

THIRD MILLENNIUM CHURCH

PREFACE

My fears that the Mainline Christians Churches - Catholic and Protestant - have been rapidly yielding ground to the Pentecostal Churches and might eventually become a *minority Church* were expressed about 17 years ago in my first book, *Prophecy and Revolution* (London, 1981). Some Catholics who read my book questioned my identity as a Catholic priest. They thought I was spelling doom for the Church I serve. The British theologian and author, Adrian Hastings, who reviewed my book in the British Church periodical *Tablet* acknowledged, however, that *Prophecy and Revolution* was the first major attempt by an African Catholic clergyman to examine the situation of the established missionary Churches in Africa vis-à-vis the increasing number of Independent Churches and religious movements emerging in Africa and elsewhere in the Christian world. Another reviewer of *Prophecy and Revolution* in the Nigerian news magazine, *Concord* advised African bishops and Church leaders not to ignore the impact of the evangelist movement on the Mainline Christianity.

The expression attributed to a prominent leader of one of the Prophetic-healing Churches in Africa, that "a Church that cannot heal is dead," led me to my second book, *Search for Security - Sickness and Faith-healing* (Nigeria, 1991). In whatever form it is undertaken, I was convinced that pastoral care of the sick is an important part of the Church's mission to "heal the brokenhearted." Today, evangelist Churches all over the world engage in "healing Apostolate." More than a few Christians have joined the evangelist Churches in search of healing and security from sinister forces that threaten life.

The exodus of millions of Christians from the Mainline Christian Churches and the proliferation of the evangelist Churches have alarmed most leaders of the former Churches. Not even the Catholic Church has been spared the pain of *empty Church* phenomenon. Some theologians and leaders of the Catholic Church have called for a third Vatican Council to examine the problems of the universal Church. A Vatican spokesman, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of faith, does not see the possibility of another ecumenical council in the near future. He does not think that another council in the stature of the Second Vatican Council would resolve the present problems of the Church. He says, "We have not yet assimilated Vatican II by a long shot. A Third Vatican Council wouldn't be the medicine to help digest it...At the moment we are busy with the implementation of the Second Vatican Council." (Salt of the Earth, 1996) This Vatican prelate prefers *continental synods of bishops* to discuss the problems of the Church. Continental synods have already taken place or have been arranged for Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania.

It was the *African Synod of Bishops* held in 1994 that sent me to examine the situation of the African Church as the bishops of Africa gathered in Rome to discuss the future of the Church in Africa. The outcome of my investigation appeared in my two volumes *The African Church, Today and Tomorrow*. (Nigeria, 1995) In volume two I discussed the importance of inculturation in the African Church. I was convinced that the lack of inculturation in the African Church was undermining the future of the Christian Church in Africa. For the Africans to cling to the "Western brand of Christianity," it must be relevant to African needs and cultural values. Volume one discussed challenges and prospects of the African Church of the future.

I was glad that some Nigerian bishops took my call for change, adaptation, and reflection seriously. In a foreword to *The African Church Today and Tomorrow*, Anthony J. V. Obinna, the Archbishop of Owerri, Nigeria, writes: "Fr. Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere's latest book, *The African Church, Today and Tomorrow* (Vol. I and II) is the combined fruit of committed service to the spread of the Good News and strenuous research into the agony and excitement of Africa's Christians as they seek to appropriate the joys of the Good News in the midst of many Afro-cultural values which they still cherish." On my earlier work, the Archbishop remarked: "His earlier work, *Prophecy and Revolution* (1981), which focussed on Africa's Independent Churches and their large flavor of Africanisms apparently laid the remote foundations for Fr. Ndiokwere's spirited tackling on the issue of inculturating the Good News and its approved liturgical forms within the Catholic Church in Africa." This African prelate recommends the book to all Christians: "This is a book to wrestle with for more productive thinking and practice in inculturation. Such agonistic and exciting wrestling with the book will be the best way to appreciate the tons of sweat that have gone into this work."

The Third Millennium Church, like *Prophecy and Revolution*, provides a simple way to examine the prospects and challenges facing Christianity at the threshold of a new millennium. Such problems and challenges, which face the Christian Church everywhere in modern times, are overwhelming. As part of my contribution to worldwide events marking the end of the second millennium, I have taken time during my sabbatical in the United States to reflect on the *future of the Church and the Church of the future*. I hope my reflections will provoke reactions that can lead to a better appreciation of the present problems of the Christian Church.

The Third Millennium Church is the *majority Church* of the future. Unlike the Mainline Christian Churches, Protestant and Catholic, that have,

incidentally, become the *minority Church* of the passing age, the Church of the 21st century will be the popular Church of all Christians - young and old - united in faith under the leadership of Christ, the Founder and the Head. Ripped by divisions and fragmented by controversies over articles of faith, the Mainline Christian Churches have failed in large part to accomplish the mission of molding the conscience of the world. Most of their members have abandoned the faith, while more than a few have continued to search for religious and spiritual fulfillment in the other Churches or new religious movements.

Evidence of failure is found in the persistent features of *empty Churches*, dissident voices among the leadership, decline in religious vocations, great confusion in theological and moral teachings, moral decadence, dechristianization of Europe and America, and the rise of the New Age movements. These and other features have dented the image of Christianity and left her powerless. Alarmed at what is happening to the Mainline Christian Churches, concerned Christians have not stopped hoping that something new will emerge from the aging Christianity. They see the Church of the future assuming a new form less identified with the old structures and societies. The *new Church* is growing among new groups of convinced believers who live their faith in a more revolutionary and ecumenical manner.

Will it still be the same Church? In *one sense*, yes. Christ's injunction to his disciples and their successors to evangelize all nations continues. His promise to be with His Church "until the end of time" is an assurance that "all gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." Neither the present Church, nor the Church of the future, will be overcome by the turbulence of the times. Will it still be the same Church? In *another sense*, no. The Church of the future will in most part appear different from the Church of the past 2000 years. While some people would not go so far as to predict the emergence of an entirely *new Church* in the third millennium, anyone who takes a close look at what is happening will be convinced that the Church of tomorrow is already among us.

While it may not mean that we will have another Church taking the place of the one we all grew up in, there are proven signs that the Mainline, Traditional, and Established Churches - Catholic and Protestant - that have dominated the scene in the past century will become the *minority Church*, indeed, the *ceremonial Church*, while the heart of the majority of Christians will remain with the new Church of the future - The Third Millennium Church.

Butte, Montana, USA

INTRODUCTION

It was Walbert Buhmann, a Swiss missionary and theologian, who predicted **The Coming of the Third Church** in his book bearing the same title.ⁱ Buhmann was analyzing the developments in the Third World Churches that are usually referred to as the Established, Traditional, or Mainline Christian Missionary Churches. These Missionary Churches include both the Catholic and Protestant Churches of various denominations as well as their offshoots, which include many splinter groups - large or small congregations that have broken away from their Mother Churches for various reasons. Many religious phenomena unprecedented in the history of religions are indeed revolutionizing the lives of the people. Christianity has been assuming a new face since the early 1960s, not only in Africa, but also in most Latin American countries and elsewhere in Europe and the United States. Was Buhmann seeing a **religious revolution** in the Third World Church as a threat to the Western brand of Christianity? Is another major schism visiting Christianity as the world celebrates the beginning of a new millennium? The conclusions of Buhmann's studies - as well as many others that have been completed since his prediction - will have far-reaching implications for the Christian Church in the third millennium. The **Third Church** may not necessarily be the Church of the **Third World**. It can be a "Universal Church."

The number of Churches professing faith in Christ is staggering. Some have remained autonomous, a result of schisms, protests, and cultural and political differences. Formation of new groups of Churches and denominations is not new in the history of the Christian religion. The rate of their growth and proliferation is bewildering and it is not easy to speculate on the number of Churches that claim Christ as their head. **The Church of the Latter-Day Saints - The Mormons** - which was founded in 1830 in New York City with only 6 members, today commands more than 15 million members worldwide and is expected to have an astounding 100 million by the year 2075. Most of that

growth is expected to occur in Latin America, including Mexico, which already is home to more than 1 million practicing Mormons.ⁱⁱ

In the United States, which has the largest number of denominations, one can count the number of the representative Churches in the world in every city of about one to two thousand families to get a fair picture of the spread of Churches in North America. This representation excludes those new or old religious movements that are not usually regarded as Christian. Under this group are the **New Age Religion** and some dangerous cults that put on the cloak of religion. It is easy to differentiate the New Age Religious groups from Traditional Christian religious groups and Churches, since "by their fruits you shall know them." The old traditional religions that the Christian missionaries encountered among the various peoples they set out to evangelize and which they condemned as evil, pagan, heathen, ancestor worship, occult, fetish, and devilish have re-appeared in the Western world as *New Age Religion*. The names of some of the Christian Churches are familiar and the line between Catholic and Mainline Protestant Churches, as well as between the old Protestant Churches and their offshoots is often clearly marked. In one particular community of fewer than two thousand, families are scattered all over the city in more than thirty Churches. The Churches include the Assembly of God, the Baptist Church with its numerous denominations [Baptist Church in the Valley, Baptist Fellowship – SBC, First Baptist – American, Floral Park Baptist – SBC, Grace Bible Baptist, Hannibal Street Baptist –CBA, Old Fashion Baptist – Independent, Park Street Baptist - SBC, Temple Baptist – Independent]

In this small city are eight Catholic Churches, although only four remain open. The rest have been closed as a result of the dwindling number of Catholics in the city. These are followed by the other Protestant Churches - Church of God Prophecy, Church of God Worldwide, Congregational United, Episcopal St. John, Foursquare Family Worship Center, Full Gospel Rescue Mission, Full Gospel Church on the Rock, Latter Day Saints Church, Lutheran Gold Hill Evangelical Church of America [ELCA], Lutheran Gloria Dei, Lutheran Saint Mark, Methodist Aldergate United, Methodist Mountain View Trinity United, Nazarene First Church of Texas & Marcia, Serbian Orthodox, Pentecostal United, First Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist and United Church of Christ.

In another town of about 500 families, there are 12 functioning Churches of various denominations. If membership is presumed evenly distributed, each Church must be commanding about 40 members. Some of the Churches are

only one or two blocks away from one another and are usually served by ordained ministers - men and women. As far as religious activities are concerned there is little or no unity among the various Churches or religious groups. Most of the Church ministers have never met or visited any of their compatriots in the Lord's vineyard. Outside of a few occasions when one of the emerging non-denominational religious groups like the "Promise Keepers" invites the ministers of God to attend and grace their gathering, some of the pastors never visit with one another in a city they have been serving for many years.

In most of the predominantly white United States cities none of the Black American Churches are represented. The African Methodist Evangelical Zion Church (AME- Zion) is one of the largest congregations in the Christian world. There are thousands of AME Churches in the United States and Africa. Also not represented in some of the above cities are large numbers of **Methodist** and **Episcopal** Churches that attach "*English*" to their denominations. Even though records indicate that in most of the American communities some of the Churches have been closed down as a result of the fall in number of adherents and ministers, the presence of 40 Churches in a small city points to the amount of division and disunity in the Christian Church. Proliferation of Churches also points to the aggressive nature of the competition for soul-winning.

In most of Western Europe, the number of Churches using the name **Evangelical** is bewildering. The German "**Evangelische Kirche**" is the Protestant Church that became the dominant Christian Church of the Protestant Reformation in that region. It has given birth to many other denominations that are, strictly speaking *evangelical* in polity and organization. These and some others as well are the offshoots of the Traditional Christian Churches. The same can be said about the groups that are described as **Pentecostal**. It may be necessary to make a small distinction between the Evangelicals and Pentecostals. The **Pentecostals** form a large group and differ from the **Evangelicals** in that the former stress the "holiness of life ethic," the mandate to mission, and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, while the latter stress preaching and conversion. The primary objective of the Pentecostal movement is to deepen the spiritual life of the individual through conversion, commitment to Jesus Christ, daily prayers, reading of the Scriptures, and participation in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. As Evangelical Churches attract massive following from Catholic and Protestant Churches and win new converts, denominationalism is de-emphasized. While preaching renewal and true conversion to Christ, some evangelical groups that claim to be *non-denominational* urge their members to be faithful and practical members of their

local Church communities. One could simultaneously remain a staunch member of one's local Church while being a committed member of the evangelical Church community. The bottom line is the practical Christian life found in the Gospels.

Since the end of the Cold War, Eastern Europe has witnessed an unprecedented rise in the number of Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches, as American and West European Churches and their young missionaries scramble for the souls of "Fallen Christians" of the former communist Eastern Europe. It is reminiscent of the "**Scramble for Africa**" in the pre-colonial days. Churches of all shades of faith thrive in these new-found-lands. Through the Internet and other electronic media, the Gospel message is exported to these people believed to have been severely starved of the riches of Christianity during the communist era. Millions of copies of the Bible as well as other Christian literature are sent to converts who hunger for the word of God!

