosion of Protestantism in Latin America, Latin America is rapidly becoming a Protestant continent. The social, political, economic and cultural landscape is being radically altered. In this context the Roman Catholic Church is using all of its governmental connections to oppose the Evangelicals in countries such as Bolivia and Peru, while at the same time it is adopting the methods, language and forms of these Evangelicals in order to stop the continual decrease in its own membership.

A mission colleague recently attended mass at a major Roman cathedral in Asuncion, Paraguay. He was amazed at the flavor and emphasis of the service. The songs sung, the guitar used, the prayers offered, etc., made him feel he could have been in any one of thousands of Protestant services across the continent. That Sunday a letter from the Vatican on the missionary task of the church was read. Again, the Scriptures and the admonitions given left him amazed at what he was hearing. Yet, as the reading was nearing its conclusion, the unmistakable marks of works salvation and Mariology emerged, revealing the unchanging purpose behind the form.

At a time when the whole Christian world is abuzz with the task of world evangelization, is it more likely that the Roman Catholic Church has reformed itself around the true Gospel, or has it simply syncretized the missionary ethos?

Tad de Bordenave

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This encyclical is a dose of yeast—hearty, strong, invigorating yeast. As yeast, it is not just one more ingredient added to the mixture. It is an agent of change. It enters the scene and shouts out, "Remember why you are here and what you are supposed to be doing!" To be sure, not all the ingredients in the pot will welcome this influence.

In a smaller way I've seen the same drama due to the appearance in the Episcopal Church of the Anglican Frontier Mission, a new agency devoted to those unreached peoples who have never heard the Gospel. Our coming to be has been a bit unsettling to some of the prevailing missionary wisdom. We have forced some questions and challenged some preconceptions. Is it enough just to send missionaries to where the church's work is already underway? Aren't we also called to those who have never heard? Shall we choose not to take the Gospel to the Zanskari of Kashmir, once we learn of their existence? Is Christ really the only Name by which one may be saved? These just come to the surface, once action is taken for the unreached.

We must not lose sight of the fact that this encyclical is addressed to the near one billion Christians under the Bishop of Rome! This is yeast with farreaching power. And the beauty of it is its undiluted content. He never deviates from his main message: We haven't fully responded to the Lord's redemption unless we take the Gospel to those who have never heard it. All his arguments are designed to interpret or elucidate that one call to his flock.

To be sure, not all the ingredients already in the pot will welcome this agent of change. That's the nature of things—whether it's bread, beer, or missionary people. In fact some will be stunned to read the priorities which the pope restates to his church and to realize the implications of what he writes. But this is good yeast, hardy and invigorating. I just hope that its stirring activity gets into the pot that holds the Anglican Frontier Mission—and many other pots as well.

Vatican missions executives

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Rome (AIF). Accepting an invitation, Pope John Paul II paid an afternoon visit on Thursday, April 11th, to the Pontifical Urbanian University, where, in the Aula Magna of the world's only missionary college together with the members of the Propaganda Fide and representatives of the Church's missionary forces present in Rome wished "to express-as Cardinal Tomko said in his address of welcome-with a single heart, praise and a deep sense of gratitude for the gift made to the Church and the entire world of the precious document (Redemptoris Missio), that constitutes a real "Magna Carta" for the third millennium's mission.

"The Bishops thank you," said Cardinal Tomko, "for this re-launching of the ad gentes mission which has dispelled all hesitation. The missionaries thank you because this Encyclical gives them new courage and revitalizes their identity. You are thanked also by the young Churches, because they are called to be missionaries from the very start... You are thanked also by theologians and experts for this harmonious composition of every aspect of evangelization brought into focus by the announcement of the one Savior Jesus Christ. The Missions Department itself is most grateful to you because thanks to the Encyclical it feels stimulated to become more and more that centre of propulsion, direction, and coordination of all missionary activity, foreseen and expected by the Second Vatican Council and by this new Encyclical.

"Redemptoris Missio offers us the premises of orientation and stimulus for a missionary Church in today's context," is what Archbishop Saraiva Martins, Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, former Rector of the Urbaniana, said in synthesis, when he illustrated some of the Encyclical's fundamental points.

Archbishop Saraiva underlined:

—the enormous opportunity seen by the Encyclical in the world situation today for bringing the Gospel to all men and women, which requires a united effort of all ecclesial forces in evangelization.

-the grounding of the mission on a Christological dimension. Christ, only Savior, through grace that can be communicated to everyone by the Spirit: "In light of the Christological mystery, the Spirit's function in the mission and in salvation history is disclosed." Having emphasized also, that "The Kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a programme subject to free interpretation, but it is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth" and it must remain clear that the missionary announcement of the mystery of Christ maintains the primacy for salvation.

—the ecclesiological dimension: the Church "by nature missionary" is constituted by Christ, as the ordinary way for all to salvation. And from this missionary nature stems the fact that the mission's goal is not only conversion to Christ, but also the "implantation" of the Church.