



North Thompson Catholic Parishes

Roman Catholic Diocese of Kamloops

THE PRIESTHOOD IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

1

Cardinal Christian Wiyghan Tumi ²

INTRODUCTION

Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, nn. 42 and 44) affirms that the nature of the Church is bound to a double mystery (holiness and the salvific mission). All the people of God are called to holiness just as their heavenly Father is holy. It is also the whole Church which is missionary. It continues and actualizes the mission of Christ the Redeemer. "The Lord Jesus has sent his Apostles to every person, to all peoples and to every place on the earth. In the person of the apostles, the Church has received a universal mission, which knows no limits and which concerns itself with salvation in all its richness, in accordance with the fullness of life that Christ has come to bring us (cf. John 10:10): it (the Church) has been sent to reveal and communicate the love of God to all men and to all peoples on earth" (*Ad Gentes*, n. 10). This mission is unique, because it has one sole origin and one sole goal, but it entails diverse tasks and activities (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 31).

The common fundamental mission of the Church does not eliminate the particular mission of every baptized person according to his state of life. There are various and distinctive features of vocation and consecration, just as there are of mission. The mission of the Church presupposes diversity in its realization. Unity in diversity manifests itself also at this level. From this prospective, the priest, insofar as he works with his bishop and in virtue of his consecration, has a specific role to play in the common mission of the Church. It is this specific, missionary ministry that we are going to try to highlight in this exposition composed of three parts. We shall examine, gradually, the particular function of the diocesan priest in the mission, that of the priest-religious (contemplative and active), and education in the missionary spirit of candidates to the priesthood.

1 Translated from the original French by Elizabeth M. Nagel.

2 Archbishop of Douala, Cameroon.

THE DIOCESAN PRIEST AND THE MISSION

Every priest is before all else a man chosen, consecrated and sent by God through the agency of the Church of Jesus Christ, to *teach, sanctify and guide* the people of God toward its true happiness (the God of Jesus Christ). Ordained to be a co-worker with his bishop, the priest is associated with him in the priestly function of serving the people of God. Configured to Christ, the eternal, Sovereign Priest, the diocesan priest is consecrated to announce the Gospel, to be the pastor of the people of God and to celebrate the liturgy (in offering, above all, the eucharistic sacrifice of the Lord). He can be defined as the disinterested servant of God and of the Gospel, by his words and witness to priestly holiness for the salvation of souls (beginning with his own).

In virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, every priest is called to share the concern of the bishop, with whom he collaborates, for the mission: "the spiritual gift which priests have received at ordination prepares them, not for a limited and restricted mission, but for a salvific mission of universal scope, "unto the ends of the earth..."; "any priestly ministry participates, in effect, in the universal dimensions of the mission confided by Christ to the apostles" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 10; *Ad Gentes*, n. 39; *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 67).

The priest joins with the Holy Spirit (Protagonist of the mission) to become the person responsible for and the principal agent of the pastoral mission. This necessitates a "missionary heart and mentality." These require that the priests be "open to the needs of the Church and of the world, attentive to those farthest away [from the Church] and above all to non-Christian groups in their own area" (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 67). The missionary apostolate embraces a double salvific activity of the Church: the announcement of the Gospel and the "foundation of new Churches among peoples and groups where they do not yet exist" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 34).

The internal missionary dynamism, maintained by pastoral charity and in depth evangelization of the faithful, leads to the mission *Ad Gentes*. There is a fundamental interdependence between the mission *ad intra* and the mission *ad extra*. Also missionary activity *ad intra* is a credible sign and stimulus for the missionary activity *ad extra*, and *vice-versa*" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 34). There are means which help pastors of souls to realize the mission *ad intra*, to arouse in Christian communities the internal dynamism which leads to the mission *ad gentes*.

In his message for the World Day of Missions (June 11, 1995), Pope John Paul II redefined the essential mission of the Christian in general and that of the priest in particular. It is a matter of announcing Jesus Christ by one's words and with one's whole life. Priestly ordination configures the priest to Christ, Head and Spouse of the Church. This interior source makes him act in the name of Christ and as the sacrament of Christ. Thus, through his ministry, he must try to illustrate consistently the prophetic mission of the Church. This manifests itself by pastoral charity which drives him to abandon himself for his sheep (the Christian community which is confided to him). He is, therefore, called to serve his brothers and sisters without exception, loving them with the very love of Christ. This is only possible if the priest accomplishes his pastoral task in the spirit of Christ, sent by the heavenly Father. To do this, he is asked to pay attention to the action of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Word, of sacraments, of prayer, of welcoming people, of listening, of visiting, etc. Particular importance should be accorded to the eucharistic celebration, source, foundation and summit of missionary priestly spirituality. The priest brings there the concerns of the whole Church for the whole of humanity.

