

# 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel'

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"Indeed, preaching the gospel is no reason for me to boast; it is an obligation that has been imposed upon me. And woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." (1 Cor 9:16)

St. Paul's utterance was reiterated by John Paul II at the very beginning of his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (=RM). Twenty-five years after the conciliar decree *Ad gentes* and fifteen years after Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, John Paul II wished to invite the Church to "renew its missionary commitment": "the Second Vatican Council wished to renew the life and activity of the Church according to the needs of the modern world; to this end, it underscored the Church's *missionary character*, basing it in a dynamic way upon the trinitarian mission itself. The missionary impulse thus belongs to the inner nature of the Christian life and inspires ecumenism as well: 'May they all be one . . . so that the world may believe that you sent me'" (Jn 17:21).

"Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." Is the imperative necessity and inward exigence of mission the privilege of the high-level apostles who have the official responsibility of preaching the Word? Does it apply equally to ordinary Chris-

tians, lay people, and religious who fulfill their daily tasks without echoing their message in the public sphere? Can we identify the Church's new missionary consciousness with this expression from the Apostle to the Gentiles? If so, what "woe" is carried by the failure to fulfill our missionary obligation? A simple moral imperfection consequent upon a neglected secondary obligation? Or a greater "woe" that reaches the identity of the person and of the Church itself? Or perhaps the very glory of God?

I wish to embark on such questions in this essay, drawing inspiration from John Paul II and Hans Urs von Balthasar, who have reflected upon the essentially missionary nature of the Church. History will retain the name of Karol Wojtyla as one of the principle protagonists of the missionary renewal of the Church at the close of the second Christian millennium. His work as a bishop and as a thinker, inspired by the great tradition developed at the Council, his contributions to the conciliar texts on mission, his itinerant manner of assuming the Petrine office, his articulated program of new evangelization, and even his solidarity with a certain Polish messianism make him a key figure for understanding the Church's missionary turn in our age.<sup>1</sup> For his part, Hans Urs von Balthasar has constructed a rather unique theological synthesis, one of the pillars upon which it rests being the fundamental category of mission. My intention in this essay is to draw attention to certain aspects of the Church's missionary consciousness whose renewal John Paul II has contributed to, and which are again taken up within the perspective of a theological whole in the work of Balthasar.

The essay is divided into two parts: first, a general survey of the missiological turn of Vatican II such as it has manifested itself in the missionary consciousness and pastoral activity of John Paul II himself, a protagonist and interpreter of the Council; secondly, a christological and trinitarian explication of the Church's missionary identity based upon the Theo-drama of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The urgent need for evangelization should thus appear in all of the breadth and depth of its implications with respect to the present demands for a new liberation theology.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. R. Buttiglione, *La pensée de Karol Wojtyla* (Fayard: Communio, 1984); B. Pottier, "Vatican II et Jean-Paul II," *NRT* 107 (1985): 361-75; B. Lambert, "Gaudium et Spes' hier et aujourd'hui," *NRT* 107 (1985): 321-46.

I. John Paul II and the missionary consciousness  
of the Church since Vatican II

A missiological turn

According to a well-known theologian of mission, Vatican II represents a "great missionary turn" at the end of a "deviation" which, since the fifteenth century, had reserved the mission *ad gentes* first to the patronage of the kings of Spain and Portugal, and then to the *Propoganda Fide* founded in 1622 for the coordination of the missionary activity of the Roman Church. This turn emerges in 1965 with the decree *Ad gentes* which "proclaims that all bishops and, with them, all Churches are 'collectively' responsible for the evangelization of the world" (AG, n. 6).<sup>2</sup>

This turn towards a collective responsibility for the evangelization of the world has been translated into new structures of participation and organization. The Synods, the renewed Congregation for the "evangelization of nations," and the recent bodies of the Roman Curia all bear testimony to this. For example, the pontifical Council for culture, and that for interreligious dialogue, to name just two, illustrate that "mission" extends beyond geographical and sociological horizons into the sphere of culture which requires a first or a new evangelization.

In addition, the very proceedings of the synod of bishops with its dynamic of consulting and elaborating propositions has clearly associated the world-wide episcopate with the exercise of the Roman Magisterium. On his side, John Paul II has multiplied his apostolic voyages to the four corners of the world, thus underscoring the organic bond that ties local churches to Peter's successor. These facts illustrate the common responsibility shared by the episcopal college and its head in solidarity for the evangelization of the world.

