

# MISSIONARY CHALLENGES

## TO THE THEOLOGY OF SALVATION

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### I. INTRODUCTION: IMPORTANCE OF THE THEME

Salvation, redemption, liberation... Various terms, perhaps with a different colouring, but which constitute for man a single reality in his search for the meaning of his own existence. It is a problem often submerged in the course of life but which emerges with pressing urgency at crucial moments.

So it is a question of a complex reality that immediately presents two fundamental aspects: one rather negative, which answers the question: salvation or liberation from whom or from what? The other aspect concerns the positive contents: salvation or liberation for what or in view of what.



Salvation is a vital question for man and gives rise to doubts, if not crises, as he aspires to clarity, to certainty, indeed to security both on the level of his physical existence, and on the spiritual and religious level.

Salvation involves a fundamental vision of man: Who is man? Does he need salvation? And which salvation? The answers vary.

There are those who give a purely human salvation in reply: man

finds self-sufficiency and self-redemption in himself; the aspiration to salvation, so deeply rooted in the human heart, can have a satisfactory psychological and sociological explanation; and there is no lack of ideologies or systems that promise this secularized salvation.

Other replies are religious in nature. In one form or another salvation is considered a central theme in all the great religions in the world. Then for the Christian, it is one of the fundamental pillars of faith in God "qui vult omnes homines salvos facere" (I Tim 2:4) and in Jesus Christ, who "propter homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de coelis" (Creed).

To bring and to mediate salvation is also the mission of the Church and so her reason for existence.

So, we are at the heart of Christian missiology and the missionary activity of the Church. Today more than ever it is necessary to make a thorough study of the problems of salvation, to present the reply the Christian faith gives to the problem of salvation, to clarify the specific Christian remedy in relation to the context of today's world, of the great religions and cultures, and also of the world of secularity.

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Urban University wanted to hold this Congress on the theme of salvation, because today there are precise reasons for urgency.

The first reason is the need to be clear about the missionary motivation of the Church and of the missionaries themselves, who dedicate their lives and at least some years of their existence to evangelization. In the past missionaries felt the pressing need to bring salvation to the non-Christians with an almost dramatic anxiety. If their reading of the sacred texts was perhaps too fundamental, their motive is still valid.

Salvation is a complex reality. Perhaps this is also the reason why in the last two decades it has become an ambiguous concept that needs to be explained in the light of the faith.

The Second Vatican Council assumed a positive, respectful attitude toward the great non-Christian religions and so encouraged the new reflection on the theology of religions and on the salvation of non-Christians. In view of the dialogue with these religions, Christians must have a clear awareness of their own identity and the role of the Christian faith in the divine plan for salvation. There are many new

ideas in this field, but they need a close examination and serious, critical maturation.

In opening this Congress I do not intend to rob experts and scholars in the theological and humanistic subjects involved in the problems of salvation of their job. Instead I want to present some questions and some challenges that missionary life itself poses for them. They come from direct experience, gathered in various mission lands, behind which are ideas that circulate in various books and articles on the subject. These experiences above all invite theologians to the greatest precision in formulating their own theses; a precision that is measured in the light of faith, but also in light of the practical disruptive consequences that these theses produce in the field of the missions.

## II. SALVATION AND THE NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

The first concrete experience comes from the Far East, where the great majority profess one of the ancient classical religions, rich in culture and wisdom.

At a meeting of pastoral operators one orator speaks of the respect the Second Vatican Council invites us to have for these religions; he presents them as a great human effort in the search for the Absolute. Then, following the words of the letter to the Hebrews, he emphasizes the activity of God himself in history, who spoke through the prophets and, recently "in these days...he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb.1:1-2). The Christian cannot be lacking in respect and gratitude to the Father who was willing to send his own Son so that he might reveal the true face of God to men: Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word is the best Revealer of God and so also the "way" (Jn 14:6), as he himself indicated.

However, there is an objection from one group of missionaries that this presentation is not acceptable, because it downgrades non-christian religions as being an effort from below and exalts Christianity as a religion coming from above, whereas in truth all religions are equally inspired by God and constitute the ways of salvation. This group of missionaries has in fact withdrawn from pastoral activities and has devoted itself to socio-economic cooperation with the non-christian majority, in a spirit of "dialoguing with life". In that region there are many possibilities of evangelization through direct announcing and catechesis, and the native clergy is insufficient, but because of these missionaries' conviction of the role the Christian and non-christian

religions in salvation the surge of evangelization has diminished.