I had for long made up my mind about the title of this book -**The Third Millennium Church** as people all over the world prepare to celebrate the end of the second millennium and the beginning of a new one. The third millennium Church is the emerging *Christian Church of tomorrow* - "**The Church That Will Survive.**" Its future or survival will be determined by many factors. The Catholic Church hierarchy, alarmed by the loss of membership, loss of a good number of the clergy and religious men and women, and little or no growth in new vocations, has continually summoned local and provincial synods to examine the situation. Pope John Paul II has proclaimed "A New Era of Evangelization" to address the problems of the Catholic Church in the modern age. Pope Paul VI, sensing the deteriorating situation in the Catholic Church, had earlier addressed the issue in his Apostolic Exhortation - *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - "On Evangelization In The Modern World," It was not long before Pope John Paul II convened the **Special Assembly for Africa** - synod of Bishops, that discussed the topic "*The Church in Africa and her evangelizing mission towards the year 2000: 'You shall be my witnesses'*" [Acts 1:8]. This Synod was timely as there were already many indications that all was not well with the Catholic Church in Africa. If the political and economic institutions were crumbling, would the Christian Church also disintegrate? What is the Church's intent vis-à-vis the current bad situation in Africa? It is not only the situation of the Church in Africa that is giving the Church authorities concern. They merely need observe what is happening in Europe, America, Asia, and in the other parts of the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Roman Pontiff also summoned *Special Assemblies* for Churches of the Americas,

Europe, and Asia, to discuss the situation of the Church in these regions. The inroad that the Muslim religion has made into the hitherto strong Christian territories of Western Europe has been generating much concern to Christians all over the world. The number of believers in the religion founded by the prophet Mohammed has been increasing by an alarming rate in the United States and Europe. Worldwide, the ratio of Christians to Muslims is 3:2.

There is a strong expression of a radical change in the course of world events as we approach the end of the second millennium. Will there be a reversal of fortunes for those nations that have not benefited from the good things of the passing millennium? Perhaps such expectations will not be illusive. Will the new millennium usher in an era of peace, stability, prosperity, and equitable distribution of world's resources? Will poverty be eliminated in the Third World and other depressed nations? Will justice and good begin to thrive over evil? Will all peoples of the world, like the Jews of the old sing songs of victory and prosperity in restored Post-exilic Zion? Or will it be only wishful thinking? "May our sons be like plants well nurtured from their youth, our daughters, like carved columns, shapely as those of the temple. May our barns be full with every kind of store! May our sheep increase by thousands in our fields! May there be no breach in the walls, no exile, no outcry in our streets. Happy the people so blessed! Happy the people whose God is the Lord!" [Psalm 144:12-15]

There is a romantic hope shared by people all over the world that the third millennium will usher in an era of improved noticeably economic conditions for most nations and peoples who have until now been starved of some basic necessities of life. Hence some projections into the future envisage the **year 2000** ushering in **health and education for all** *by the end of the first quarter of the third millenium!* A great number of God's children have not had the opportunity to enjoy good health and good education. Many who could have enjoyed them have been denied such valuable commodities as a result of racial and ethnic differences. In many underdeveloped countries of the world, a staggering number of people – children and adults – languish under the yoke of political, racial, and ethnic bondage that makes self-realization impossible. In some parts of the modern world, ethnic conflicts and civil wars provoke mass movements of people from one corner of their country to another. Such a situation does not offer the best atmosphere for good health care and education. There are no health care clinics and schools in the bushes and deserts, where displaced masses become refugees, exiles, and strangers in their own lands.

Thinking that the excess food produced and wasted in the richer nations of the world would be made abundantly available to the poorer nations, some

economists project that the **year 2000** would usher in an era of **food for all**. The hungry and malnourished children of the world will be well fed. Perhaps "food for all" will keep the "street-kids" out of the streets or garbage dumps, where these God's creatures often forage like wild beasts. Unfortunately the disposal of such wasted foods is most often tied to political conditions. If nations in need do not meet such political demands, their children could very well starve to death. Often the leaders of these poorer nations are held responsible for the intolerable situation. Yet governments of the richer nations could compensate their farmers who produce the excess indisposable food products as the excess foods which in turn are dumped into the hungry seas and oceans!

Some politicians and governments admit that starvation is a legitimate instrument of warfare. The numbers who die of starvation during civil conflicts do not matter to them. For governments that are at the advantage, as long as the measure works, starvation can be used to force the rebellious groups to give up the struggle for freedom from oppression. Will the "Food for all by the year 2000" program be able to surmount the obstacles on its way? It would be a great accomplishment if all nations would agree to "exceptions" to certain man-made rules during emergencies, such as wars and other ethnic conflicts. Such an agreement would help make this important program – "Food for all" in the third millennium meaningful - and realizable. The *politics of food* is a tragedy for the starving masses of the world. It has continued to jeopardize efforts to provide food to the poor and the hungry. Stories of starving children in Iraq, Sudan, Rwanda, North Korea and many other nations are recounted in the dailies. The richer and powerful nations of the world have never ceased to put into practice the politics of food, when it serves their political and economic interests. Surely this attitude has disastrous consequences for the achievement of economic, political, and social goals being projected by optimists about the year 2000!

As the year 2000 approaches, prophecies concerning the "face" of the new millennium continue to multiply. Over the centuries prophets of peace and doom have arisen at certain moments in history. Some have preached repentance and conversion designated to attract God's mercy and usher in an era of hope and peace. Because the sinful world has listened to the warnings of the prophets and repented, God's wrath has been averted. But today there are not a few prophets of doom who see the catastrophic end of the world on the horizon. These emphasize the hopelessness of the world's present situation. Whether it be chemical and biological warfare leading to the annihilation of humankind, moral degeneration and scandals in high places, the increasing rate of crime, the rise of the militant and oppressed peoples of the world, anarchy and the total collapse

of world order, adverse weather conditions and other natural catastrophes, one thing is certain, such crises must come to pass despite man's optimism and wishful thinking. For the modern prophets, these things have been predestined to happen. Man cannot change the course of events. Particularly for the Christian Churches, hard times lie ahead. The past and present events in the Churches make predictions easy. The **Third Millennium Church** may not resemble any of the Churches Christendom has known for the past 2000 years. For the Mainline Christian Churches, things may never be the same again. Some visionaries already see in the Pentecostal and Evangelistic Movements the coming together of the Churches. This for them is true ecumenism, the fulfilment of the New Testament prophecy - that the Churches may be one!

The Year 2000 may not evoke much positive reaction from most people. There may not be any dramatic changes in the economic, social, and political lives of the millions of people in the world. Pessimists even predict worse disasters. Even though politicians on the international level claim that the end of the so-called Cold War has ushered in an era of political democracy in some of the regions hitherto believed to have been under the yoke of communism, some critics do not think that the end of the Cold War has brought any significant changes - economically, politically, socially, morally, or religiously in people's lives. The euphoria over the fall of communism and the overthrow of the kingdom of the anti-Christ did not last. The Catholic Church authorities did not seem pleased with the outcome of events in both the Eastern and Western parts of Christian Europe - hence the summoning of the special synod of European bishops, scheduled for 1999.

The European synod, the second such gathering for the bishops of the entire continent, comes at a time quite different from that which formed the background for the first European synod, held in 1991. That first synod was dominated by the dramatic developments of 1989, the disintegration of the Communist Empire, which changed the face of the European continent and left the modern world with only one superpower, the United States, to dictate the trend of world events in the economic and political arenas. Now, with a more mature perspective of those developments, the bishops will face several main challenges. As the Africans say "The snake is still hidden in the grass!" If communism was the snake, the threat to the spread of the Christian religion and all that the Church of Christ stands for, then it has only been scotched not killed. There are many Catholics who still pray for the conversion of Russia! For these and many others, the European Church has many problems that are more serious than the 75 year-old struggle and prayers to bring down the Communist Empire.

The *Lineamenta*, The Vatican working paper for the special synod of European bishops, is certain that a great task for the Church in Europe lies ahead when it bluntly asks whether the European Church should speak in terms of "disillusion" at the developments since the fall of Communism. The document points to the absence of unity among the Christian people of Europe, the lack of progress in ecumenical dialog, and the continuing threats to peace. At the same time, the document suggests that many of Europe's current problems can be traced to the failure of the contemporary man to understand that the heritage of the continent as well as its future are tied with the Christian faith. There is no doubt that it is the loss of the Christian faith that is at the root of the Church's problems in Europe as well as in the other continents that once held that faith in high esteem. What has led to such a lamentable situation? After examining the difficulties of the day, the *Lineamenta* wishes that the European bishops are better able to make their plans for the "new evangelization" of the year 2000.

On a strictly political scene, many critics - often referred to as "conservatives" - strongly believe that the *Western brand of democracy*, with its acclaimed *freedom of expression*, is doing the modern society more harm than good. They point to the "liberated" former Soviet Union and to the other countries of the Eastern European block that have embraced democracy. Instead of uplifting the modern man to a higher level of morality, religiosity, and spirituality, which should form the basis for political, economic, cultural, and social decisions, democracy seems to have set the scene for moral decadence. "Freedom of expression and action" for many means "freedom to embrace whatever satisfies people's material needs." It is a vicious circle. Once again people find themselves in bondage.

It is at this point that the Church should examine its messianic work of liberating enslaved humanity from sin and from all the forces that endanger self-realization and true happiness. There is naturally the need to examine the expectations of the Church in the old Christendom at the threshold of the third millennium. There is no doubt in the minds of many worried Church leaders and members of various religious organizations that the role of the Church in the modern world should be re-examined. Much has been written on the *successes and failures* of the Christian Churches as we approach the end of an age. As a result of a series of setbacks that the Churches have suffered in the last 30 years, a gloomy future, indeed, faces Christianity.

Some Church leaders, theologians, historians, psychologists, social scientists, and other observers are, however, not alarmed by the gloomy picture

of the situation that "skeptics" paint. As far as they are concerned, stories of scandals, schisms, controversies, and empty Churches are not new. From the beginning of Christianity, controversies have been part of the "human face" of the Church. Controversies over leadership and articles of faith have led to various Church councils and the formulations of creeds. Some people think that because the Church has survived many crises in its 2000 years of history this gives credence to the early Christian faith that Christ would not abandon His Church. But will this Church continue to survive in spite of human error, weakness, lack of discipline, and other vices associated with the Church in modern times? The faith is no longer as strong. Its foundations have been shaken at the roots.

Many Churches - old and new - claim authority from the Lord. The competition for supremacy and autonomy is fierce - in fact, scandalous. How many of these autonomous religious bodies or Churches will survive in the next millennium? By posing this question, one may not be speaking about "physical survival" in terms of the number of structures and Church buildings these Churches are able to construct and maintain. What is of utmost importance is the impact these Churches are able to make on people and on the modern world. Naturally the number of followers each Church may command is also an important factor. There is no doubt that many of the Mainline or Established Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches, are in danger of either not surviving or in fact remaining in the minority. The "parable of the sower" comes to mind as we examine some of the factors that will determine the survival of the Churches in the next millennium as well as the outlook of the Third Millennium Church. While skeptics may not be thinking of total extinction of the Mainline Traditional and Established Churches, there is possibility that these older Churches will for long remain only ceremonial Churches, while the Church that is to win the heart of the masses is yet to emerge. Identifying this *new* Church, its features, and mission in the third millennium is the subject of this work.

"The Third Millennium Church" is divided into seven chapters. **Chapter One, *Christianity at the End of an Age - Successes and Failures*** examines the problems of Christianity at the end of the second millennium. There is no doubt that divisions and controversies have constituted the major obstacle to the achievement of the Church's mission among the nations of the earth. Whatever the consequences of disunity among the Mainline Christian Churches, it is not easy to ignore their successes in many areas of the Church's mission.

Chapter Two, *The Catholic Church at the End of an Age: Discordant Voices and Crisis of Faith* examines the situation of the Catholic Church at the threshold of the third new millennium. Like the other major Protestant Churches, the Catholic Church has suffered major reverses in her bid to maintain the leadership of all Christian Churches. She has not had successes with some of the major reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The ecumenical movement and the liturgical reforms are among the initiatives of the Council that have not yielded the expected results. Discordant voices among the Church's leaders and theologians as well as crisis of faith among Catholics lend support to the view that the Catholic Church has lost much influence and power.