The missiological turn of Vatican II has not limited itself to the broadening of missionary consciousness from the center to the peripheries; it has also touched upon the very meaning of the mission *ad gentes* and the ways of accomplishing it. A glance at the missionary problematic since Vatican II suffices to show this.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, a crisis of missions and mis-

<sup>2</sup>A.M. Henry, the article "Mission" in the dictionary *Catholicisme* (Paris: 1982), 321.

sonary institutions has followed the realization of the universal character of mission, and on the other hand, ambiguities have arisen in colonial endeavors in missionary lands. In certain circles, people have begun to speak of a "moratorium" in order to indicate the need to rethink in depth the particular contribution of missionaries to the countries and cultures said to be those of mission.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, mission has taken the form of various battles for *liberation*, helping underdeveloped nations to come out from the economic dependence and cultural oppression that binds them.<sup>5</sup> For many, proclaiming Jesus Christ has turned into a commitment to "human promotion" which no longer adequately distinguishes between worldly progress and the growth of the Kingdom.

The manner of evangelization has also undergone changes at the level of pedagogy. The awakening to the values of other cultures and other religions has caused mission to pass from "indoctrination to the exchange of life and word."<sup>6</sup> The ruling word in the last stages of the twentieth century will have been the word *dialogue*. Previously understood in a somewhat unilateral way, mission is more and more taking the form of a dialogue, respecting the identity of the other and accepting his values. The dominant theme of "*inculturation*"<sup>7</sup> acknowledges this new sensibility, which goes much further than the "adaptation" advocated in missiology before the Council.

*The missionary Church in Christ and in the Spirit*

"The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* on the permanent value of the missionary precept had been eagerly await-

<sup>3</sup>Cf., P. Tihon, S.J., "Des Missions à la Mission," *NRT* 107 (1985): 520-36, 698-721. Also, R.J. Schreiter, "Faith and Cultures: Challenges to a World Church," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 744-60.

<sup>4</sup>M.P. Hebga, *Emancipation d'Eglises sous tutelle. Essai sur l'ère post-missionnaire*, coll. Culture et Religion (Paris: Présence africaine, 1976), 33-50; Msgr. de Souza, "La mission aujourd'hui," in *Doc. Cath.* 81 (1984): 686-94.

<sup>5</sup>Cf., G. Gutierrez, *Théologie de la Libération* (Brussels: Lumen Vitae, 1974), 93-99; A. Roux, "Mission des Eglises, mission de l'Eglise," coll. *Rencontres* 35 (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 190-99.

<sup>6</sup>A.M. Henry, "Mission," 322.

<sup>7</sup>Cf., P. Arrupe, S.J., "Lettre sur l'inculturation," in *Acta Romana S.I.* 17 (1978): 251-309; J. Scheuer, "L'inculturation," in *Lumen Vitae* 39 (1983): 251-59; A. Roest Crollius, "Inculturation and the Meaning of Culture," in *Gregorianum* 61 (1980): 253-74; H. Carrier, *Évangélisation et développement des cultures* (Rome: PUG, 1990), 83-124.

ed."<sup>8</sup> Aware of the hesitations and ambiguities that were stalling the missionary impulse, John Paul II wanted to provide some theological criteria which would permit granting a second wind to the missionary endeavor of the whole of the Catholic Church: "Indeed, in the history of the Church, the missionary impulse has always been a sign of vitality, in the same way that its weakness has been a sign of a crisis of faith. . . *Faith affirms itself by giving itself!*" (RM, n. 2).

What is striking in this encyclical are the three doctrinal chapters dedicated to giving dogmatic foundations for missionary activity. Taking up the initial orientations of the conciliar decree *Ad gentes, Redemptoris Missio* develops, against the "background of a reestablishment of the value of world religions,"<sup>9</sup> the central affirmation that Jesus Christ alone is Savior: "It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's center and goal: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Rev 22:13)" (RM, n. 6). This christocentrism, characteristic of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*, which included Karol Wojtyła among its editors, is developed in the following chapter dealing with the *Kingdom of God*. Firmly anchored in biblical exegesis, this chapter culminates with the affirmation that "the Kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but is before all else *a person* with the face and the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God" (RM, n. 18).