This practical attitude however is based on ideas. And the ideas revolve around central points such as:

1. God's plan for salvation
2. Jesus Christ's role in this plan
3. the mission of the Church in relation to salvation
4. the role of the non-christian religions.

Today everyone admits the universal saving will of God, who "desires all men to be saved" (I Tim 2:4), even though many stop at this point in the reading of the Pauline text and neglect or consider less important what follows, "and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim 2:4). However it may be, many questions remain open as to how God realized and realizes this universal plan in history: with what means, through which people and instruments.

And here attention immediately moves to the other three points of interest: Jesus Christ, the Church, and the non-christian religions. St. Peter, in front of the Sanhedrin, asserts that there is salvation only in the name of Jesus Christ, "and in no one else" (Acts 4:12). This affirmation gives theologians the difficult task of explaining whether and how men were saved before Christ, and how, even after Christ, those who do not know or accept Jesus Christ are saved. The question of the necessity of the Church for salvation comes as a consequence and in connection with the person and work of Christ. And so the focus of the problem is reduced to two poles, Christ and non-christian religions.

Paul Knitter had the merit of reducing all theological reflection on religions to four schemes or patterns of the Christ-non-christian religions relationship.(1)

1. The first period that dominated nearly all the history of Christianity is that of hostility towards "pagan" religions: Christ "against" the religions.

This hostile attitude was influenced by a rigid interpretation of Origen's and Cyprian's affirmation "Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus", which limited divine grace to the Church. The geographical discoveries of other continents led other theologians, like Bellarmine and Suarez, to correct this narrow perspective - which Knitter calls "exclusive" - to a rather "inclusive" one: from no salvation "outside the Church", they went to no salvation "without the Church". This perspective remained until our own century in the form of various theories concerning invisible or potential membership in the Church.

It has already been noted that this schematization is not sufficiently objective.(2) It is true that the Fathers of the Church assumed a hostile attitude to cults, rites and myths considered as idolatry and aberrations; and yet, it remains to be seen whether this was so in reality! However, in the Church there is positive appreciation for the valid aspects of religions. St. Justin also speaks of the "logos spermatikos" or "seeds of the Word"; St. Clement of the "illumination of the Logos"; St. Irenaeus of "divine teaching"; Pope Gregory the Great gives wonderful missionary directives for the evangelization of England; Raymond of Penafort and Raymond Lullo support dialogue with Islam; St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of "natural religion" which is a "praeparatio evangelica." Then there is the attitude of love and respect towards all that is not in error in many missionaries, like St. Francis of Assisi, Ricci and De Nobili, and in the famous 1659 instruction of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. And what can be said of the theologians of the last four centuries who maintained that God's grace operated also outside the visible confines of the Church, but was always mediated by Christ and by the Church, until the thesis that excluded non-members of the Church from salvation was officially condemned in the Holy Office's letter to the Archbishop of Boston, in the case of Father Feeney, dated August 8, 1949?(3)

2. The Second Vatican Council and the Declaration Nostra Aetate opens a decidedly new perspective which Knitter characterizes with the dual concept: Christ-within-the-religions.

The positive statements on the possibility of salvation also for non-Christians were "made clear" - according to Knitter(4) - by Karl Rahner.(5) He maintained that other religions are and can be ways of salvation; it is always the grace of Christ that operates in the non-christian, offered through the respective non-christian religion. The person thus touched by Christ is unconsciously directed to Christ and to his Church, he is an "anonymous Christian" who must, however, be transformed into an explicit, fully ecclesial Christian. Rahner's theory, however, developed above all by H. Schlette and A. Roper(6) and accepted by E. Schillebeeckx, does not satisfy Knitter, because it would end up "only in partial and provisional approval of them."(7)

3. In the last decade a certain number of theologians have been searching for a new perspective described as "Christ-above-the-religions". Not satisfied with Rahner's theory, they maintain that the other religions have an independent validity: even if Christ is not, in their opinion, the exclusive cause of saving grace, yet he remains,



above all religions and all peoples. To preserve the fact of faith on the uniqueness, finality, and so on the normativity of Christ, they give various explanations. Christ is the only "critical catalyst" also for other religions, in the face of our modern world: H. Kung.(8) Geffre uses the universality of the right that Christ has over all peoples, in that he is the Word of God made flesh, whereas this would not be due to Christianity as an historical religion.(9)

4. To put Christ above religions does not seem very ethical if an honest dialogue is to be held. This, at least, is what the theologians think who propose another model that sees Christ-together-with other religious figures. According to them, after the abandonment of "ecclesiocentrism", it is necessary to redimension also "Christocentrism" and put God at the heart of religion, in a theocentric vision.