Chapter Three, *The Evangelical Threat*, sees a decline in the Mainline Christian Churches, as the Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical Churches emerge as the popular "United Church of Christ" that has won the hearts of millions of Christians, young and old, all over the world. As the Mainline Christian Churches witness the phenomenon of empty pews during Sunday services, the Evangelical Churches are overflowing in membership. Stadiums and football fields are often converted to Churches to accommodate members.

Chapter Four, *The Church, the Moral Conscience of the World - Fruitless Endeavor and Loss of Power*, examines the loss of power by the Church, as she could no longer influence the world and her members in moral and ethical decisions. The majority of humankind, among them Christians, have lost faith in the Church. They obey *man* - governments, civil leaders, and lawmakers - rather than *God*. It is the task of the Third Millennium Church - the Church of the future - to find new ways of bringing the message of the Gospel to modern man.

Chapter Five, *The Third Millennium Church: Healing the Wounds of Grave Injustices - A Thorn in the Flesh*, sees this task as indispensable for the Church of the future. The image of the Christian Church has been marred by the past sins of the institution, its leaders, and members. By not condemning atrocities committed against certain groups and races or by colluding with the perpetrators of injustice, the Church has been accused of abetting the evil she was supposed to fight against. On a happy note, however, the leaders of the various Christian Churches are showing remorse for the past sins of the Church, her leaders, and members. The thorn must be removed if the Christian Church is to remain the salt of the earth.

Chapter Six, *Missionary Enterprise in the Western Church and the Dilemma of the Third World Church* detects a scandalous trend in the Western Church in which missionaries from Third World countries are not usually

welcomed in Europe and the United States. It sees history repeating itself, as racism, discrimination, and exclusion, which featured prominently in the 20th century Christianity, were rearing their ugly heads in the present Church and that of the future. The concept of *mission* and the *missionary territory* has changed. Mission is no longer limited to the Third World countries. Most European countries and North America have over the past 30 years become mission lands. The missionary can no longer be determined by skin color or race. How the Third Millennium Church handles the issue of *Church and race* will determine her future among the Third World Christians.

Chapter Seven, *The Church That Will Survive - The Church of the Future*, sees that in most part the controversies that have led to schisms and divisions among Christian Churches are continually dying away. Disunity and competition among Churches have contributed to the proliferation of new Churches and new religious movements. As the competition for soul-winning is fierce, it is fashionable to talk about *survival* among the hundreds of thousands of Churches, religious movements, and sects that lay claim to Christ as the Head of their "Church." The features of "The Church That Will Survive," "The Church of Tomorrow," and "The Third Millennium Church" have been examined in this last chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

Christianity at the End of an Age: Successes and Failures

As we approach the end of the second millennium writers and critics from various perspectives are assessing the successes and failures of Christ's Church, ancient and modern. Some arrive at their judgments and conclusions from the performances of the leadership and other "chief actors" of the various denominations, while others place more emphasis on the membership. The documentary, "**The Faithful Revolution: Vatican II**," a series of one-hour video programs in 5 parts, examines through selected eminent Church leaders, theologians, and experts in Church history some of the dramatic changes spearheaded by the Second Vatican Council and the continuing effects of such changes on the Church and modern history. For most of the participants at "The Faithful Revolution" debate, out of the 20 major and minor councils of the Church held during the 2000 years of the history of the Church there is none to

compare with the Second Vatican Council, convoked by **Pope John XXIII** in October 1962 and in session until 1965. They agree that the Second Vatican Council was the greatest religio-cultural event in this century. In spite of the contrary views held by other Catholics, the fact that more than three-quarters of the Council Fathers voted for the approval of the Vatican II reforms confirms the success of the Council. Unfortunately not all Catholics - leaders and followers alike - agree that the Second Vatican Council was a "blessing" to the Church. We shall examine their views in another part of this work.

Notre Dame professor, Father Richard P. McBrien, one of the most widely known U.S. theologians and a severe critic of the leadership of the Catholic Church, evaluated the Catholic Church at the end of the second millennium via the performances of the Popes. In his recent book, **Lives of the Popes**, he undertakes a ranking of the Popes. "Outstanding Popes," are followed by "Good or Above Average Popes." According to McBrien's assessment, the reigning Roman Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, made neither of these categories. This American Catholic theologian rates Pope John II as "less than the great" because the Pope did not pursue the ideals of the Second Vatican Council. In his view, the Pope was rather a stumbling block to change in the Catholic Church. McBrien earlier aired his views on the leadership of the Catholic Church, as well as the successes and failures of the Roman Church in "The Faithful Revolution." Even though in his view, Pope John Paul II did not score high marks, McBrien rates John Paul II as "Historically Important."

While theologians like **McBrien** and **Hans K♦ng** think that Pope John Paul II has been very slow in carrying out reforms in the Catholic Church some others think that the Pope has over-stretched the Catholic Church in the bid to improve its relationship with other Christian churches, Jews and women in trying to correct the *past mistakes* of the Church. Such critics of the Pope think that the Pope is compromising too much with his **primacy** and the doctrine of **infallibility**. If the Pope is infallible, the Church at the same time cannot be accused of "mistakes." An unnamed American priestⁱⁱⁱ writing in one conservative Church magazine - *The Latin Mass* - took the Pope to task, criticizing him for apologizing to various groups said to have been wronged by the Catholic Church in the past. The priest referred to three times John Paul II has apologized for past wrong actions of the Church, namely the **Inquisition**, the **women** and **other Christians**. The priest wrote that the Pope's apologies falsely implied that today Catholics are guilty of sins committed in the past, and that "personal sins are transmitted like original sin" from Catholic to Catholic. In order to pacify the victim of the holocaust and defend the position of Pope

Pius XII, the reigning Pope during the World War II, Pope John Paul II has made reconciliatory statements on "The Catholic Church and the Holocaust."

As far as some other Catholics - who are very much on the side of the **Roman Church** - are concerned, apologies for racism and other sins of injustice perpetrated by the Church and its members are totally unnecessary. These people think that if apologies must be rendered to anyone who has been wronged by the Church or her ministers, no stone should be left unturned. They cite several abuses committed by the Church's ministers within the past few years, particularly in the United States. They call for apologies from bishops "who have done nothing about the reports of clerical crimes - including liturgical abuses in parishes, doctrinal errors and obscene sex education in their schools." For them it is not the dead who need apologies, but the living, and what the living victims want are not symbolic forms of apologies but effective actions to deliver them from their plight. In all political religious issues there are liberals and conservatives. Each side takes an opposing view and the war of words continues.

As far as the Popes directly connected with the Second Vatican Council are concerned controversies will never end. There are more than a few conservative Catholics who think that Pope John XXIII was the anti-Christ who tried to ruin the Catholic Church with the Council's reforms. For these critics, the Church was blossoming in terms of faith, vocations to the priesthood and religious life, beautiful liturgy, authority, and peace when the Vatican II descended and dealt a heavy blow on the flourishing Church. Since 1962, when Pope John XXIII inaugurated the Council that precipitated the reforms, the Catholic Church has had no peace. All the great Popes before him never disturbed the peace and unity of the Church. What of the successors of Pope John XXIII?

In the view of most European and American Catholics, Pope Paul VI, the successor of Pope John XXIII, brought further confusion into the Church and into the Catholic families with his publication of the encyclical "**Humanae Vitae**." The fact that opposition to "Humanae Vitae" is strong even among many eminent Catholic Church leaders and Catholic theologians points to the failure of the Church to deal with this sensitive moral issue- the **birth control**. Thomas Reeves, an Episcopalian theologian,^{iv} summarizes the views of non-Catholics on the birth control controversy in the Catholic Church: "I have real problems with the teaching about birth control, and I do not see how I can get around that. Most Catholics in this country favor birth control, and they live at ease with the Church, but my conscience won't let me do that." It is not only the

birth control controversy that has divided the followers of Christ in the Catholic faith. The legalization of abortion and the practice of abortion even in the most Catholic countries of Europe and America points to the degree of laxity and chaos within the Catholic Church. A non-Catholic observer, Reeves, thinks that "a civil war is going on in the Roman Church." The rejection of the Church's teaching on issues such as birth control, abortion, and euthanasia by a majority of Catholics is an open rebellion to the accredited Church leadership. In the secular world the entire leadership of such a government would have resigned. It could equally have been overthrown by the people in a violent revolution.

Many radical Catholics have been disappointed with the leadership of Pope Paul VI and John Paul II. Some liberal Catholic theologians who expected the immediate successors of Pope John XXIII to continue with the "aggiornamento" - the recreating of the Catholic tradition ancient and modern, to exist together, the "updating" of Church's disciplines and structures to be in tune with changes in the modern world - have no good word for the Post Vatican II Church. Many who expected more liberalized programs - **abolition of clerical celibacy, ordination of women as Catholic priests, scrapping of any regulation on birth control, election of the Pope and bishops by popular ballot**, and other sweeping changes - could not but call for the convocation of a **Third Vatican Council** to discuss these "urgent issues." They look to a new Pope in the "stature" of Pope John XXIII who "opened the windows of the Catholic Church to allow in fresh air." Unfortunately, in the views of the liberals the successors of the great Pope, rather than opening more of the windows, are closing them and the suffocation is becoming unbearable.

Not all critics and theologians assess the successes and failures of the Church of Christ - Catholic or Protestant - from the performance of the Church leadership. Experts like David Barrett, a professor of religion at Regent University in Virginia, has assessed the Churches from **demographic perspective**. While some Church groups or denominations have become smaller, others have grown larger and stronger commanding large followership. Such statistics show the amount of **disunity** within the Church while simultaneously pointing to the outlook of the Church of the future. For example, in the estimate of David Barrett, **460 million Christians** around the world are caught up in the "Spirit-filled" Religious Movement referred to as "**Pentecostalism**." The Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical Churches are known to have outgrown the Mainline, Established, and Traditional Catholic and Protestant Churches in number and vitality. From another perspective theologians like Thomas Reeves, the University of Wisconsin scholar and the

author of *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity*, tracks the decline of the Mainline Christian Churches in terms of membership and influence.

Other critics apply different yardsticks in assessing the Churches' successes and failures on the community and national levels. The leadership of the Church is subjected to severe criticism by some Christians who think that some Church leaders and ministers have betrayed their vocation. Priests and bishops are accused of neglecting their duties or performing below standard. Catholic critics blame the phenomenon of "empty Churches," "empty houses of formation for the priesthood and religious life," "crises of faith," "theological misinformation, "liturgical abuses, and "moral bankruptcy of leaders and followers" on Catholic Church leaders, who have not been faithful to their vocation and mission. One disillusioned Catholic, writing in ultra conservative Catholic journal^v is so critical of the bishops of the United States that he actually names some bishops he thinks should hand in their resignation notes to the Pope! He calls some of the bishops "careerist bishops." "Most of our bishops are careerists, men who view their service in the episcopate as little more than a job which requires them to keep 'peace' among competing factors."

As this critic points out, the Churches are becoming empty because the chief shepherds have abandoned their flock for "other business ventures." They spend more time among their confreres talking about little else than career matters - who is going to get what diocese - who will be promoted to another diocese. "This careerist mentality is so strong that some bishops spend a lot of their time on the golf course, relegating the administration of the diocesan affairs to others. One recently retired bishop spent a great deal of his time shuttling back and forth between his diocese and Wall Street, where he played the stock market for his personal gain." This critic was not happy with the bureaucratic structure that the Catholic Church in the United States has assumed. Nor is it only in the United States. It is no doubt a universal phenomenon, and many other critics - left - or right-wing - would agree with him. He is not happy that most bishops delegate their work to the other "ecclesiastical bureaucrats." He writes: "The personal care and attention that our Lord meant for his shepherds to exhibit is largely a thing of the past today. Chancery offices have become huge, impersonal bureaucracies. We have been eyewitnesses to a proliferation in the number of such bureaucracies in the last thirty years, eerily paralleling the growth in the governmental bureaucracy." Surrendering their own duties to govern their dioceses to those this critic calls 'ecclesiastical bureaucrats' has its disastrous consequences: "Such an abdication

of Episcopal responsibility results in the empowerment and emboldenment of the bureaucrats, who come to view a bishop as a nuisance, an interloper whose signature they need to continue old policies and to institute new ones." Obviously, some kind of bureaucratic structure is necessary in a diocese. Division of labor is simply a fact of life. But this cannot be compromised with personal supervision of the work in the diocese by the bishop.