The source of the mission is Trinitarian. But this reality need not call into question the gift of the Holy Spirit that is called the ministry of authority in the Church (bishop, priest, deacon). It is a matter of a specific service which leads certain men (set apart) to live the mission as an act of their faith. Thus, they agree to make their life an intimate communion with the being and the activity of Christ. In joys and pains or failures they strive to have confidence in the mission itself (work of the Holy Spirit), and to be adamant about conducting missionary activity in the manner that Jesus Christ himself lived it. This implies today that the absolute priority, or the central preoccupation, of every priest in a parish apostolate should be the concern for missionary animation and cooperation. As Cardinal Josef Tomko said (on the occasion of the presentation of *Redemptoris Missio* to the press), priests (secular and religious) must be the principal agents of "the missionary revolution of the Church." These essential tasks are not limited to the administration of the sacraments, Christian instruction, and the good testimony of the consecrated life. They include also missionary information and missionary formation of the People of God. Priests are asked to help all the baptized to acquire the missionary spirit and to open their spiritual, cultural and social life to universal dimensions. This missionary animation is facilitated by Catholic action associations or movements and by groups (especially the youth). These give rise to and promote, not only missionary vocations *ad gentes*, but also good cooperation for evangelization (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 83).

The priest hereby communicates above all a life, or better an experience of life. This is his vital experience of God and his passionate love for Jesus Christ (true God and true man, the only Mediator, Redeemer, Lord and Master). But if he himself does not live in Christ, how is he able to communicate this experience to others? Hence, the call to sanctity is for the good fulfillment of the mission. "Every missionary is only authentically missionary if he commits himself to the way of holiness.... The renewed impulse to the mission *ad gentes* demands holy missionaries. It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and coordinate ecclesial resources, or to delve more deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of the faith: *What is needed is the encouragement of a new 'enthusiasm for the faith'* among missionaries and throughout the Christian community, especially among those who work most closely with missionaries" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 90). The priest, to be truly missionary, must try diligently to be holy. He must become a "contemplative in action" who draws the power for his actions from the divine Word, and from individual and communal prayer. In effect, he evangelizes much more by his life, and his deeds, in short, more by witness than by theories. As Pope John Paul II says, "the contemporary person believes the witnesses more than the teachers." In fact, theory can only convince intellectually, while the witness to Christ touches the heart of the person, arouses his emotions and spurs him on to conversion. Consequently, to accomplish his mission well, every priest must show that he is the witness only of the one Master: Jesus Christ who the whole of humanity is called to recognize as its Lord.

We are able to affirm that the quality of the priest's life and ministry, for the completion of a fruitful mission, also depends upon his witness to the radicalism of evangelical demands and counsels. It is a matter of a consistent style of life in the setting where he exercises his priestly ministry. This is born out in a life marked by apostolic obedience, evangelical poverty, chastity in consecrated celibacy, and priestly unity with the diocesan bishop -"with Peter and under Peter." Priestly unity, in this case, determines in part the quality of the ministry of the presbyterate and the success of the mission (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 17). underscores in effect that "Each priest, whether diocesan or religious, is united to the other members of this presbyterate, on the basis of the sacrament of Holy Orders and by particular bonds of apostolic charity, ministry and fraternity." *The Directory for Ministry and the Life of Priests* affirms also that every priest of a diocese is linked to a distinct priestly fraternity and is a member of a presbyterate. Ordination and incarnation connect with the diocese, the priests, who cannot have an isolated existence. All priests participate to the same degree of ministry and can only realize the mission effectively within the presbyterate constituted by their brother priests. This corresponds to the will of the Lord who never sent his apostles on mission alone, but instead two by two (Mark 6:7). We comprehend why the presbyteral body is necessary for all priests who work for the common mission (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 28) in a diocese, the place of sanctification and evangelization. In the *Ordo Presbyterorum* of a diocese there is a healthy pluralism that can enrich priestly spirituality's and charisms. All this inspires the priest to work in a unity of

views, of hearts and of action, animated by the very love of Christ, in fidelity to the same evangelical doctrine of which the Church is the guardian.