Knitter himself upholds the theory of "unitive pluralism" or the "coincidence of opposites", according to which "each religion (or religious figure) is unique and decisive for its followers; but is also of a universal importance;... it is neither exclusive ("against") or inclusive ('within' or 'above') but it is essentially related to other religions, so, "perhaps... other revealers and saviors are as important as Jesus of Nazareth".(10)

R. Panikkar reaches the same conclusion starting from the distinction between Christ-Logos and the historical Jesus. There is more in Christ-Logos than in the historical Jesus, so the Logos can appear in different but real ways in other religions and historical figures, outside of Jesus of Nazareth.(11)

The faithfulness of this theology to Christ is assured because it still maintains that God really spoke through Jesus, but it is fully open to God's possible message in other religions.

5. Finally, Knitter crosses this Rubicon also in order to "liberate" the theology of religions. Using the methodological criteria of the theology of liberation (option for the poor, orthopraxis) he resolves to "go beyond theocentrism, toward soteriocentrism", so that the "primary concern of a theology of religions should not be the 'rightful belief' in the uniqueness of Christ, but the 'rightful practice' with other religions, of the promotion of the Kingdom and its soteria"; in other words: "This means that the basis and principal interest of every theological evaluation of other religions is not their relationship to the Church (ecclesiocentrism) or with Christ

(Christocentrism), or even with God (theocentrism), but rather the degree in which they are able to promote salvation: the well-being of humanity".(12)

The well-being in which the Kingdom of God consists is the kingdom of justice and of love to be reached in collaboration or dialogue with all. Exalting interreligious dialogue, Knitter manages to reduce faith in Christ to the level of an ambiguous earthly "well-being". And here at last is a reassuring conclusion for the missionaries who are, perhaps, perturbed: "The missionary goal is reached if the announcing of the Gospel to all peoples makes the Christian a better Christian and the Buddhist a better Buddhist", since "the primary mission of the Church is not the salvation business" (to make people Christian so that they can be saved), but the task of serving and promoting the kingdom of justice and love".(13)

### III. SALVATION AND THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF MISSION

I do not know how far the missionaries I mentioned at the beginning acted on the basis of the opinions explained here. What is certain is that they have concentrated on social action, trying to achieve this dialogue with non-Christians and abandoning the direct announcing of Jesus Christ more and more.

This reduction of evangelization occurred also in other countries and on other continents. It is justified in various ways but it always starts from at least two presuppositions: 1. every religion is a way of salvation; 2. it is necessary to seek dialogue with other religions, which are to be re-evaluated.

It is also a common tendency to eclipse or reduce the role of Christ, of the Church and of the announcing, and to concentrate all activity and the finality of evangelization on the building up of the Kingdom of God, sometimes undefined, and at other times identified with social well-being, justice, peace, love.

#### 3.1. The "Missio Dei"

The most explicit theological motivation for this tendency is found in the most radical derivations of the theory of "missio Dei".(14) The real protagonist of the mission is God. God's sovereignty or absolute lordship must in the end overcome the "Christomonism" in which the Christian missiology, both Protestant and Catholic, was enclosed (A. van Rule; M.K. Miskotte). The "extra" promised by Jesus is realized in the

building up of the Kingdom of God. "The real end of the *missio Dei* is the Kingdom of God, not the *ecclesia viatorum*", Anderson decrees.(15) God saves as he wants and when he wants; his action is not bound to the Church. Mission today is the action which tries to discover God's action in the world: to discover God in the world and to serve him; and not "to bring Christ" to the world. So also the Church, like Christ, must practice kenosis, self-emptying, in this service.

Even more radically opposed to the Church's role in mission is the tendency of "out-churchism". The Dutch Reformed theologian and missionary, J.C. Hoekendijk (16) asserts that mission is realized with the proclamation of "shalom" in hope; so the "*missio*", is a "*promissio*" in the service of the world, building up of peace - "shalom" that leads to intercommunion and participation. With this service to the world people are coagulated and so the Church happens as an event and not a structure.

Even the Catholic L. Rutti(17) rejects the theology of the decree of the Second Vatican Council as being too ecclesiocentric and not very realistic, when it refers to the Trinitarian missions and the mandate of the Lord. For Rutti, mission is the responsibility of Christians before the world in the hope of transforming it, in order to create a new world.