Most African priests, nuns, and ordinary Catholics are not happy with their bishops and religious superiors who spend much time outside their dioceses and religious houses during the year. It is alleged that some bishops and religious superiors spend more than six months in the year outside their dioceses and religious houses. While people would expect these African Church leaders and their counterparts elsewhere to attend to their Episcopal and other duties overseas, there are many critics who strongly feel that the amount of time allotted to such engagements overseas is too much. During their absence from their dioceses the local Church suffers since generally African bishops are not known for delegating powers to their vicars and other functionaries during their absence from their dioceses. When they are not overseas for some Church duty, they are locally attending numerous Episcopal meetings and conferences. This is not a happy situation in the African Church. There is no doubt that this ugly phenomenon is not limited to Africa.

The Clergy Also Part of the Problem?

While the Second Vatican Council's *aggiornamento* - the updating of the Church - the letting in of fresh air is blamed in large part for the decline in the priestly vocations, the *laicization* of most priests in the Catholic Church is seen by some critics as sign of failure on the part of the Church. Yet there are others who feel it is a salutary development for the Catholic Church in particular. The latter think that it would be better for the Church to move along with the "good few" who are able to live the life and commitment demanded by this vocation. The faithful are more ready to bear the burden of the "*priestless Sunday*" than to put up with pastors who are unable to challenge their parishioners - priests whom the *New Oxford Review* Group of lay Catholics refer to as "**wimpy Catholics.**" These concerned lay Catholics strongly believe that the Catholic Church is in peril and blame the clergy for contributing to the deteriorating situation of evangelization in the modern times. The bearers of the Gospel are failing the Church of Christ in this all-important duty of proclaiming the word - *being persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient, reprimanding and*

encouraging through all patience and *teaching...*”[2 Timothy 4.1] These concerned Catholics lament.

In fact there are many lay persons in North America today who feel that the clergy, the bearers of the gospel, are not living up to standards. They blame the clergy for watering down the authentic teachings of the Church or not even teaching their flock anything. Some lay persons really doubt whether some of the clergy believe what they say. Confrontational evangelization has been replaced with *laissez-faire*, easy-going telltale stuff, expressed in politically correct language that does not prick the conscience of the listeners or challenge the followers of Christ. Hear them again:

Cowardly clerics, fearful of being politically incorrect or challenging the flock or offending some stray soul, keep the full Catholic message from us. In effect we are blindfolded - left to stumble in the dark, prey to false prophets and the sirens of the world, not even knowing why we are Catholics...How long is American Catholicism going to censor itself, bow down before an alien culture?

But instead of performing below standards in preaching the word or in not living up to the moral standards of the Catholic priesthood, critics think the Church would do much better with fewer of ordained clergy than a great number who abandon their duty or live scandalous lives. This for many is a regrettable sign of failure on the part of the Church. There are more than few individuals worldwide who think that the good image of the Catholic priesthood has been dented by the unfaithful members of the clergy and the religious. There is fear among Church authorities and the laity as well, and there are signs of desperation everywhere. There is crisis in the Church and solutions are being sought before more damage is done.

There is no doubt that the news of massive defections of priests immediately after the end of the Second Vatican Council must have shocked ordinary Catholics all over the world. As for Africans it is always a scandal to hear that some of the old missionary priests, nuns, and brothers who once ministered to them have left their ministries and have taken to lay state of life. It is known that 10,000 Western priests, including bishops left the priesthood between 1965 - 1975, immediately after Vatican II. More than 26,000 sisters were said also to have pulled off their religious habits during the same period. Most of those who still function as religious women have however done away with religious habit and community life. Such a phenomenon alone was enough

to dent the image of the priesthood and the religious life in the universal Church. Although the number of defections between 1976 and 1996 is not as high as between 1965 and 1975, the number of the Catholic clergy and religious men and women has continued to fall. This phenomenon has not only helped erode the good image of the priesthood; it has also led to the shortage of priests. The call by some priests themselves for the abrogation of the Church's commitment to priestly celibacy is seen by most lay Catholics as a breach of a solemn promise made at priestly ordination. It is also a breach of faith and confidence reposed on the clergy of the Roman rite.

The call by Church leaders and some of the recent Popes for "new evangelization," "re-evangelization" or "conversion" of Europe and the New World - the territory in which Christianity originated - is seen by many critics as one of the greatest signs of the failure of the Church of Christ in the 20th century. The gospel message did not take root among the first hearers. In the article "**Paganism for the next Millennium**," J. F. Pisani^{vi} bemoans the influence of **neo-paganism** in the Western Society. "Paganism is gaining acceptance in our culture. New Age religion is replacing Christianity," he warns. "But the most disturbing aspect of this cultural transformation is that paganism is portrayed as a benevolent and inclusive faith for the third millenium, while the Christian faith is portrayed as backward, authoritarian and oppressive." Pisani is not alone in this observation and prediction. His, in fact is many people's opinion.

In fact the most effective litmus test critics are using to assess the successes and failures of the Church is the effect the word of God has had on the followers of Christ. How has the word changed their lives for the better? How have Christians observed the commandments of God and Christ's law of love? How has the word of God changed the views and actions of the Western Christians, for example, on issues such as race, violence, truth, peace, fair play, and tolerance? Has the word of God permeated believers so that they are able to function as one family of Christ's faithful? Two quotations attributed to two great Indian non-Christian religious leaders offer a response to the above questions and summarize the depth of the influence of Christianity on believers. The first is a quotation attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: "I admire Christ but not Christians." The second is attributed to Sandhu Singh. Many worried Church leaders and Christians have always expressed the wish that the words of Singh would perhaps one day no longer be true:

One day I was sitting on the banks of a river. I took from the water a round stone and I broke it. Inside it was perfectly dry. That stone had been lying in the water for a very long time but the water had not penetrated it. Then I thought that the same thing happened to men in Europe. For centuries they have been surrounded by Christianity but Christianity has not penetrated, does not live within them.^{vii}

That Christianity has not penetrated is evident in the way of life and action of most of those who profess the religion. Non-Christians as well as those who profess no religion regrettably may have fared no better. Millions of men and women who have professed faith in the great world religions that have taught the great ideals of unity and love have little or nothing to demonstrate that their lives have been directed toward a better world and future for all. Humankind is still sharply divided by race and color. These are still contentious issues even in the Churches, 2000 years after Christianity won adherents among most nations of the world. Statistics released recently from the European Union's Commission for Social Affairs in Brussels reveal that one **out of every three** European Union citizens described themselves as '*quite racist*,' according to an opinion poll conducted at the end of 1997 "*European Year Against Racism*". **One in every five** also agrees with the view that all non-EU immigrants should be sent back to their country of origin. **One in every four** respondents expressed the view that, to be accepted into European society, minorities and non-Europeans must give up their own culture. And further asked whether there is a limit to the number of people of other races, religions, or cultures a society should accept **65 percent** argued that this limit had already been reached in their country. Many of those who admitted to racist feelings said they were dissatisfied with their life circumstances and feared losing their jobs. For the past ten years, **anti-immigrant, racist, neo-nazi, neo-fascist feelings** have been growing in Europe among the younger generation. Many Europeans and non-Europeans express extreme concern by these shocking statistics.

In the United States many concerned Church leaders remind their people that racism, which has plagued black people for centuries, is still alive and is at the root of anti-immigrant measures, anti-affirmative action as well as the root of poverty, poor education, sickness and violence. Christianity does not seem to have influenced the lives of people to shun violence either. "**Confronting a Culture of Violence**"^{viii} - A Catholic Framework for Action - is the title of a pastoral message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops. Modern society is growing numb to human loss and suffering as the Bishops express horror at the

consequences of violence in their country. But the cult of violence in the United States may be no different from the same sad phenomenon elsewhere in Europe and the developed world. How has Christianity succeeded in influencing people's ways of life? Not much seems to have been accomplished, as the Catholic bishops enumerate a **catalogue of evils**^{ix} that hold the nation hostage:

- A nation born in a commitment to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" is haunted by death, imprisoned by fear, and caught up in the elusive pursuit of protection rather than happiness. A world moving beyond the Cold War is caught up in bloody ethnic, tribal, and political conflict.
- Decades ago, the Kerner Commission called violence "as American as apple pie." Sadly, this provocative statement has proved prophetic. No nation on earth, except those in the midst of war, has as much violent behavior as we do - in our homes, on our television, and our streets.
- Violence in our culture is fed by multiple forces - the disintegration of family, media influences, the availability of so many weapons, and the rise of gangs and increasing youth violence.
- Increasingly, our society looks to violent measures to deal with some of our most difficult social problems - millions of abortions to address problem pregnancies, advocacy of euthanasia and assisted suicide to cope with the burdens of age and illness, and increased reliance on the death penalty to deal with crime.
- The deterioration of family life and the loss of community leave too many without moral direction and personal roots.
- Lives sometimes are diminished and threatened not only in the streets of our cities, but also by decisions made in the halls of government, the boardrooms of corporations, and the courts of our land.

The ugly picture of violence and other evils in the United States - "God's own country" -believed to have been influenced by Christianity, clearly shows that Christian principles did not take root among the people. Not even peoples of the world - ancient and modern - described as **savages, primitives, pagans, or heathens** by Western missionaries and Christian evangelists have committed the incredible atrocities and immorality attributed to the people who profess faith in the One True God and His Christ. As far as the Catholic Bishops and all well-meaning Christians are concerned, new policies and programs that ignore

Christian ideals are worthless. They cannot substitute for recovery of the old values of right and wrong, respect and responsibility, love and justice.

Fruits of the Ecumenical Movements

Another yardstick critics have used in assessing the successes and failures of the Church at the threshold of a new millennium is the degree of "progress" the Church of Christ has made on ecumenism. There is not much good news to report when it comes to Church unity. Rather than uniting, the Churches are moving farther apart with ever-increasing discordant voices and rancor. For Thomas Reeves,^x "Ecumenism is largely a mythology." He wonders at the wasted time and effort of advocates of Church under one leadership toward the achievement of the illusive Church unity. "Think of the meetings of these theologians - long discussions that go on for decades, Church money being poured into these efforts. They never produce anything worth the pocket change these people bring with them."

For more than 30 years representatives of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches have been trying to repair the breach between the world's two largest bodies of Christian believers. A millennium ago, Christians of the East and West were united in one faith despite differences in culture, liturgy, and tradition. Today they are separated by organization, outlook, and 1,000 years of animosity. The Western Catholic Church has the Pope as the single figure who speaks for a Church of about 1 billion Catholics, but the Orthodox Eastern Church is split into 15 independent Churches, all sharing a common faith and worship but divided by national, ethnic, and intra-Church rivalries. Among the larger groups of the Eastern Orthodox Churches are the Russian Orthodox, which claims about 90 million members, the Byzantine, about 4 million, and the Greek Orthodox with fewer than 2 million. As far as unity or a better relationship with the Roman Church is concerned there is little hope that the Eastern Catholics are yet in the mood for the healing of wounds. In 1995 Pope John Paul II and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop Bartholomew, joined in prayer at mass at St. Peter's in Rome. The Roman Pontiff had talked of possible reconciliation between the Churches of East and the West by the year 2000. According to reports the speech of the Patriarch, who was at Georgetown University to receive an honorary doctorate in theology, dashed the Pope's ecumenical dreams. Bartholomew warned an ecumenical audience that the separation between Catholics and Orthodox was even deeper than they imagined. There was an indication from the Patriarch's statements that the Roman Church is still a 'heretical Church,' reinforcing the

depth of the old prejudices and theological presumption that the Eastern Church is the "Orthodox Church." Some ecumenical observers called the Patriarch's reaction a "cold shower for Catholic-Orthodox relations."

"Healing of wounds," by the way of ecumenism, reconciliation, and dialogue has not fared better with the Protestant "Separated Brethren." As the third millennium nears, Pope John Paul II has called for urgent new efforts to work toward greater unity among Christian Churches. In his Apostolic Letter of November 1994 - "**Tertio Millennio Adveniente**" outlining the events marking the end of the second and the beginning of the third millennium - the Holy Father proposed a meeting of all Christians at an as-yet-unnamed venue of significant importance for all Christianity:

The ecumenical and universal character of the Sacred Jubilee can be fittingly reflected by a meeting of all Christians. This would be an event of great significance, and so, in order to avoid misunderstanding, it should be properly presented and carefully prepared, in an attitude of fraternal cooperation with Christians of other denominations and traditions, as well as of grateful openness to those religions whose representatives might wish to acknowledge the joy shared by all the disciples of Christ.

According to initial reports from Rome, a day of inter-religious prayer similar to the one held in Assisi, Italy, in 1986 will probably be repeated one year before the jubilee. Reports also indicated that a true spirit of cooperation was growing in anticipation of the millennium. There were plans to set up a committee of Catholic and ecumenical World Council of Churches to plan common projects. "This is a new ecumenical approach," said Bishop Francesco Fortini, secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. "It is not an invitation extended by the Catholic Church to other Churches, as in the past, but something that all Churches are organizing."