Though the Church remains distinct from this Person and this Kingdom, she is "indissolubly united to both" (RM, n. 18). Endowed by Christ "with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation," inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Church shares with Christ "a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role" (RM, n. 18). It will be necessary to explore the nature of this relationship and this role further in order to understand precisely how the mission of Christ and the mission of the Church ultimately make up but one divine-human mission,

<sup>8</sup>P. Tihon, "Retour aux missions? A reading of the encyclical 'Redemptoris Missio,'" *NRT* 114 (1992): 69-82, here p. 69.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

without confusion or separation, which continues into future ages.

The chapter on the Holy Spirit, the "principal agent of the Church's mission," perhaps best reveals the path followed since Vatican II for understanding the mission of the Church theologically, in the divine mission of the Spirit. John Paul II introduces this development with a very dense passage in his encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem*: "At the climax of Jesus' messianic mission, the Holy Spirit becomes present in the paschal mystery in all of his divine subjectivity: as the one who is now to continue the salvific work rooted in the sacrifice of the Cross. Of course Jesus entrusts this work to human beings: to the apostles, to the Church. Nevertheless, in and through them the Holy Spirit remains the transcendent and principal agent for the accomplishment of this work in the human spirit and in the history of the world (RM, n. 21)."<sup>10</sup>

Once he has clearly identified the *divine* agent of the Church's mission, the pope elucidates the ultimate purpose and fundamental pedagogy of evangelization, in light of Jesus' sacerdotal prayer in John's Gospel: "The ultimate purpose of mission is to enable people to share in the communion which exists between the Father and the Son. The disciples are to live in unity with one another, remaining in the Father and Son, so that the world may know and believe (cf. Jn 17:21-23). This is a very important missionary text. It makes us understand that we are missionaries above all because of *what we are* as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries *in word or deed*." (RM, n. 23)

This pedagogy of unity, in the image of the Trinity, corresponds to the diversified experiences of ecclesial movements, new communities, and groups of all sorts which have chosen an ideal of communion as the foundation for their missionary extension. "May they be one *as we are one*" (Jn 17:4-5). Exegesis confirms that "this '*as*' is not a matter only of comparison, but also of causation."<sup>11</sup> The ties of love uniting the Father and the Son also guide believers in this same desire for communion (*koinônia*, 1 Jn 3:6-7). Unity alone creates the possibility for success of the mission (Jn 17:21).<sup>12</sup> The new missionary con-

<sup>10</sup>Encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem* (18 May 1986), n. 42.

<sup>11</sup>E. Cothenet, the article "Mission et Missions," in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), col. 1368.

sciousness of the Church passes through the experience of a liberating communion. By inviting us to cultivate a "being-in-communion" before "word" or "deed," John Paul II indicates the evangelical path to the renewal of mission. Faced with cultures lacking transcendence, unconsciously desiring to rediscover sacred realities, doesn't the Church offer a communion which would render people and human relations sacred? A crucial question for evangelization today is how to cultivate in the Church a "sacramental" consciousness, that is, how to cultivate a consciousness of belonging to the sacred space of trinitarian relations and to bear witness to them in a meaningful and effective way. This would grant ecumenism and the mission *ad gentes* a much needed second wind.

*The encounter of the new evangelization with secularized cultures*

The missionary consciousness of the Church that has developed since Vatican II, and whose teacher and interpreter is John Paul II, has begun to mobilize itself with respect to the challenges of evangelization in formerly Christian lands. Since the launching of the celebrations for the fifth centenary anniversary of the evangelization of the Americas in Santo Domingo, the calls reiterated by the pope have provoked a sharper awareness of the need for a new evangelization of cultures. The limitations of the "inculturation" problematic have made the need felt for a shifting of emphasis towards "evangelization."<sup>13</sup>

Paul VI had prepared the way for this movement by remarking, in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, on the growing separation between faith and modern culture. He had thus promulgated the ideal of a "civilization of love"<sup>14</sup> to combat the ideologies of hate at work in the cultures. John Paul II took up this project under the name of the "new evangelization" by inviting the whole of the Church to involve itself with renewed means, a renewed lan-

<sup>12</sup>The Focolaris movement founded by Chiara Lubich offers an eloquent testimony to this point of view. Cf., Chiara Lubich, *Amour Famille et unité* (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1983).

<sup>13</sup>Among these limitations, we note the following: the temptation for a return to the past, the obstacle represented by the (great) religions (the foundational element for all other domains of culture), and the difficulties of reconciling inculturation and liberation in practice. Cf., P. Tihon, "Des Missions à la Mission," 715-16.