"The commitment of Christians (N.B. not of the Church!), bestowed with a new promise for the world, is not to maintain or spread a church but it consists in efficacious responsibility for the present hope in the world".(18)

### 3.2. The Centrality of God's Kingdom

The centrality of the Kingdom appears more and more frequently in these theories. And the Kingdom of God, in the full ambiguity of interpretation, is also the cornerstone of the most recent reflections of some Asiatic theologians, who were influenced by their experiences of direct contact with the great ancient religions and cultures. Indeed, one of them sees "a Copernican revolution of the theology of evangelization" in the fact that "the centre of the approach moves from the Church to the Kingdom".(19) First he analyzes and then relativizes the role of the Church for salvation. He reports the opinion of some who "called the Church an extraordinary way in opposition to other ordinary ways" of salvation represented by the religions.(20)

After Vatican Council II, the relationship between the Church and the religions could not be presented in terms of presence-absence of



salvation, or light-darkness, and not even with the divine-human or supernatural-natural dichotomy; today the binomial explicit-implicit or full-partial is more common. Since the "Church, as she is, is a historically and culturally limited realization of the Good News"(21), this theologian abandons ecclesiocentrism. "The Church does not offer an easier or fuller salvation... Because of God's universal saving will and the socio-historical nature of the human person, God's saving encounter with man occurs also through other religions and their symbolic structures: writings, codes of conduct and rituals... The Church is called not only to witness, to proclaim but also to collaborate in humility and respect for the divine mystery that operates in the world".(22) "Being a member of the Church is not an easier or surer means of salvation".(23) Our theologian recognizes the saving role of Jesus Christ and refuses to set Christocentrism against theocentrism. But here, too, with Panikkar, he distinguishes between the cosmic Christ and the historical Christ. The saving mediation of non-Christian religions is linked to the cosmic Christ, whereas the Church's role is linked to the historical Christ and his paschal mystery. Now we must not take advantage of the "communicatio idiomatum" attributing certain qualifications such as "final, last, unique, universal" to the historical Christ, because they belong not to Jesus, but to the Word. But in the end, how is the divine universal plan of salvation to be accomplished? Through evangelization that knows three patterns: the first is ecclesiocentric, the second centered on the world and the third on the Kingdom. The author aims at an evangelization in the global sense in which the "new focal point"(24) is the Kingdom, i.e., the building up of a new humanity that will unite all people in a community of love, justice and peace. This is the mission in which the Church must collaborate with dialogue, with inculturation and with liberation. Strangely, but significantly, proclamation, i.e. the announcing, is omitted. The explanation is found, perhaps, in our theologian's extremely radical doubt: "In this context of religious pluralism does it still make sense to proclaim Christ as the only Name in which all people find salvation and calls them to be disciples through baptism and to enter the Church?"(25)

Starting from the basis of the experience Jesus had of the Father, another Indian theologian also concludes that the "Church's mission is not so much to bring salvation as to bring the manifestation, not to obtain conversion to the Church as the necessary means to salvation, but to help in the realization of the broader Kingdom of God as it develops in history. This includes the effort to help followers of other religions to follow those religions in a better manner".(26)

These theories are now very widespread and are beginning to bear

fruit in the practical field. Even one magazine of a pastoral nature presents the following programme of a missionary institute: "We go to the missions not so much to establish the Church or to bring the faith, but rather to discover a faith and goodness that already exist there."(27)

Some missionaries working among the Indians in Latin America pose the same problem for themselves from a different angle. They were faced with the difficulty of changing the customs with which the Indians lived happily and with an easy conscience; so why should they disturb their good faith with the severe demands of Christian morality which is too hard for them and leads them to continuous spiritual distress? On the other hand following their conscience, the Indians are saved just the same. Some of these missionaries then asked themselves whether it was not perhaps better to raise the level of social life and concern themselves more with the physical health of the Indians than with their salvation.

So the need for a clear answer to the problem is felt in many continents. It is even vaster with regard to the relationship between salvation and human promotion in any form (economic, social, or political development, liberation, justice and peace).

### 3.3 Salvation and human advancement

Several recent theological opinions regarding the non-Christian religions have weakened one of the motives that urged missionaries to sacrifice themselves for the salvation of non-Christians, announcing Jesus Christ and the Christian faith to them. These theories exalt the role of the other religions and the common commitment to the renewal of the world and human development. Some reduce evangelization to this purpose, others include this renewal in the very concept of salvation, yet others give human development priority ("first make men, then Christians" or "first feed the hungry, then speak of God"). In this field all continents feel the need for clarity: mission continents in order to give a correct orientation to missionary activity, other regions in order to direct their animation and cooperation properly.