There have been no visible signs that the ecumenical movement has produced any encouraging results, to offer hope for "the unity of all churches" by the year 2000 or the foreseeable future. Fewer people even understand the goals of the ecumenical movement: unity of all Christian Churches - Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestants - under one umbrella, presumably the Catholic Church - and under one supreme head - the Pope. For many such a union is not feasible at least before the year 2000! Like the Orthodox Catholics of the East, as far as the Protestant "Separated Brethren" are concerned, this goal is

farfetched. According to Rev. Konrad Raiser, the head of the World Council of Churches, [WCC], a fellowship of 324 Churches worldwide with which the Catholic Church cooperates but does not belong, Church unity is long way off. The thorny issue is the Catholic Church's claim to papal primacy. The non-Catholic world is still far from accepting the pope's authority. Reports from the WCC headquarters in Geneva indicate that although the major Protestant denominations, as well as Orthodox and Lutheran Churches welcomed the Pope's 1995 encyclical on ecumenism - **Ut Unum Sint** - "That All May Be One," they felt that the encyclical did not go beyond anything that had been discussed thus far. It is obvious that ecumenism means different things for different groups of Churches.

Many Catholics and non-Catholics, leaders and followers are not happy that during the more than 30 years of the ecumenical movement, not much has been achieved toward a better relationship among all the Christian Churches. Rather than unity, divisions have continued to grow. This is definitely a failure of all concerned - Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants - in honesty of purpose. By sticking to their divisive attitudes, the Christian Churches have not contributed to world peace and unity among all nations. As the controversial Swiss theologian, Hans K[†]ng, points out, "there can be no genuine peace among all the nations without peace among all the Churches. And there can be no peace anywhere without dialogue."^{xi} Not many theologians and lay people are interested in the old rhetoric about primacy and differences in doctrines. They don't even find useful an umbrella Church that could include all Christian denominations. Many envision a model of Christian unity that is more of a fellowship of Churches in integrated communion and mutual respect than as one uniform Church structure absorbing all traditions. Africans would favor such a model, and the African aphorism confirms this way of thought - "Egbe bere ugo bere" - ("Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch, the one that tries to prevent the other perish.") By this they mean, too, that forced unity that provokes tension rather than good neighborliness and peace is worthless. Thus a unity of Churches that allows differences in culture, liturgy, doctrine, and rituals is more viable and realistic.

Not All Ended in Failure!

Whatever yardsticks experts use in assessing the Christian Church at this point in history, it would be unfair for critics to ignore the impact of the Christian religion on humanity. Christianity's influence on world civilization is tremendous. As a *divine* and *human* institution, most of the facts are always verifiable and many have been subjected to various modern and scientific investigations throughout the centuries. The Christian "handbook" - the Bible - contains both the divinely inspired word as well as the editors' embellishments of the spiritual truths. Modern scientific methods of investigation in biblical research have no doubt tried to separate the "wheat from the chaff," the myths and fables from historical facts in which the divine truths were wrapped. In most cases, Church authorities and custodians of the divinely revealed truths have been forced to accept the findings and conclusions of the modern science. The *sitz im leben* of most of the biblical accounts have been established.

Church authorities acknowledge the guidance of scholars and modern scientists in various fields of knowledge. historians, archeologists, philosophers, theologians, anthropologists, sociologists, philologists, and astronomers are at hand for consultation on biblical and divinely related issues. In most cases their findings and recommendations have been accepted with little hesitation. Who erred? Galileo or the Church? Copernicus or the Church? Which should be accepted - the biblical accounts of the origin of the universe or the evolutionist theories? What of the emerging Martian theories? Supposing life exists in Mars or existed on that planet before the Earth came into being? To whom will Christians turn to for guidance in the face of numerous theories challenging the origins of the universe? Will the Church authorities be ready to accept proven scientific theories that might jeopardize some revealed truths that have been taught for centuries?

In most cases, some of these questions do not arise again. If they do, however, they are no more as contentious as they were in the past. **Excommunications** or *Anathema sit* are no more pronounced on dissenting theologians and Christian philosophers as frequently as it was the case in the past. It is amazing how things have changed in the Catholic Church. Thomas Reeves wondered how one blaspheming Catholic theologian was not excommunicated from the Catholic Church. According to Reeves, this "very prominent theologian" told him at breakfast one morning that he prays for the Pope's death. "He prays for the Pope's death!" wondered Reeves, "and nobody is

excommunicated!" Reeves thinks an outrageous breakdown of discipline has infected the Catholic Church. Tolerance and accommodation have been overstretched! As he sees it, "Until it gets some of the discipline back, the Roman Church, too, is going to languish."^{xii} The doctrine of *infallibility* of the Pope is better understood and appreciated today than as it was in the past. Christian traditionalists may still fear that new theories that "contradict" some of the divinely revealed truths will be generating confusion and ill-feelings and may continue to divide the already fragmented Christian Church.

Apart from biblical accounts, Church history supplies researchers with an enormous stock of materials for study and evaluation of the impact of Christianity on humanity. Thanks to God that the authority of the bible had been established and accepted by the *One Apostolic Church* before the great schism erupted. It would have been disastrous for the Christian religion had the divisions and schisms that had characterized the hitherto "One Christian Apostolic Church" taken place before the Canon of the scriptures was established! Who could imagine the number of *versions* of the bible, collections, and compositions with which Christianity would have come up? An uncountable number of voices would be proclaiming the various and contradictory truths emanating from the same One True God!

Major schisms have eerily come almost at 500-year intervals, Ralph Martin points out.^{xiii} The **first - Nestorian and Monophysite** separations in the **5th century** - cut off much of the Church in the lands of its blossoming, rendering it vulnerable to the expansion of Islam. It is difficult for anyone visiting Antioch or Alexandria today to realize that these two cities were once the major theological centers of the Church. The **second schism**, between the Eastern Church and the western Church, became final in 1054. The **third** major division, within the western Church, the Protestant reformation, is often dated to Luther's 95 theses of 1517. "These schisms define the major lines of demarcation among Christians of this day, although the lines have become more complex with the rise of Pentecostal and Independent Churches in the 20th century."^{xiv}

Successes and failures of Christianity are well documented in Church history from the beginnings of the Christian era. Both foes and friends have produced books and volumes of commentaries on the Church. Critical investigations into the history of the Church - ancient and modern - have continued. If there are criticisms of the Church, certainly some of these have been initiated and propagated by the Church's most renowned scholars and theologians. Most of the Church's faults have been repeatedly uncovered and

there is nothing extraordinarily exciting one can write about the dark side of the Church again. Christianity has produced great saintly leaders as well as corrupt and wicked lay leaders and many in clerical garb. Church scandals on the part of major and minor ministers are part of Church history and are well documented. Facts and figures are therefore there to help evaluate the successes and failures of the Christian Church. Such studies are truly important and necessary. They help believers, non-believers, and indeed, the present leaders and apostles of this great institution to prepare for a more demanding divine mission in the third millennium, if the Church can still exert any meaningful impact on the people. As Christian Churches - singly or in groups - celebrate the end of the present millennium and the beginning of the next it is easy to understand why some critics of the Church focus on the dark side of the Church. While not denying the successes of the Christian Church, this might be one of the best ways of exposing all interested parties to the enormous task ahead.

Divine Authority vis-à-vis Secular Authority

There is rapid push for secularization at this time, not by sworn enemies of the Church and anti-Christian writers such as the philosophers of The Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, or by the Communists and practical atheists, but by modern scientists and computer technologists. With new discoveries in science and the pace of human achievement dictated by the computer world, can the Church continue to exert influence on modern man? Will modern man lean more now on the Church for moral and spiritual guidance, or on scientists and modern political leaders? With Christian faith already in crisis and the cult of 'group decision' now in vogue, can the Church sustain leadership in dictating the conscience of the nations regarding many serious issues touching moral life in modern times? There are signs of danger ahead! In the most advanced nations and in the formerly strong supporter-nations of Christendom, political parties, pressure groups, and lawmakers have virtually replaced religious institutions in modeling moral conscience. Governments and the ruling parties draft the laws that govern modern society as God's commandments and the Church's precepts receive secondary attention and in most cases no longer influence the people's moral decisions. Laws regulating attitudes on **abortion, sex, sacredness of life, birth control, euthanasia, and marriage and family** are passed in parliaments with a simple majority! The decisions of the courts of justices influence the moral life of the people rather than God's commandments and Church precepts. In most cases, the new law of Christ, which served as an indelible mark of His true followers

as well as the mark of the true Church, has been thrown overboard. In everyday moral life most Christians are little influenced by the teachings of Christ on the **law, anger, love of enemies, forgiveness and revenge, oaths, judging others, God and money, lawsuit, marriage and sexuality, and the Golden Rule.**

In the past it was commonplace to acknowledge that the bishops of the Church, united with the Pope were specially endowed with the power to give directives on moral issues. In the old Roman Catholic Church, "Roma locuta est" ["Rome has spoken"] ended most controversies. Today such powers are being challenged by various pressure groups within and outside the Church. As far as these groups are concerned, no person or group in the Church has the monopoly of the truth. Divine authority is no more easily accepted by many "free-thinkers." The tendency is to apply an "opinion survey" before serious Church decisions are made. Indeed, pronouncements from the pulpits on serious issues affecting the moral lives of believers without due consultation are no more tolerated. Most Christians do not in conscience accept Church legislation as binding. "Dialogue" is preferred to *authoritative* and *binding* teachings of the Magisterium. Church leaders may ignore protests against **authoritarianism** or crusade for **democratization** with the argument that the Church, for all its humanness, cannot be treated as a mere human organization. As far as they are concerned, there is no dialogue on issues where the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church has spoken definitively. Such issues are not negotiable. But today many Christians look at such views with scorn.

The question is whether the modern man, a *democrat* will continue to accommodate the *undemocratic* and *dictatorial* laws of the Church. There are strong feelings within and outside Church circles that "serious mistakes" were made in the past and these "mistakes" arose as a result of little or no *consultation* with the people and "experts." "Humanae vitae," the Papal encyclical on the birth control and the use of contraceptives is one of the issues still being contested by both clergy and laity in the Catholic Church. While some Protestant denominations can easily compromise with some Catholic teachings and dogma, many have real problems with the Catholic Church's teaching on birth control. But whether theological and moral truths should be subjected to the "majority opinion" or measured by the public opinion polls is a serious matter. The present Church leadership may have to re-examine many issues as we approach the end of the second millenium. It does not need a long theological dissertation to discover that modern Christians of every denomination disagree with their bishops, evangelists, elders, pastors, and many others holding important offices and positions in their Churches. Many

Christians - liberals and conservatives alike - contest most Church's directives and pastoral letters on moral and theological issues. While certain *liberals* accuse their Church leadership of ineptitude in pursuing the *much-needed reforms* in the modern Church, *conservatives* discredit their Church leaders for giving in to the pressures of members who they think have lost their Christian faith. As for the liberals, they think the modern Christian Church should get rid of *right-wingers* and *reactionaries* - people who are not in tune with 20th century Christianity. In the Mainline Protestant Churches, these right-wingers are seen as the oppressors of gays, anti-feminists, and those who oppose women's ordination. Without the right-wingers, think the liberals their Church would have peace!

Within the Catholic Church, many liberals want the Papacy abolished and the leadership of the Catholic Church decentralized, bishops elected by the people, celibacy abolished, and women ordained as priests. On their own part, the Catholic right-wingers want nothing less than a return to the Pre-Vatican II! Only such a radical decision could restore the lost image of the Catholic priesthood as well as the authority that Christ vested on his Church, the power to bind and loose. Some Christians - both Protestants and Catholics - who trail the middle course have their own 'private beliefs' on important articles of the creed and Christian faith. They care little about the Church's position on current issues and are not ready to engage in any disputation with those who for one reason or another are unhappy with their Church leadership. For some of the Church's leaders and ministers of the Word, it may not, after all, be the Master's will that the messengers should give in to pressures and bend, or restructure the *rules* to suit the hearers. Indeed, the battle line has been drawn. True believers may not have any choice but to accept without adulteration the message of the gospel. The messengers have been sternly and solemnly charged to "proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching." [2 Timothy 4: 1 ff.].

The situation that arises is not really new. The Church has throughout history endeavored to contain one problem or another - dissensions, schisms, and heresies. As far as many believers are concerned, the "prophecy" was made long ago: "For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths. But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry." [2 Tim. 4.3 ff.] There are many other problems that worry the leaders of the Christian Churches as we move

toward the third millenium. While some may see these problems as normal - a result of changes in modern society - and so do not think the problems will lead to major disasters in Christianity, others discern a serious crisis of faith. Where many have lost their faith in God and the Church, the best way the Church can address the crisis is by a clarion call to conversion. There may be no other options. This is the greatest task facing the Church of the future.