<sup>14</sup>H. Carrier, "Vers une civilisation de l'amour," in *Cultures notre avenir* (Rome: PUG, Coll. Studia socialia, 1985), 197-220.

guage, and a renewed zeal. During its development, this program was enriched with a renewed theological content. The trinitarian agent to which we have alluded is perhaps one of the richest and most promising aspects of this theological contribution. It invites us to a renewed contemplation of the mystery of God at work in the midst of men.

This project of new evangelization carries a prophetic and critical dimension. The dialogue between the Church and secularized cultures does not occur without tensions. It calls for a discernment of values and counter-values that emerge in these cultures. John Paul II has taken on this task in the light of a christocentrism which provides the foundations for a critique of ideologies and for a vigorous affirmation of human rights. His confrontations with modern cultures, most notably on the questions of divorce, contraception, abortion, euthanasia, and war, bear witness to the growing chasm between a Christian view and a secularist view of the human person.

The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, along with the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, certainly represents a masterpiece of his program of new evangelization. It contains the most lucid diagnosis of the drama of the tragic separation of truth from freedom in the modern age. Moreover, in no uncertain terms, it proposes the only remedy capable of reconciling the alienated sinner to God and to himself: "freedom itself needs to be set free. It is Christ who sets it free: he 'has set us free for freedom' (Gal 5:1)" (VS, n. 86).

Though the tight argumentation of this encyclical takes account of reason and natural law, it establishes more clearly than ever before that the fundamental norm for Christian ethics is Christ. Christ appears in his Person, his works, and his teachings as the "way" which is the form of Christian identity. One of the highlights of this document is the paradoxical affirmation that Christ crucified is the model of the fulfillment of freedom: "the crucified Christ reveals the authentic meaning of freedom, he lives it in fullness by the total gift of himself, and he calls his disciples to share in his own freedom" (VS, n. 87). The profound dynamic of this encyclical draws inspiration, as does the new *Catechism* very explicitly, from a faith renewed in the trinitarian love which gives itself in participation. From this spring flows the enthusiasm and the moral demands of a life in the Spirit, in imitation of Christ, in order to attain to the kingdom of true freedom in love.

Moreover, faith in Christ is not reduced to aiming at

a more or less inaccessible moral ideal. It also affirms a liberating "moral content" (VS, n. 89) which forbids in any circumstances those moral acts judged to be intrinsically evil. The new evangelization must thus propose "universal and unchanging moral norms in service to the person and society" (VS, n. 95). These norms are not a hindrance to freedom. Their only purpose is to serve true freedom, and they are a "solid guarantee of a just and peaceful human coexistence, and hence of genuine democracy" (VS, n. 96). With John Paul II we become more aware that the firmness of the Church in ethical matters is the indispensable condition for reordering individuals and societies towards the ideal of Christian freedom.

"It is impossible for us to keep silent" (Acts 4:20), exclaims John Paul II in responding to the question, *Why mission?*: "Mission is an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us"; it "derives not only from the Lord's mandate but also from the profound demands of God's life within us" (RM, n. 11). This is why he ends his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* with a chapter on a missionary spirituality whose points of emphasis summarize well the crucial aspects of the Church's new missionary consciousness: "being led by the Spirit," "living the mystery of Christ, 'the one who was sent,'" "loving the Church and humanity as Jesus did" (RM, nn. 89-97).

In a word, "the authentic missionary is the saint" (RM, n. 90), concludes the Holy Father, and the call to holiness concerns the missionary *ad gentes* as much as any baptized Christian: "*The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission.* Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission" (RM, n. 90). This is one of the most vigorous affirmations of the essentially missionary nature of the Church. Thus, in some way, the whole Church and each of her members in full legitimacy can cry out: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel."

## II. Towards a deepening of the missionary identity of the Church

The missionary teachings of John Paul II, rooted in "the profound demand of the life of God within us," confirm and reinitiate the Church's missionary enterprise in all of its forms, in the spirit of Vatican II. The purpose of this second part is to extend the developments of the Council and the present pontificate with the help of Balthasar's Theo-drama. The question of the essentially missionary nature of the Church will be linked to

the trinitarian missions, starting with the Balthasarian concept of the person as mission in Christ. From this concept, a new horizon of meaning ought to emerge for understanding and defining the Church itself as mission.