The radical position that reduces the Church's mission to human development is expressed by G. Davies in a concise sentence: "The purpose of mission is not to make Christians but to help peoples become men".(28) Also for some liberation theologians, mission is an historical practice in the revolutionary process; without this participation mission becomes omission, whereas "participation in the

process of man's liberation is already, in a certain sense, a work of salvation".(29)

Without adopting Karl Barth's diametrically opposed Puritan opinion, which maintains that the purpose of mission is exclusively eschatological salvation, it is necessary to confirm and deepen the balanced position reached by the Church in the last two decades, but only imperfectly passed into missionary practice and into certain theological theories.

#### IV. CHALLENGES AND QUESTIONS FOR THEOLOGIANs

After this vast but incomplete presentation of the various opinions about salvation, it is necessary to explain at least some anxieties, challenges and questions the missionary world addresses to the experts.

4.1. A first set of challenges and questions which the missionary pastoral addresses to experts and theologians concerns the contents of salvation; i.e., which salvation are we dealing with? Salvation or liberation from what and for what?

Is it an essentially religious salvation? And if this is so, does it concern only the next world, in the exclusively eschatological sense, as Karl Barth wished, assigning to mission the task of bringing this salvation and of being a "crisis" of all human, cultural and religious values?

According to divine revelation can it be said, that the salvation to which evangelization tends is of an economic, political, social or cultural nature? Or is it limited to service to the "world", for the "well-being" of the world?

What are the bonds between the "human" dimension (liberation progress, development, justice and peace) and the "divine" or "spiritual" dimension of salvation: liberation from sin and the evil which is its fruit and consequence, the rebirth of God's children to new life and final participation in the happiness and glory of God in life everlasting?

In evaluating elements of salvation in non-christian religions, should one not take into account the difference - sustained for example by H. Urs von Balthasar(30) - between the religions of revelation that profess a personal God (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and those that

believe in an impersonal divinity and thus see the contents of salvation differently?

4.2. Putting oneself on the level of the Christian faith, another series of fundamental questions concerns the divine plan of salvation in its three pillars: God, Christ, the Church.

"God desires all men to be saved" (I Tim 2:4) - this is clear and generally accepted by all the theologies. It becomes more problematical if what is also revealed and follows immediately in the Pauline text is likewise respected: "...and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim 2:5). What does this addition mean? Is the solemn mandate to preach the Gospel to all peoples and to baptize those who believe perhaps not the interpretation that Jesus himself gives to God's saving will? (cf. Matt 28: 19-20; Mk 16: 15-16)

Obviously, what divine revelation understands as "salvation" desired by God for all must be established.

Jesus Christ is man's only Savior and the only mediator between God and men, according to revelation: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Peter's testimony before the Sanhedrin, Acts 4:12); "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all" (I Tim 2:5-6) "No one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6-7). With his death and resurrection Jesus became for all men "the source of eternal salvation" (Heb 5:10) and "Leader and Savior" (Acts 5:31-32)

Can the only definitive role Jesus Christ has in the work of salvation perhaps be disputed ("No other name") without neglecting the facts of the Christian faith? Or is it sufficient to consider them as later Christologies of the New Testament and as emphatic statements on a level with those of an enamoured husband for whom his wife is the most beautiful and most lovable woman in the world (Knitter)?

Does the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God made Man, the incarnate Word, have impact on the quality of his message and of the Christian faith? Can the "revelation" brought by him be put on the same level as the "revelations" and "divine inspirations" contained in other religions?

Can he be set "next to" or "together with" other founders? Is he not a savior also for them? Does God save those who do not believe in

Christ, without Christ? Does Christ's grace constitute salvation? And how does Christ reach those who do not believe in him?

What should one think of the difference between the cosmic Christ and the historical Christ?

The necessity of receiving baptism and of being part of the Church is also contained in the divine plan for salvation: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." (Mk 16:16); in fact one cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless "one is born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5-6); through baptism one enters the Church, which is by the will of Christ "the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48) and it is only through her "that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained" (UR 3).

So is it necessary to believe with the Second Vatican Council and in the Council itself when "basing itself upon sacred Scripture and Tradition, it teaches that the Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation" (LG 14)? Certainly we are well aware that the obligation to follow the Church belongs only to those who know this necessity (LG 14) and that those who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God, and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of their conscience, also may achieve eternal salvation" (LG 16).