How the Mighty have Fallen!

Sociologists and ethnologists often divide communities into two camps - majority and minority - placing emphasis on the dominating culture. The same division appears also in certain subcultures of racial groups. It could be *white and black* in a white-dominated world or simply *whites and non-whites*. In whatever situation in any part of the world and in any sphere of life, there are some groups that exercise dominant influence over the rest of the communities. As there are major political parties, so also there have been in history major religious bodies or Churches. Whether the "majority" continued to dominate would often depend on many factors. In the Christian Churches, as in politics, it is not an unfamiliar scene for influence suddenly to pass from a hitherto "major Church" to a lesser-known "religious sect or denomination." As in politics, some of the major political parties have dominated the political arena and enjoyed the patronage of the electorate for years. Suddenly something happens, the support of the people is lost - and what a fall! Through a "revolution," a popular demand for a reversal of fortunes is set into motion.

In the political arena, many reasons are advanced for the majority party's fall from power - from grace to grass. The people, the masses, the revolutionaries, the reformers, or their leaders claim that the ruling party is now ailing and no signs of "renewal" may be in sight. The party is not keeping its promises. Its face has been dented by corruption. It has been dictatorial. The majority party and its leaders are often accused of contributing to economic and social problems of the nations, instead of helping to alleviate the suffering of the masses. The leaders are not tackling the urgent problems of the people. They waste a great deal of time and scarce government resources in irrelevant projects and neglect the pressing needs of the people. Indeed, the ruling party is moribund and should be discarded. The emerging new political party - often named *Redemption Party* or *Revolutionary Party* - becomes popular and begins to enjoy the people's patronage. Many old and oppressive regimes have been overthrown and have been replaced by newer and younger ones.

The Church is vulnerable to such infections, which have brought down many political regimes in the past. Churches and political systems will no doubt continue to face changes. The results of disillusionment with the government or the ruling political party can be devastating to people. Many of the people, especially the poor and many who feel strongly that they have not benefited from the ruling power, lose interest in politics and boycott the polls. "It is of no use going to cast the vote to promote corruption, injustice and oppression perpetrated by the regime against the people." Others who care to step out on the day of the elections, do so only to accomplish their civic duties. They are not interested in the election results.

Some or all the above phenomena could apply to any religious or civic organization. Through neglect, national protests, strikes, and violent revolutions mighty powers have been brought down. How have the mighty fallen! It has happened in the remote and recent past, and presently we live with the phenomenon. In politics, the mighty give way to the younger new breed of politicians and new generation of leaders. Some of the older generation of politicians who are accused of perpetrating various atrocities are disgraced out of office. In the arena of political hegemony history is full of surprises. Indeed, "history," as Kelly Miller, an African American writer puts it, "plays havoc with the vainglorious boasting of national and racial conceit."^{xv} Miller, illustrating from history, was pointing to possible *reversals of fortunes*, of peoples and nations who have controlled power. He was reacting to some anthropological assertions in his days that Negroes in America had never produced a culture of their own in Africa and in fact had nothing to boast about. Miller was convinced that "no condition is permanent." In spite of the gloomy political, economic, and social situations facing an oppressed people, he was optimistic that a change was possible in the future. Through a revolution or a natural trend of events a once-flourishing empire could lose its grip on power.

The Bible is in support of Miller, in that the "Lord has shown the strength of his arm by scattering the proud in the conceit of their heart. The Lord has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly" [Luke 1:51-52] In the summit of their power and domination over the rest of humankind, the Babylonians, the Assyrians and the Egyptians dominated the known world and lorded it over their neighbors. These powerful kingdoms tormented and enslaved their neighbors and most peoples of the Ancient Near East. As Miller notes, in the historical recession of races the Babylonians, and Assyrians are one with Nineveh and Tyre. In their era hegemony, expeditions were sent from some distant continent to unearth the glorious monuments of their ancestors

from beneath the very feet of their degenerate descendants. The Babylonians and Assyrians suffered reverses and in modern times are absent from the most powerful nations.

In history, there are many surprises as well as materials for reflection. The Greeks, too, once ruled the world in the great human endowments of mind and body. The powerful ancient cities of Greece - Athens and Sparta - famed for strict discipline and military training are remembered today on account of the Olympic Games. Outside of that, modern Greece is in the *third category of underdeveloped or developing countries*. With regard to politics and economics, Greece is not reckoned among the eminent world powers. Things have changed and how are the mighty fallen! "The lordly Greeks who ruled the world through the achievements of the mind, who gave the world Homer and Socrates and Phidias in the heyday of their glory, have so sunken in the scale of excellence that, to use the language of Macaulay, 'their people have degenerated into timid slaves and their language into a barbarous jargon.'"^{xvi}

If the arrogant of mind and heart are dispersed, and the rulers are thrown down from their thrones, the lowly are lifted up [Luke 1:52] and there is no doubt that the poor and despised people of the world may rise to power some day. It is interesting to note that the *barbarians* Aristotle despised and believed could not count beyond ten fingers in his day subsequently produced Kant, Shakespeare, and Newton. There are more *wizards* who can perform "miraculous feats" in modern times than were possible in the days of Aristotle and the Greeks. Many of them come from the despised and poorer nations of the world. Their contributions to the fields of technology and science today have been recognized by the industrialized nations that have gained more from their hard work.

The Mass Exodus of people to the richer parts of the developed world, or the *Search for Greener Pastures*^{xvii} of the earth, is not a phenomenon usually associated with black people. The former rich and powerful nations of the world - including Spain and Portugal and some of the Eastern European countries - struggle with Africans in search of new jobs in the industrialized nations. At one point Spain and Portugal ruled the world. They were powerful and remained unchallenged on land and the sea. Only they and Britain could in those days trade in human commodity. Only they had the massive political and economic power to change "the face of the earth." Through slavery Africans, against their will, found themselves in most places where they are still treated like exiles or strangers in their own land. Today Africans associate Spain with Vernando Po - a poor and insignificant offshore island in the South West African coast. While

rich nation like the United States chase illegal aliens from their borders, no immigrants flock to the borders of Greece, Spain, and Portugal. There are numerous examples of "how the mighty have fallen! Such examples are not limited to the political and economic fields. Once powerful nations of the world are today trailing behind their European allies and must also beg for crumbs from the masters' table as some other poorer nations of the world. The events that reshape the political face of the world may be no different from those that reshape its religious face. The decline in power and influence of the major Christian Churches is a perplexing phenomenon. Did the Scriptures not predict that "the first will be the last and the last, the first," as the old gives way to the new!

Contradictions and Disillusionment: Why the New Is Favored

Christianity did not gain outright acceptance among some of the Third World countries, "mission lands," or "pagan nations" to whom the Western missionaries directed much energy and resources to evangelize. It was not because these regions of the world, which include Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Latin America, were impenetrable for the European missionaries. It was not because the people were idol worshippers and never recognized a Supreme God who ruled the universe. No. The peoples of these regions of the world worshipped God, like peoples of other nations - ancient and modern. But it was not easy to convince the natives that Christianity had anything extraordinary to offer in one's search for spiritual fulfilment. The method of presentation and the content of the message were unattractive to the people.

In spite of initial successes, the situation does not look much different two to three hundred years after Christian missionaries penetrated the hinterland of these "missionary lands" as the universal Church prepares to celebrate 2000 years of existence. Cardinal Josef Tomko, the prefect of the Congregation for Evangelization, hints on the enormous task ahead in his new book on the vital role of missionary work in the life of the Church. In the book, **The Mission Toward the Year 2000**, the cardinal underlines the fact that the Church, from her inception, has been involved in missionary work. This work is not a supplement to the ordinary life of the Church, he maintains, but an intrinsic aspect of Christian existence. As far as he is concerned, "the Church was born missionary." But the "mission" in the evangelization context makes special reference to some areas of the world and among specific peoples. Here Cardinal Tomko points to the continent of **Asia** as "the greatest challenge for missionaries today," since that continent is home to 85 percent of the world's

non-Christian population. **Latin America** poses a different problem, he notes, because although the culture is overwhelmingly Catholic, many people still do not know Christ. As for **Africa**, even though most of the early attempts by Christian missionaries to establish the Christian Church there have yielded an encouraging harvest, the black continent remains basically a "mission land" in the minds of most European Churchmen and women. When the situation of the Church in Europe and North America is examined, there is no doubt that the picture looks very gloomy.

Christianity's abstract teachings about God, after-life, death, judgement, punishment, heaven, hell, and the Sacraments made little or no sense to the people the missionaries went to evangelize. Most of the Church's doctrines compounded an already difficult situation. The theology of the Trinity, particularly that of God the Father and his beloved Son, instead of attracting a sympathetic hearing from the African traditional religionists, looked foolish and provoked laughter. "If God had a son, surely he must have had wives!" questioned one of the elders of Umuofia, in the pre-colonial tribe of Eastern Nigeria. Often the scene did not look much different from that of Paul's first contact with the community of Thessalonica in the Acts of the Apostles. "When they heard about resurrection of the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, "We should like to hear you on this some other time." And so Paul left. But some did join him. [Acts: 17.32]. As far as the dogmatic teachings, methods of evangelization, and the political system of the Church were concerned, Christianity did not look attractive to the people. Only few converts, unimportant people of low caste and status, embraced the Christian religion. Christianity had nothing more attractive to offer, when compared with the perennial values of the traditional religions, with their code of conduct, rituals, sacrifices, and belief in the spirit world and the Supreme God of the universe. There are other lesser gods and a multitude of spirits. But these lesser gods and spirits do not vie with the *Great Spirit*. They are his messengers and agents and not his rivals. African religious feelings were hurt when some of the missionaries accused the African traditional religionists of idol-worship and of being ignorant of a merciful God, the creator of the universe and all its creatures.

In their disputation with Western Christian theologians, the exponents of the African Traditional Religion point out to their Western counterparts that Africans are not ignorant of God and are never idol-worshippers. In the African situation, religion and life are bound together. It is an acknowledged fact that among Africans - ancient and modern - there is no dichotomy between the

spiritual and the *secular* world. *When the African eats, he eats religiously; when he sings, he sings religiously; when he works, he works religiously; and when he dances, he dances religiously.* This is basically true of the Igbos of Nigeria. This spiritual and moral code - not separated from the unseen world of Great Spirit and his messengers - influences the lifestyle of the traditional African. He knows that his public or secret conduct is always at the guess of the author of life. It is not the law of the civil government that influences his lifestyle. It is basically the code of conduct as found in the traditional religion of the ancestors that forces him to act morally correct. And that code of conduct does not change with time and man cannot manipulate it.

The unattractive face of Christian religion in the "mission lands" was further dented by the incessant and often scandalous rivalries among the various sects and denominations in the Western world as the Christian religion divided into many factions. Each group strictly identified with national interests of its region or nation of Europe. Not even the conquered Native American Indians and their chieftains could comprehend the controversies over the doctrines preached by the various Christian denominations. These Natives rejected the Western brand of Christianity and wondered why trifles concerning the incomprehensible "Great Spirits" should become sources of division, hatred, and acrimony among believers of the Christian religion. Chief Joseph of the conquered Nez Perce Indian tribe could not understand the *good news* the Christian missionaries claimed that they brought to his people. There were many contradictions, as the chief wondered:

They will teach us to quarrel about God, as Catholics and Protestants do. We do not want to do that. We may quarrel with men sometimes about things on earth, but we never quarrel about the Great Spirit. We do not want to learn that.^{xviii}

Broken promises, greed, oppression, hypocrisy, and lack of love were other accusations leveled against Christian nations who claimed to know God and His inner thoughts and designs better than the people designated "primitive savages," heathens, pagans, and ancestor and idol worshipers. There are no better illustrations of these facts than some pronouncements from American Indian tribal chiefs, leaders, and people who suffered great injustice and humiliation in the hands of the Christian nations that went to evangelize non-believers. But does the cry of a dispossessed and oppressed people reach God? **Red Cloud**, one of the tribal chiefs, lamented: "They made us many promises,

more than I can remember - they never kept but one: They promised to take our land, and they took it!" **Seneca - Corn Planter** could not understand the oppressors' "hardness of the heart." "The land we live on our fathers received from God. They transmitted it to us for our children, and we cannot part with it. Where is the land, on which my children and their children after them are to lie down?" **White Antelope - Cheyenne**, in 1864, accepted what he saw taking place among his tribe and people as an inevitable event that only God could change: "after all nothing lives long - only the earth and the mountains," he concluded. These were words of consolation as well as resignation.