Pastoral charity for brother priests and for the faithful should not make the priest forget the missionary requirements of dialogue with and evangelization of the "de-christianized," non-Catholics and non-Christians present in the area where he lives (ecumenical dialogue, dialogue with the Muslims and believers of the traditional religions).

It is true, moreover, that incardination obliges, morally and juridically, a priest's belonging and dedication to a particular Church; it develops the consciousness of being a member of a particular Church (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, nn. 31 and 74); but the insistence on the spiritual value of incardination and belonging to a particular Church should not make one forget that the priest, as pastor, is not only consecrated for a diocese. He is consecrated for the salvation of the whole world (*Ad Gentes*, n. 38). For this, he must be available for the mission *ad gentes* beyond the borders and limits of diocese and even of country. The mission *ad gentes* manifests in a fitting way the gift and gratuity of the Church. It aids those who are in spiritual and material need. It expresses growth toward maturity of faith. One goes beyond the temptation to rely on oneself in order to open his spirit and his heart, not only to the infinite horizons of the mission, but also to the essential ecclesial dimensions which follow:

1. The communion which must exist among the diverse particular Churches demands the exchange of gifts, and especially of the living and personal gifts who are the priests. The example that confirms this is the experience of priests today (cf. *Fidei Donum*). "...They provide a precious contribution to the growth of ecclesial communities in need, and for their part, they receive from these communities new energy and vitality for their faith" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 68). This experience demands, among other things:

- maturity in the vocation;
- the courageous capacity to detach himself from country, from ethnic group, from tribe, from clan and from family;
- the remarkable ability to integrate himself into the new ecclesial milieu which welcomes him, and into that of other cultures with intelligence and respect, the mark of a missionary spirit which is open and fraternal.

2. the rational use of the classic instruments of missionary animation (national direction of pontifical missionary works, missionary institutes, missionary groups of youth, missionary journals and expositions, publications, missionary documentaries and films, vocational camps, etc...), and those of the classic forms of cooperation with the missions - prayers, sacrifices for the missions and vocations; offerings; adoption from a distance, etc...).

3. "... Interdiocesan priestly associations, clerical societies of apostolic life, secular institutes of priests and even congregations of religious priests" whose specific charisms and qualified ministries ensure an undeniable benefit to the mission of the Church (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 31). This leads us to examine the specific place of the religious priest in the mission of the Church.

THE RELIGIOUS PRIEST AND THE MISSION

The religious state is a way of living which is organized in view of holiness (J. J. Hamer, "*La dimension missionnaire de la vie religieuse*," in "*Les dossiers de la documentation catholique*," *Les religieux*, Paris, Centurion, 1973). Religious life does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, but to its life and its holiness. An essential element of the holiness of the Church, it is characterized by the profession of evangelical counsels. In virtue of their detachment, total consecration in a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, the religious carry out a fruitful, generous and creative apostolate.

"The apostolate of all religious consists first in their witness of a consecrated life, which they are bound to foster by prayer and penance" (Can. 673). The religious life, as a school of holiness, has in itself an undeniable missionary importance, if one accepts that the saints are the most effective actors in evangelization, as Pope John Paul II just recalled in *Ecclesia in Africa* (chapter VII). Thus, the missionary dimension of the religious life cannot do without apostolic holiness (the personal and intimate experience of Christ through the life of prayer and evangelical charity). The principal mission of the religious priest must consist in the witness of his consecrated life. The Synod of Bishops on the Consecrated Life (October 1994) affirms that there is a fundamental interdependence between consecration and mission.

"The consecrated person receives this grace of unity, because of which consecration and mission are not two juxtaposed moments of his life, but are reciprocally implied in its depths. The member of the consecrated life receives consecration for the mission of the Church in keeping with the charism of each Institute" (*Message*, n. 4). Beyond the diversity of charisms, it is also a question of the difference of juridical or canonical status. As the same Synod emphasized, the members of *contemplative institutes* must organize their life and mission by granting absolute priority to the mystery of Christ praying. Their specific mission is to make known in the Church the dimension of Christ praying (P. 6). It is a matter of a life of adoration and intercession for the world. One accompanies, by means of "prayer and sacrifice, the apostolic works of the brothers" and sisters (M. 6). Here the effective service of prayer for the Church and for souls is underlined.