### *The Trinity as model of the Church's identity*

At present there exists in the Church a varied understanding that the renewal of evangelization in all of its forms depends upon a new image of God as love which must place the trinitarian mystery at the center of our attention. The experience of the various ecclesial movements and new communities, the theological reflection on the Church as Communion, the contrasting currents of contemporary theology, and the new evangelization of cultures all converge towards what Balthasar calls the "Theo-drama."<sup>15</sup> Thus designated because it unfolds as a dialogue with the world of theater, the second part (five volumes) of the trilogy develops a universal vision of God's commitment for the liberation of the world which articulates itself around the concept of the trinitarian mission.

According to Balthasar, the Church's mission inscribes itself in the relation of obedience-mission which links the incarnate Son to the Father in the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit, the Church's mission actualizes Jesus' mission, which is "the temporal modality of his eternal procession." Hence, the Church participates in the uncreated relationship between Jesus and his Father. By preaching the gospel to all creatures, the Church proclaims and extends the kingdom of the trinitarian relations, of which she already possesses the first taste by the very fact that she espouses the obedience of Jesus Christ.

Though it is conditioned by the historical and cultural contexts in which it unfolds, the Church thus fundamentally lives in a participation in the trinitarian event which precedes and encounters any given culture. The Council expressed this reality in speaking of the Church as a sacrament, i.e., "a sign and a means of effecting a profound union with God and unity with the whole human race" (LG, n. 1). The Church is a mystery of communion, at once human and divine, "*sacramentum Trini-*

<sup>15</sup>H.U.v. Balthasar, *La dramatique divine* I: *Prolégomènes*; II, 1: *Les personnes du drame*; II, 2: *L'homme en Dieu*; III, 2: *Les personnes dans le Christ*; IV, 3: *L'action*; V, 4: *Le dévouement*. [Theo-Drama, in 5 volumes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988–forthcoming).]

tatis." The realism of these expressions must be taken seriously by any theology of evangelization, lest we consider the Trinity and the Church as two independent entities, external to each other, or linked merely by an ideal relation. A glance at Leonardo Boff's socio-cultural model will serve as an introduction to a properly Balthasarian perspective.

1) *A socio-cultural model.* In two recent publications,<sup>16</sup> the theologian of Petropolis gives a socio-cultural reading of the relationship between the Trinity and society, intending to promote a new liberating evangelization. Boff saw well that the trinitarian figure of God requires a respect for cultures and an openness to the mutual enrichment of cultures. He unqualifiedly denounces the limitations of the first evangelization of Latin America which was achieved through military conquest and the imposition of a foreign cultural model. In his eyes, the colonial legacy left deep wounds, which justifies a new liberating evangelization that begins from the perspective of the oppressed.

Given the gravity of the injustices he denounces, Boff must be listened to. He offers a radical interpretation of the renewal of evangelization. But the accuracy of his critique on many points does not prevent his global perspective from becoming anthropocentric and finally reductive. His conception of evangelization is based on socio-cultural categories which translate the fundamental Christian mysteries into the vague language of "utopia."<sup>17</sup> The Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Resurrection are treated as rich and liberating "paradigms"<sup>18</sup> for the promotion of models of cultural development primarily concerned with authenticity and autonomy.

His interpretation lacks the realism and density of the "*analogia entis*," that is, the philosophical foundation which comprehends in depth the mutual penetration of the divine and human spheres without confusion or separation. The absence of a metaphysics of being in Boff, as in many contemporary theologians, no longer allows one to think through adequately the originality or novelty of the Christian mystery in the terms of *covenant*. In effect, the decline of the *analogia entis* in modern thought has deprived theology of an ontological foundation

<sup>16</sup>L. Boff, *Trinité et Société* (Paris: Cerf, 1990); *La nouvelle évangélisation, perspective des opprimés* (Paris: Cerf, 1992).

<sup>17</sup>L. Boff, *La nouvelle évangélisation*, 61.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 62-64.

which would allow the construction of an authentic covenantal relationship between God and man. Modern thought thus tends to alternate between a dialectical opposition (Barth) and a mysticism of identity (Tillich). At the limit, the Incarnation itself is stripped of its uniqueness and becomes either an "idea," a practical model, or a paradigm for the transformation of cultures. The primary consequence reveals itself in the difficulty in integrating ecclesial and, above all, institutional mediation in the renewal of evangelization.