This same God who rules the universe demands justice and kindness in dealing with his creatures. It is unfortunate that those who claimed to worship Him, the True God, did not walk in his ways. **Seattle (Seathe)** of the Indian Dwamish Tribe, in 1854 reprimanded the oppressors of his people: "Let him be just and deal kindly with my people for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say; there is no death, only a change of worlds."^{xix} Christian nations and Christian Churches have not been great champions of liberty. In times of oppression of the poor- the Indians and the African slaves in the Americas some Christian Churches failed to identify unequivocally with the oppressed. **Powhatan**, another Indian chieftain, in 1609 put a disturbing question to those who posed threat to the survival of his people. He was worried by the oppressors' lack of love and no sincere desire for peace: "Why will you take by force what you may obtain by peace? We are unarmed and willing to give you what you ask if you come in a friendly manner. Take away your guns and swords...or you may die in the same manner."^{xx}

Missionaries and teachers of the Christian religion agree that Christianity gained acceptance among the "Gentiles" and peoples of the non-Western world *not* primarily on account of the *beliefs* they taught. Early European missionaries in Africa, Asia, and other areas of the Third World learned to change their evangelization strategies when they discovered that not even the threats of hellfire scared their listeners or moved them to accept the Christian religion. Most of the people, particularly the older generation, scorned and ignored the rattlings of the Christian preachers. Poor knowledge of the cultures of the people created a further stumbling block to conversion to Christianity. For the successes of Islam, it was indeed brute force that bent the will of the resisting non-believers to accepting Islamic religion. As far as the natives were concerned, in its original form and content Christianity had nothing exciting to offer the people, and they did not see what placed these foreign religions - Christianity and Islam - above the traditional religions that Christian and Islamic

proselytizers discredited. The people needed more convincing arguments to consider embracing the new faith.

It was therefore necessary for the missionaries to change their strategies to make any headway. The establishment of schools, hospitals, and maternity homes to take care of the people's *material* needs opened the way to massive conversion to Christianity. Naturally the relevance of these institutions to *life here and now* was evident. From the "material," it was possible to address the "spiritual" needs of the people. Concern for justice, peace, and love would later become the center of the new message of salvation that the missionaries brought. By acts of charity and dedication to God's work, the missionaries succeeded in large part in presenting a religion that had more to offer the entire human race than most of the other religions of the world. Sooner or later the newly planted faith would bear fruit and bloom. The increased number of adherents who received baptism and were confirmed in the faith bears witness to such happy news. The growth of the Christian faith in the missions is also evident in the number of native clergy who eventually would become missionaries in other parts of the world and even minister to the needy Christians of Europe and the New World.

In spite of the rapid social, political, and economic changes in Europe and America that have caused the decline of Christianity in both number and influence in the modern times, there is no doubt that the Christian religion remains the religion that has made the greatest impact on humanity. Indeed, divisions, leadership tussles, and scandals have dwarfed and dented the image of this great religion. Looking back to the past these aberrations constitute a painful area of study in Church history. Leaders of the Christian religion can no longer speak with one voice. And its most current scandal is that it has an uncountable number of voices claiming autonomy, authority, and leadership. This setback notwithstanding, Christianity in whatever form it is proclaimed today can still claim to influence the lives of many people all over the world, directly or indirectly. It has wielded great power - political and religious - in the past. And in the modern times religious institutions have continued to influence and revolutionize the political, cultural, and social lives of people.

No matter what modern man thinks about Jesus, the Christ - the founder of Christianity - He remains the most popular figure whose teachings have had perennial impact on the lives of the majority of humankind - ancient and modern. And whatever conclusions modern critical research arrives at regarding His nature - the Jesus of history, the Jesus of faith, Son of God, Son of Man, Prophet, Teacher, Master, Messiah, or the Anointed of God - Jesus the Christ

still remains the greatest revolutionary religious leader of all times. His "Doings" and "Sayings" have become a standard of evaluation of what is good, and honorable. Who would contest the Golden Rule: "Do unto others whatever you would have them do unto you?" [Matthew 7:12] Some aspects of the "revolution" and revolutionary ideas are contained in his extraordinary teachings and confrontational stance against political and religious authorities of his day. Whether traceable to him directly, to his disciples and followers, or to the second generation preachers, the importance of the Christian teachings shifts from "Who" to "What" - the values and the perennial meaning of his message addressed to listeners of all generations.

Generally, therefore, Christianity has had an attractive face. Even its enemies - non-believers and other rival religious bodies - Traditional or Non-Christian - have nothing better to offer mankind, in terms of education and charity - always identifying with social, and economic, and even political development. Moreover Christianity has massive manpower and material resources to sustain its programs in various fields of human endeavor. It is these other engagements in education, healthcare and social development that have give the Church an admirable image before converts as people were being evangelized. In its two thousand years of service to mankind, Christianity has exerted great influence on peoples of various creeds. Perhaps it has done more than what any government of the world could do. If this assertion can be supported by facts and figures, why is the Christian Church losing ground in its work of evangelization at the close of the 20th century? Many factors are contributing adversely to the decline of Christianity. A further survey of these factors might help toward a re-assessment of the Church's mission in the third millenium.

What is happening to the Churches - Self-inflicted Wounds

As the celebrations marking the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the new millenium gather momentum, there are more than a few worried Christians, Church leaders, and writers who wonder at what is happening to the Churches. Things are rapidly falling apart within the once-powerful Christian Churches that had up till recently commanded a large following. Through the Christian Churches, Europe and other colonial powers extended their powers of influence to distant lands, where they exercised political control. Politics and religion joined to cast a spell on conquered people as they, by coercion or persuasion, embraced the religion of their conquerors. It was through the evangelizing mission work of the Christian Churches of Europe and America that Africans -

formerly thought to be animists, heathens, and pagans, without knowledge of God - embraced Christianity and its splinter denominations and sects. Africans conquered by the Muslim jihadists became Muslims. Christian Churches, denominations, and sects that dot the face of Africa today are representatives of their counterparts in Europe and America. How could Africans have learned to live with the bitter lessons of Catholic and Protestant rivalry in Ireland and Northern Ireland if the Irish Catholic and Protestant missionaries did not establish their national Churches in the kingdoms of Africa conquered by Britain? Likewise Brazil became the most populous Catholic nation in the world having been conquered by Catholic Spain. The Mother Churches continued to exercise influence on the Churches they set up in the Missions until things went wrong. The younger Churches have not stopped wondering what was happening to the Mother Churches. Some authors are offering some answers and solutions to the problems plaguing the Mother Churches. There is no doubt their reflections would help as we try to imagine what the third millenium Church would look like.

Thomas Reeves,^{xxi} thinks that what the Mother Churches - primarily the "Seven Sisters" of American Protestantism - is suffering from is a self-inflicted wound. He sees these Mainline, Established, and Traditional Christian Protestant Churches [American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalian, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church] as a dysfunctional family. Reeves tracks the decline of these Churches in terms of membership and influence. There is no doubt that the author's searchlight on the American Protestant Churches extends to most of the other Christian Churches all over the world, including the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. His conclusions have far-reaching consequences for the emerging third millennium Church.

Some factors contribute to the phenomenon of the "Empty Church." Reeves says that since the 1960s the leaders in these denominations have shifted the Churches' focus from salvation to politics - a particular brand of politics - and in doing so, they have alienated their ordinary members. He declared: "The public, in large part, has no idea of the crazy things the leadership and the clergy in these Churches are doing." But, he adds "the people in the pews know the effects, and they respond by staying home."^{xxii} The steady decline of Mainline Churches in both influence and membership over the last 30 years can also be attributed to loss of ground in Christianity's task of pricking the moral conscience of the people. "Christianity has to be at war with the world, or it isn't authentic," says Reeves. Liberal Protestantism has been accommodating the

world since the 1960s - in biblical criticism since the late 19th century. So these Churches have proved to be no match for the poisons that have poured into the public life of its members. They have become echoes of National Public Radio and popular newsmagazines. They have become worldly and embarrassed by the Gospel. They have been unsympathetic to the claims of those who believed, as most Christians have always believed, that the supernatural is real. And that has caused them to disintegrate.

In fact what most critics like Reeves are saying is that by lowering the standard of Christian morality, in the false illusion of modernity, the Mainline Churches have alienated a large segment of their membership who saw their Churches were losing sense of direction. These disillusioned members of the Mainline Churches have not been amused by most of their Churches' "modernization programs" that included radical feminism, accommodation of gays, and rapid "laicization" of many Church ministries. By ignoring most moral issues plaguing modern society or by not taking a clear stand on them, most of the Mainline Churches have lost credibility as the spokespersons, and prophets of God - the God who demands "obedience, rather than sacrifice, and submission rather than the fat of rams." (I Samuel 15.22) In frustration, many have abandoned their Mother Churches and joined the evangelical Churches, where preachers confront them with their iniquities and provoke them to weep publicly at religious crusades and before large television cameras, as they ask for God's forgiveness and promise to amend their lives. Unless there is a radical change in the sense of mission, the phenomenon of "Empty Churches" will remain longer with the Mainline Churches.

Although the Christianity in its 2000 years of history met with great success in the salvation of humankind, there have been many recorded areas of failure. There are problems that demand attention. Attempts have been made at various times over the millennium to resolve them. But the fact that the same problems - and or new ones - continue to create setbacks shows that inadequate attention has been given to them that solutions have yet to be found. Therefore at this moment in the history of Christianity, it is imperative that all concerned Christians, Church leaders, experts and novices alike should take a close look at Christian faith to assess the Church's **successes and failures**. This cannot be a moment of bickering, but a moment of sober reflection and truth, that the Church be better prepared and well armed to continue its work in the new millennium. To find adequate solutions to problems in any field, there is always need to examine what has gone wrong. Such close examination of issues exposes areas that have gone sour; helps to determine what has contributed to

the deterioration and may point to possible solutions. As most of the controversies surrounding the post-Conciliar Church find their various schools of thought in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States, most of our observations and conclusions will reflect the situation of the Church in these places. A large part of the African continent was still "missionary" before and during the Second Vatican Council. But we will not ignore the reactions emerging from the Third World Church in these reflections. Evidently the first recipients of the gospel of salvation are no longer in the majority. It is providential that the seeds, the missionaries planted are bearing fruit. If the former mission lands are encouraged they will contribute toward the global new evangelization. With all hands on deck the universal Church will continue the mission of making disciples of all nations. The older Churches have still significant role to play. But where they fail, it is likely that the younger and newer Churches will assume the leadership.

CHAPTER TWO

The Catholic Church at the End of an Age: Discordant Voices and Crisis of Faith

The Catholic Church at the end of the second millennium has to contend with more crises than most of the other Mainline Established Mother Churches that have exercised much power and influence over the Christian world for the past century. In fact, the Catholic Church is becoming a "minority Church." In this chapter some of the current problems of the Catholic Church will be examined. The results of such examination will help to determine its future in the third millennium and whether it will survive the fierce competition with the numerous Christian Churches for dominance and popularity. It is obvious that the Catholic Church has much to worry about the institution and the fate of millions of its members who have abandoned the Catholic faith and joined the Evangelical Churches. Most of those who have not joined the other Churches are not practicing their faith. One can talk about "Post Christianity" in the West. The Church leaders are already calling for a new beginning, an urgent need for "re-christianization" and "new Evangelization." To regain influence and the lost ground, the Catholic Church may indeed need "**to begin again.**" That an entire exercise should be repeated might indicate that methods and strategies that have

been used have not worked or have become obsolete. Some business companies and unions often retrench a portion of their workers on account of changes in world markets and demand for products. Some cut their size to avoid a total collapse of business. Others decide to reorganize the entire structure in order to realize more profits in the future. Even where significant achievements have been recorded, there may sometimes be need to consider new ways of making maximum profit. The goal being pursued may not be achieved, unless necessary changes are made.

When one decides to cancel an exercise already started and to begin it afresh, one thing is evident. A mistake has been made and it is necessary to stop and re-examine certain steps already taken. To achieve the desired goals, new and even more sophisticated ways of resolving peculiar problems may have to be introduced. But as with human nature old ways die hard. Often not everybody recognizes that something was wrong with the old system. For these people, referred to as 'conservatives', there is no need to upset the old system. Why not let the *sleeping dog lie*? **Reformers** and **Conservatives** often clash and the consequences of their disagreement can be disastrous for humanity or an entire institution. The phenomenon is not new. It is not unusual to find even among the highest Church officials those who close their eyes to the evils that beset the Church and its institutions. These people are neither ready to re-examine the issues at stake and discard what is no more useful nor are they ready to embrace what is new and perhaps the most useful.