The members of *institutes of apostolic life* cannot carry out their apostolate outside of the hierarchy. "Religious are subject to the authority of bishops, whom they are obliged to follow with devoted humility and respect, in those matters which involve the care of souls, the public exercise of divine worship and other works of the apostolate" (Can. 678, par. 1). But the juridical status of religious (autonomy of life) protects their distinctiveness and helps them to respond not only to the needs of the local Church, but also to those of the universal Church. This advantage frequently places them "on the frontiers of the mission" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 69). This is more manifestly true the more their vocation "is the model of the Church's missionary commitment, which always stands in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold endeavors" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 66). This missionary impulse, inherent in the religious vocation, must find its place in the task of evangelization in the depths of the diocesan Church. Hence comes the necessity to create healthy relations between religious priests and diocesan priests on the one hand, and on the other, between the diocesan projects and institutional charisms.

Finally, the religious priest like the diocesan priest, in short, the pastor of souls, must flee the danger of a consuming activism in the mission of evangelization. The missionary incentive or zeal finds its source and its strength in prayer and intimate union with God. It is necessary to find a vital synthesis between consecration and mission. This dynamic nourishes itself and reinforces itself by listening to the Word of God, personal prayer (the Divine Office, etc...) and above all by the Eucharistic Sacrifice (source and foundation of priestly spirituality). Thus, every pastor is called to imitate Jesus Christ, the supreme model of pastoral life. Our Lord and Master, even in the most intense periods of his ministry, always reserved privileged moments for exclusive dialogue with the Father in solitary prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12). The regularity of prayer allows the priest to carry on his apostolate in profound communion with Christ the Savior. And as the Synod of bishops on the consecrated life emphasized, "prayer is one of the most beautiful expressions of spiritual, fraternal communion with all the members of the People of God" (P. 28).

There remains for us only to see how one can develop the priestly missionary spirituality in our seminaries and other priestly houses of formation.

EDUCATION IN THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT FOR CANDIDATES TO THE PRIESTHOOD

For every priest, missionary spirituality can only be developed by the seminary or another institution of priestly formation. In Cameroon, we have emphasized in the *Ratio Nationalis* that the seminary must form men who have a pastoral sensibility which is apostolic and missionary (men of their people, disciples of Jesus Christ and true pastors to all in the image of Christ). It is a matter of initiating future priests to the apostolic and missionary spirit. Certain means can help to reach this fundamental objective of priestly formation:

1. prayer which conveys the needs of the world;
2. spiritual conferences centered on the hermeneutics of worldly events and missionary places;
3. teaching of missionary spirituality and missiology;
4. missionary pastoral initiation (connection between theology and pastoral work; training periods; missionary animation);
5. teaching of the social doctrine of the Church;
6. meetings with priests, true apostles and missionaries;
7. frequent meetings with their bishop or the vocation director who speaks to them about pastoral orientations of the diocese, etc....

CONCLUSION

Even if certain priests are prepared for the mission *ad gentes*, all of them "need to have the mind and heart of missionaries —open to the needs of the Church and the world, with concern for those farthest away, and especially for the non-Christian groups in their own *area*" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 67). In his message for the World Day of Missions (June 11, 1995), Pope John Paul II affirms that: "gift of the Father to humanity and prolongation of the Mission of the Son, the Church knows that it exists in order to carry the joyful news of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, as long as this world lasts (cf. Matthew 28:19-20)." The Church is essentially missionary; and no one is proprietor of the mission. Therefore, the mission cannot be the private enterprise of a priest; but the latter is the principal agent and animator of it. For the priest, the mission is a movement which brings him toward the other, as his servant, through and in the steps of Christ. Consequently, he must allow his personality to be modeled progressively by the Spirit of Christ and the Gospel which he announces. He becomes with Christ the Suffering Servant who has "come not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45), in order that all men might have life and that they might have it in abundance (John 10:10). It is for this reason that the warning of the Apostle must always resound within each priest: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16) *ad gentes* and *ad vitam*.