2) *A theo-dramatic model.* Hans Urs von Balthasar offers an alternative to the perspective of liberation that would leave the oppressed more aware of their earthly oppression than of their theological liberation. His Theo-drama proposes a radical understanding of the Church as mission *in Christ*. The originality of his position consists in considering the Church as a co-participant in Christ's mission in the Spirit. Firmly grounded in the *analogia entis*, Balthasar makes maximal use of the dynamic of participation and covenant which defines the Church's relationship to the trinitarian mystery in Christ. He thus makes clear that the Trinity is no longer merely a more or less rich and paradigmatic "model" to be used as a guide for the *ad intra* and *ad extra* relations of a democratic Church-communion. The community of mission between Christ, the Spirit, and the Church leads the world to the Father by opening up for it the beatifying space of the trinitarian exchanges.

The nerve center of his conception of the Theo-drama is the notion of person as mission.<sup>19</sup> This is a properly theological notion which presupposes a distinction between the spiritual subject and the person and which situates the human subject dynamically in Christ and the Church: "In Christ, the created man can, through grace, become a (theological) person, i.e., a son of the Father who has received, in a qualitatively unique way, a participation in Christ's mission, which is fulfilled by the Holy Spirit dwelling within him as in a dwelling place for the divine persons (Jn 14:23; 1 Cor 6:9; Eph 3:17)."<sup>20</sup>

This theological constitution of the person, which implies the aid of the three divine persons in circumincession,

<sup>19</sup>See my article, "Foundations of Christian Ethics according to Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990): 386-93.

<sup>20</sup>Balthasar, *Dramatique divine* II, 2: *Les personnes dans le Christ*, 417 (Orig. ed., 482).

simultaneously guides the spiritual subject in the being-as-mission of the Church: "A human spiritual subject, insofar as he becomes a theological person through a call and a unique mission, is simultaneously de-privatized, socialized and made into a space for and a bearer of community."<sup>21</sup> "In this de-privatization, he who has become the property of God becomes a '*homo ecclesiasticus*' who takes on not only psychologically, but also ontologically, an ecclesial character."<sup>22</sup>

The ecclesiological extension of this theological notion of person follows naturally, towards a vision of the Church-as-communion. Balthasar explains this by means of a typology of particular missions which participate in the universal mission of Christ. Around the "christological constellation" made up of the qualified missions of Mary, Peter, John, and Paul, and the twelve disciples, Balthasar develops a whole string of missions which form the historical and eschatological "*communio sanctorum*." The idea of the "communion of saints," which has biblical roots, seems to him capable of filling out "the notion of a 'holy people,' made up of individual persons; while the idea of the 'body' (of Christ), which, as a biological image, does not make interpersonal communication immediately apparent, finds itself freed of limitation."<sup>23</sup>

The privileged figure of the *communio sanctorum* which is predominant in Balthasar's ecclesiology reveals the proper mission of the Holy Spirit which is to include the Church in God's commitment for the world. In effect, the Spirit is the transcendent Subject who mediates the subjects' reception of their participation in Christ's mission. In the Church, as in the Trinity, the Spirit is the crowning of unity in the distinction of Persons. It thus governs the distribution of charisms and the love which assures their harmonious practice in the Church and for the world.

The participation in Christ's objective mission thus finds itself completed by the subjective receptivity (*disponibilité*) of the Spirit which inwardly incites the elect to consent to their personalizing mission. The milieu favorable to this personaliza-

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 218 (Orig. ed., 249).

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 417 (Orig. ed., 482).

<sup>23</sup>Balthasar, *La Gloire et la Croix, Nouvelle Alliance* (Paris: Aubier, 1975), 400. [*The Glory of the Lord VII: Theology: The New Covenant* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).]

tion is the open space of the trinitarian circumincession which weds itself to the laborious coming into being of historical communities. This is why the exchange of gifts which develops within the communion of saints opens up into entirely unsuspected perspectives of solidarity with God and the poor.

