

Editorial

Evangelization 2000

As we begin the last decade of the 2nd millennium, we cannot but focus on the Church's responsibility for mission and evangelization. Many Christian churches have already given this decade various names: Decade of Evangelism, Decade of World Mission, Universal Decade of Evangelization, etc. Pope John Paul II has also dedicated December 25, 1990 - December 25, 2000 to evangelization and issued an encyclical entitled *The Mission of the Redeemer*.

In this issue of TRIPOD we look at mission and evangelization from various perspectives. Recent papal documents clearly witness to a deeper understanding of the subject and theologians also bear witness to a renewed energy and excitement as fresh perspectives emerge. Just as with each new age in the past, Christianity has risked interpreting itself anew, so must it today risk re-interpreting the Church's role of evangelization.

Some of the articles in this issue will use familiar categories. For example, Cardinal Danneels explains the impact of secularization on evangelization in terms of different forms of atheism, a theme that has dominated European theology since the French Revolution. Others will risk exploring possible but so far undefined new categories, sometimes acceptable, sometimes questionable with the hope of shedding more light on and coming to a deeper understanding of mission and evangelization today. For example, Paul Knitter challenges us to rethink traditional concepts and presents another conceptual framework. He challenges absolutist categories by proposing pluralistic and liberation-centered ones.

Aloysius Chang in his thought provoking essay, *Evangelization in a Chinese Environment* presents evangelization specifically in the context of inculturation within the Chinese culture and its local church.

Michael Amaladoss posits mission in the 1990's holistically, giving special emphasis to its role in the promotion of justice,

dialogue and liberation.

The word *mission* is very rich theologically. Besides denoting the sending of the Church into the world, deeper reflection leads us to its origin within the God-head itself and the sending of the Son and the Spirit. Mission has a wider meaning than evangelization which is the proclamation by word and witness of the Good News to the nations. Yet, because of its historical association with colonization, the term has negative overtones, and so now-a-days, besides the word mission, the word *evangelization* is used more and more in the Church's documents. It has consequently acquired a broader meaning and now includes all missionary tasks at the service of making the Gospel known throughout the world.

In *The Mission of the Redeemer* the Pope identifies three situations of peoples in relation to the Church: 1) those who already accept the Gospel and actively participate in the life of the Church; 2) those who have never accepted the Gospel and are not Christian; and 3) those who were once members of the Church but have lost their faith and no longer participate in its life. The corresponding mission of the Church differs in each situation: 1) for practicing Christians it is the *generic mission of pastoral care*; 2) for those who are not Christian it is the *specific mission "ad gentes"*; and 3) for those who have turned away from the faith the Pope uses the term *new evangelization*, a mission activity aiming at a fresh discovery of Christ and his Church. Sometimes the Pope uses the term *new evangelization* in other senses, such as, evangelization today according to a whole new awareness the Church has of itself and its mission; or to refer to integral evangelization of person and culture following the line of Paul VI's encyclical, *Evangelization in the Modern World* (1975). He also uses it in the sense of re-evangelization in the case of countries already Christian but which have been influenced by indifference, secularism and materialism. The term *new evangelization* in this encyclical takes on fresh meaning and energy (cf. L'Osservatore Romano. March 4, 1991).

The decade will be marked by these new insights, fresh perspectives and heightened awareness of a concern so central to God's plan of salvation for all peoples. Consequently, our hope is that the year 2000 will also be marked by many breakthroughs in mission and evangelization.