Thus, in what sense is the Church the "universal sacrament of salvation"? Since non-Christians who live a good life are excluded from formal and explicit membership in the Church, can it still be said that it is necessary for salvation, and if so, in what sense?

Is complete aversion to so-called "ecclesiocentrism" theologically justifiable? Must mission forego planting the Church as one of her goals? (cf. Eph 3:17; 2:19; AG 6, 9; EN 62, etc.)

Have the other religions a "sacramental" function for salvation in the same way as the Church, which is the "universal sacrament of salvation", or are they rather only "occasions" of salvation?(31)

4.3. The specific Christian purpose of mission also needs to be clarified. The questions have already been partially asked in the first series of questions concerning the contents of salvation. But some theories expounded need a thorough critical examination above all as far as the Kingdom of God and dialogue in relation to mission are concerned.

Can it be said that the Kingdom of God is the centre of Jesus



Christ's mission (and of that of the Church) separating it from or setting it against the great mandate that obliges us to "teach" and to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all that (he has) commanded you " (Matt 28:20); "to preach the Gospel" (Mk 16:16); to preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins" (Lk 24:47); "to announce and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42-43)? What meaning does the "Kingdom" have on the lips of Jesus Christ?

Following the text and context of the Gospel, does the Kingdom of God precisely mean earthly social well-being? Are the "values of the Kingdom" reduced to justice, fraternity and peace?

Is the "Kingdom of God" not at the same time the "Kingdom of Christ"? Does the Kingdom of God have no relationship to the Church?(32)

If the "proclamation of the Kingdom is evangelization"(33), according to Evangelii Nuntiandi (8-10) is it not also true that evangelization is a complex and rich reality? And that among other things it includes the "plantatio ecclesiae"(AG 6, CIC.c 786, EN 59,62)? And yet is it not equally true that "evangelization" will always contain - as the foundation, centre and at the same time the summit of its dynamism - a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men...not an immanent salvation but a transcendent salvation"? (EN 27)

Does the fact that God operates with his grace also on non-christians release the Church from the obligation of announcing the Gospel?

Does dialogue replace the announcement-proclamation? Does the announcement eliminate dialogue? Or do both belong to the "complex and rich reality" of evangelization?

## CONCLUSION

The challenges and questions presented do not exhaust the expectations or the tasks that lie before this Congress, but they do point out how important its theme can be at the present moment.

Because today, even more than in 1974 and 1975, i.e. in the years of the Synod of Bishops and Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi, which was the fruit of it, the words of this document are

extremely true: "The presentation of the Gospel message is not an optional contribution for the Church. It is the duty incumbent on her by the command of the Lord Jesus, so that people can believe and be saved. This message is indeed necessary. It is unique. It cannot be replaced. It does not permit either indifference, syncretism or accommodation. It is a question of people's salvation. It is the beauty of the Revelation that it represents. It brings with it a wisdom that is not of this world. It is able to stir up faith by itself, faith that rests on the power of God (cf. I Cor 2:5). It is truth. It merits having the apostle consecrate to it all his time and all his energies, and to sacrifice for it, if necessary, his own life" (EN 5).

And at this point I would add: it is also fitting that this Congress should dedicate a deep reflection to it.

## NOTES

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- (2) Cfr. D. COLOMBO, Missionari senza Cristo?, in "Mondo e Missione" 10 (1988) 317.
- (3) Cfr. Denz.-Sch., ed. 33, 3866-3873.
- (4) Cfr. KNITTER, art. cit., 135.
- (5) K. RAHNER, Das Christentum und die nichtchristlichen Religionen, in: "Schriften zur Theologie", v.5, Einsiedeln 1962; It. ed.: Storia del mondo e storia della salvezza, in: Saggi di antropologia soprannaturale, Rome 1965, 497-532.
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- (7) KNITTER, art. cit., 136.
- (8) H. KUNG (edited by), Cristianesimo e religioni universali, Milan 1986; id., Per una teologia ecumenica delle religioni, in "Concilium" 22 (1986) 1; 156-165.
- (9) C. GEFFRE, La Mission de l'Eglise a l'age de l'oecumenisme interreligieux, Spiritus 1987, 6.
- (10) KNITTER, art. cit., 139.
- (11) R. PANIKKAR, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, Maryknoll, NY, 1981.
- (12) KNITTER, art. cit., 141-142.

- (13) KNITTER, No Other Name? 222.
- (14) Cfr. H.H. ROSIN, Missio Dei, Leiden 1972.
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