#### *Towards a Theo-drama of liberation*

The perspectives of liberation which begin to emerge from Balthasar's vision surpass the socio-economic dimension of the battle for justice and the sphere of inter-cultural dialogue in the spirit of the gospel. They reach the historico-eschatological level with the invisible but concrete efficacy of the communion of saints. In effect, the engagement of persons and communities "in the engagement with God"<sup>24</sup> participates in the paschal dynamism of the Cross-Resurrection. According to Balthasar, the mystery of "substitution" through which Christ takes the place of sinners belongs, analogically, among the possibilities of the "*sequela Christi*." It introduces the disciples into the dynamism of a being-for-others in the image and likeness of Christ crucified.<sup>25</sup> Balthasar draws attention to the inclusion of death itself among the possibilities of Christian "pro-existence."<sup>26</sup> He attributes the merit of having explicitly developed this theme, which the saints have experienced, to the writers Georges Bernanos and Gertrude von Le Fort. *Les Dialogues des Carmélites* and *La Dernière à l'Echafaud* admirably treat death as a substitutive expiation. Balthasar feels himself in perfect harmony with certain Catholic writers in the affirmation that "in love, no one simply lives his own destiny (and no less in sin), but the destinies of others are shared by all, and each one finds his own represented in the lives of others: in an infinitely deeper sense than even Christians imagine, life and death are exchangeable in the heart of the unique body that we would have to call truly mystical."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Balthasar, *Dans l'engagement de Dieu* (Montréal: Ed. Paulines, 1973).

<sup>25</sup>The theological mission of Adrienne von Speyr bears witness to the truth of this participation in a truly charismatic and abundant way. Cf., Balthasar, *Adrienne von Speyr et sa mission théologique* (Montréal: Ed. Paulines, 1978).

<sup>26</sup>The expression "pro-existence," borrowed from Schürman, expresses the being-for (*Für-sein*) which belongs to Christ, but which may be participated in analogically in faith. Cf., *Dramatique divine* III, 377ff.

<sup>27</sup>Balthasar, *Le chrétien Bernanos* (Paris: Seuil, 1956), 470.

By broadening the meaning of the Christian pro-existence in the direction of a Theo-drama of history, Balthasar elucidates in an original way the Council's notion of the Church as the world's "sacrament of salvation."<sup>28</sup> The exchanges of the communion of saints extend themselves, beyond all visible control, to every nation and to every age in history. In the light of the Book of Revelation, Balthasar discerns a growing amplification of the dramatic 'yes' of the communion of saints in the face of the luciferian 'no' of the Beast disguised in political power.<sup>29</sup> The Church becomes the world's sacrament of salvation by engaging itself in the paradoxical battle of the sacrificed Lamb which extends, in the 'com-passion' of its members, the victory of trinitarian love over the sin of the world.

But even if, in this battle, the author emphasizes the invisible fecundity of the '*communio sanctorum*,' the other dimensions of ecclesial engagement are not for all of that devalued. Works of charity, the effort of evangelization and inculturation, and the battle for justice and against oppression all belong by full rights to the Theo-drama of the Church's mission. But the fecundity of these activities must be situated with respect to the central mystery of the suffering and dying love-for-others:<sup>30</sup> "Quite otherwise, it appears that the visible efficacy in the following of Christ—*tansiit bene faciendo* (Rev 10:38)—does not end where the human efficacy necessarily finishes, but gains ever

<sup>28</sup>Balthasar, *La Dramatique divine* III: *L'Action* (Paris: Lethielleux), 392 (Orig. ed., 394).

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 411-22 (Orig. ed., 408-20).

<sup>30</sup>Balthasar thus takes up a position with respect to the liberation theology which would place primary importance on the battle for social justice in favor of the poor and oppressed in the activities of Christian engagement. To avert the dangers of rationalism which threaten theologies like those of Leonardo Boff, Segundo Galilea, J.L. Segundo, etc., he recalls the criteria of an authentic Theo-drama of liberation: the relationship of non-identity between the Kingdom of God and worldly progress; the eschatological dimension of the Cross which refuses to be instrumentalized for worldly purposes; the acknowledgment of a deeper level of engagement for the total liberation of sinful man in Christ—for example, the engagement of monks. Cf., *Dramatique divine* III, 449-54; "Considérations sur l'histoire du salut. A propos de la théologie de la libération," *NRT* 99 (1977): 518-31. It is noticeable though that some liberation theologians, particularly Gustavo Gutierrez, accept these criteria and have evolved towards a spiritual deepening of their vision. Cf. G. Gutierrez, *We drink from our own wells* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), and *On Job: God-talk and the suffering of the innocent* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

more in intensity and efficacy, through the same following of Christ, in suffering and death; only here does it enter into its completely decisive phase, as Ignatius of Antioch saw more clearly."<sup>31</sup>

The preceding developments allow a glimpse at the scope of what we may call, with Balthasar, a "Theo-drama of liberation."<sup>32</sup> These possibilities of action and compassion, in God and with God, presuppose a theology of covenant which includes a metaphysics of being as love. Balthasar always moves within the sphere of the *analogia entis*, which receives from him a dynamic, existential, and even mystical form, with roots in Christology. Christ is the concrete *analogia entis*. He is the Creator and the creature in one single being. He is the covenantal relationship between God and man in the unity and relationality of his divine Person. The integration of the created person, with his freedom of action (*agir*) and passion (*pâtir*), in Christ, as the agent of God's commitment, crowns the fruitful covenant between God and the world. The "*analogia substitutionis*" in Christ is the highest expression of the "*analogia caritatis*" and thus of the "*analogia entis*."

In this is given the first level of meaning which illuminates the meaning of the Church's mission: every ecclesial mission, even the most mundane in appearance, participates in God's self-giving to the world. But there is more. Because, in the final analysis, this sharing of God's love situates itself in the trinitarian intersubjectivity, it follows that every ecclesial mission takes on, through an unfathomable grace, a new meaning from the fact that it serves to express the love of God for God. The Church as the Spouse of Christ is the historico-eschatological locus in which the inner-trinitarian dialogue attains its highest degree of self-glorification in the world: this is because the circumcession of missions and services in the '*communio sanctorum*' serves as a created expression of the uncreated life exchanged between the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit.

### III. Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council renewed the mission-

<sup>31</sup>Balthasar, *La Dramatique divine* III, 392 (Orig. ed., 394).

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 442-52 (Orig. ed., 444-54).

ary consciousness of the Church by rooting it within the trinitarian missions, by affirming the collective responsibility of evangelization, and by promoting an attitude of dialogue. John Paul II gathered this heritage and made it fruitful with an eminently christocentric—and, we may add, Marian—pastoral consciousness. As an agent of the new evangelization he bears witness to what Balthasar calls the “theo-dramatic mission”: a radical engagement in God’s engagement for the world and for his greater glory.

The path we have followed has intended to make a contribution to the shifting of emphasis in the theology of mission. Accustomed to methodologies which begin with the analysis of situations, we are led to define the Church’s mission in function of the needs of the world, and we easily forget its properly theological dimension. What results is that the original contribution of the decree *Ad gentes*, carried higher by the pope to the level of a mission based on the trinitarian mission, finds itself underdeveloped for the sake of sociological, anthropological, and cultural considerations. These considerations are essential, but they do not suffice to construct a theology of evangelization.

Through the course of these reflections, I have come to believe that the present development in missiology, with its groping and hesitations, requires a properly theological deepening in order to keep the “repatriation of the Missions in the Mission” from ending in resignation (*dé-mission*).<sup>33</sup> To be sure, my essay does not wish to disparage the concrete missionary experiences which provide, without any doubt, important criteria for the inculturation of the gospel. I have sought simply to put into relief the theological presuppositions of inculturation and evangelization from the perspective of an interiorization of the Mystery whose sacrament is the Church.

“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel,” because God’s self-donation would thereby be obstructed, for he has chosen to surrender himself to the world through his incarnate Son who leads the triumphal procession of the witnesses of the Lamb behind him, to the praise of his Glory. Wouldn’t the additional Glory God receives from his creatures be diminished otherwise?

“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel,” because

my personal identity would thereby find itself truncated, for, separated from the identity of Christ and the Church, it would no longer reach the supreme dignity of being a sacrament of the divine life. Would I then be able to find an answer to the ultimate question, Who am I?

“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel,” because the entire cultural environment and ecclesial identity would thereby remain devoid of the eucharistic form destined from the beginning of creation to become the “*forma mundi*,” the fulfillment of the world. How, then, would the Church be able to appear as the emergence of the Kingdom?

At the close of these few reflections, the reader may judge whether it would be an exaggeration to conclude that the pontificate of John Paul II, conjointly with the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, are eloquent signs, among others, of the rising in the wake of the Council of the “dawning of a new missionary age” (*RM*, n. 92).—Translated by David L. Schindler, Jr. □

<sup>33</sup>P. Tihon, “Des Missions à la Mission,” *NRT* 107 (1985): 520.