Reformers and Conservatives: Discordant Voices in the Catholic Church: An Ominous Sign of Failure

Discipline and complete compliance to her authoritative teachings have not been among the true marks of the Catholic Church. While in the past many thought all was well, that discipline reigned supreme in the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church, and that the Pope's authority could not openly be challenged from within the Church's hierarchy, these days it is no longer rare to witness open disagreements and confrontations among high-ranking leaders of the Catholic Church. The United States examples illustrate clearly the present problems of the Church as we approach the beginning of the Third millennium. While disagreements among bishops and theologians may be partly due to personalities and frayed tempers, they also point to underlying conflicts in the Church at large and to deeply opposing views among bishops, the clergy, and the people on how to deal with Church's problems.

When Archbishop **John Quinn**, the retired Archbishop of San Francisco and former president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, gave a talk at Oxford University in England on June 29, 1996, he never realized that his speech would make headlines around the world and would consequently prompt reactions. There were indeed positive and negative reactions from various quarters and personalities. In his speech the Archbishop called for major reforms in the Roman Curia, major reforms in the exercise of papal primacy, and also major reforms in the ways of selecting bishops. The Archbishop also called for a **New Ecumenical Council** and discussions on a variety of Church issues. These Church issues include **ordination of women, contraception, general absolution and reception of Sacraments by the divorced and remarried, the role of bishops' conferences, and the quest for Church unity** (which the Archbishop said required changes in the style of governance in the Catholic Church.) Archbishop Quinn made it clear that there was widespread concern over these and other issues in the Church today. Other issues dealt with **the appointment of bishops, the grave decline in the availability of Mass for the people, the cognate issue of the celibacy of clergy, the role of Episcopal conferences, the role of women, and the issue of ordination of women.** In fact a fundamental problem was evident, namely the decision of the Holy See on specific issues and the way in which decisions are reached and implemented.

For instance, are decisions imposed without proper **consultation** with the episcopate and without appropriate **dialogue**? Are bishops appointed against an overwhelming objection of people and priests in a given diocese? wondered Quinn. For Quinn, the **Curia**, which is the administrative structure of the papal staff, sometimes acts as if it is a "tertium quid" - a third force between the pope and the bishops. "When this happens", said Quinn, "in place of the dogmatic structure comprised of the pope and the rest of the episcopate, there emerges a new and three-fold structure, namely the Pope, the Curia and the **Episcopate**. This makes it possible for the Curia to see itself as exercising oversight and authority over the college of bishops."

"A Profound and Wise Analysis of the Church?"

As would be expected, the Archbishop's recommendations provoked mixed reactions from various Church leaders and theologians, from within and outside United States. The reactions of other people, especially bishops and theologians, have definitely helped observers and critics of the Catholic Church to assess its future as the Church approaches the beginning of the third millenium. As widely

reported in various papers in the United States, Archbishop **Rembert Weakland** of Milwaukee called the speech by Archbishop Quinn "a profound and wise analysis of the Church today." As far as Archbishop Weakland was concerned, Quinn had opened the needed discussion on the right issues, issues that will not go away and that are very much at the heart of the ecumenical dialogue. He praised Quinn's comments particularly on the ways the primacy of the pope might be exercised differently "to make this Petrine ministry less of an obstacle to unity". Many theologians also hold the view that the doctrine of papal *infallibility* needs a new definition in order to promote ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox Churches.

There was also need, according to Quinn, to assert the doctrine of *subsidiarity* within the Church. This would lessen the control and interference from Rome in matters of Church governance. In fact Quinn was calling for a major shift of authority in the Church - away from the Pope and the Roman Curia, toward diocesan bishops or national Episcopal conferences. With a view to more local option on many matters Archbishop Quinn also observed that **consultation with priests and laity on the selection of bishops** had been reduced greatly since the early years following the Second Vatican Council. He said that a "happy medium" was urgently needed between one extreme of **election of bishops** by everyone in the local Church and the other extreme of the **appointment of bishops** by Rome without sufficient involvement and trust on the part of the local Church. Also in reaction to Quinn's propositions, **Jesuit Father Francis A. Sullivan**, who taught theology for decades at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, called Archbishop's Quinn's talk one of the most important public statements on Church reform by an experienced high-ranking Catholic prelate since the late 1960s.

Skepticism

While Archbishop Weakland and Father Sullivan were full of praises for Quinn, **Cardinal O'Connor** of New York believed Quinn was misinterpreting Pope John Paul II, who in his 1995 encyclical on Christian unity had called "all the pastors to explore together ways in which papal primacy might be better exercised in the service of Christian unity." According to O'Connor, the Pope's call for dialogue in his encyclical was an invitation to "Church leaders and theologians of other Christian persuasion, rather than to Roman Catholics." "Archbishop Quinn clearly considers it to be a call to Roman Catholic bishops, theologians and others to make recommendations to the people," Cardinal O'Connor said. But whatever may be the correct interpretation of the Pope's

letter, O' Connor was very skeptical of Quinn's speech and issues raised. For O'Connor the various popular controversies that Quinn referred to in his speech did not need further discussion. He preferred clarifications or explanation of Church's teaching on those issues to fresh discussions on issues like *clerical celibacy* or the *ordination of women*.

Although Archbishop Quinn expected criticisms of his proposition, he actually received support from many Church leaders and theologians who might have lacked the courage to come out in full support of such important statements. In a separate press release in question-answer form, Quinn said he expected to be accused of heresy or disloyalty for his remarks, "especially in today's climate, where orthodoxy has been distorted in many quarters into a pseudo-orthodoxy called integralism." "Integralism is more rigidity than fidelity, more fear of error than confidence in truth, more blind adherence to forms than an ever-deepening penetration of substance," he said.

Was it not fear of criticism that made Quinn, in one of his responses to critics explain that in urging discussion of a wide range of current Church issues by a council, he was not necessarily advocating changes in Church teachings or policies but arguing that one of the chief obstacles to Christian unity is "the way issues are dealt with by the Roman Curia?" Surely it must be admitted that most of the concerns Quinn expressed were not limited to the American Church. As he rightly pointed out: "Recent events in Switzerland, Austria, Germany, France, Brazil, Africa, and the United States are only one indication of how widespread this concern is."

There is no doubt that Archbishop Quinn's call for major changes in the way the Church operates now will continue to attract more criticisms positive or negative. But whatever the case, it is certain that the call for major changes in the Church and for a *Third Vatican Council* should be viewed with seriousness. Such a meeting of the world's chief shepherds is long overdue. Issues that should be discussed are many. It may not be easy to arrive at a consensus, but at least it will be a most opportune movement for the Church to review its teachings and make changes where the demand for such changes can no more be ignored.

Catholic Common Ground Project: "Called to be Catholics"

The controversies over Archbishop Quinn's speech at Oxford were still raging when the late **Cardinal Joseph Bernardine** of Chicago unveiled an initiative for bringing together polarized Catholics in dialogue. An advisory committee of 23 Catholic leaders and experts were appointed to oversee the **Catholic**

Common Ground Project, a 3,000-word "Called to be Catholic" document. In it the initiators claimed that Catholicism was being deprived of its vitality and power by distrust, acrimony, deadlock, and a dynamic of fear and polarization. It therefore urged divided Catholics to join in constructive dialogue, emphasizing their common faith and commitment. It asked them to devote their energies to the central tasks of building the Church and strengthening its institutions, its missions and its witness to the world. Catholics, whatever their particular interests or agenda, "must be accountable to the Catholic tradition and to the Spirit, in the Church that brings to us the revelation of God and Jesus," the document said. There can be "legitimate debate, discussion and diversity" about aspects of Church teaching and tradition, it said. But "accountability does demand serious engagement with the tradition and its authoritative representatives. It rules out the pop scholarship, sound-bite theology, unhistorical assertions and flippant dismissals that have become all too common on both the right and the left of the Church," the document said. According to the initiators of the project, conferences would be organized while the committee on Catholic Common Ground Project started its work. During such conferences, representatives of different viewpoints will be able to meet with the goal of trying to understand the other's perspective rather than attack it.

But as it appeared not even all the high-ranking Church leaders in the United States appreciated or supported the above project. **Discordant voices** were heard from above. It was reported that the Cardinals of Boston and Washington DC described the statement framing the "Catholic Common Ground Project" as a flawed document. They said it sought to promote dialogue with dissidents at the expense of truth. According to Cardinal Law of Boston, "The fundamental flaw in this document is its appeal for 'dialogue' as a path to 'common ground'. By this he meant that the Church already has 'common ground' found in sacred Scripture and tradition and mediated to us through the authoritative and binding teaching of the Magisterium.

As far as this high-ranking Catholic prelate was concerned, the "pastoral crisis" of the Church stemmed from **loss of faith** and consequently the inability of Christ's faithful to accept the **authority of the Church**. There are some issues that may not require debate or dialogue in the Church. In short, there are certain problems that cannot be resolved by dialogue or **majority opinion**. For the Cardinal, "Dissent from revealed truth or the authoritative teaching of the Church cannot be dialogued away... Truth and dissent from truth are not equal partners in ecclesial dialogue." Cardinal Hickey of Washington, D.C. also echoed many of Cardinal Law's criticisms, namely, "We cannot achieve Church unity by accommodating those who dissent from Church teaching, whether on

the left or on the right. To compromise the faith of the Church is to forfeit our 'common ground' and risk deeper polarization."

Controversies, dissension, and discordant voices are not new in the Church and are not phenomena associated with the Catholic Church in United States. Most of the European Catholics and their leaders have their own problems. Germany is one. Peter Seewald in the interview with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,^{xxiii} provided the ugly situation of the Church in that country. As Seewald observed

It seems that nowhere is there so much unrest, discord, and apostasy from the old faith as in Germany and the German-speaking countries... Since the First Vatican Council, more than a hundred years ago, there hasn't been as vociferous a protest against the Pope and the Roman Curia as there is today.^{xxiv}

The German problem is not limited to clerics and theologians calling for more reforms in the Catholic Church and attacking most of the Church's teachings; the movement toward a total rejection of Christianity and what it stands for is widespread.

A large part of the population is calling for a sharper separation of Church and state. There is talk of removing the mention of God from the Constitution, of eliminating religious holidays, of ceasing to observe Sunday, and of abolishing the Church tax. Crucifixes in classroom became a constitutional controversy.^{xxv}

The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith is in the position to appreciate the dilemma of the German Church and the people. He thinks that an excess of German self-accusation should be avoided. Countries like France, Spain, Italy, or Great Britain also have their anti-Christian movements and their inner-Church problems, he observes. But "Germany does have, of course, a historical burden all its own, which has grown very heavy since 1933-1945. And the question of what actually happened to our people that something like that could take place is one we must ask with great seriousness."^{xxvi} **Reformers and Conservatives, Moderates and Radicals, Leftists and Rightists** are terms that have been used in both Church and politics to describe experts' and ordinary people's divergent views on specific issues. Sometimes it has been possible to reach a common ground and save a particular institution from impending disaster. It takes honesty and courage to face problems and resolve

issues at stake. But the real disaster is the pretense that there is nothing wrong to worry about! Some problems need honest, brave, and courageous examination and resolution.

The Second Vatican Council

Tension runs high when supporters and opponents of the Second Vatican Council clash. For the "enemies" and "supporters" of the Council, "**Pre-Vatican versus Post-Vatican**" rhetoric has often become the dividing line between what is considered good, spiritual, full of flavor, sacred, valid, lasting, and enriching and what is considered worldly, profane, transitory, experimental, destructive, and insipid. Vatican II is blamed to a great degree for all the calamities that have befallen the Catholic Church in Europe and America. These calamities range from secularization to and almost complete loss of faith in God and the Church. As far as Reverend John J. Walter, a founding member of the Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy and the editor of its quarterly journal, *The Priest*, is concerned, it is indeed *not Vatican II* but the **Post-Second Vatican Church** that is to blame for the confusion, the discordant voices, and the "civil war" in the Catholic Church. In other words, the Second Vatican Council did a nice job, but the leadership of the Post Vatican II Church has failed to carry out correctly the **decrees** of the Council. It is likewise possible that the faithful have refused to listen to the voice of the Spirit and the leadership of the Church. In his article titled, "**Why we need the new Catechism,**"^{xxvii} Walter strongly believes that most of the teachings of Second Vatican Council have been distorted, misunderstood, or misapplied. The distortion, misunderstanding, or misapplication has led to disastrous consequences for the Church. The immediate sign of the disaster is the weakening or total loss of faith of a majority of Catholics from every rank and file of the Church. This is why he points to the New Catechism of the Catholic Church as a handbook of the Catholic faith. Abandoning the source that enlightens and explains the faith while relying on speculation, controversy and the urge for more reforms is a worse calamity.

John Walter^{xxviii} bemoans the situation of the Catholic faith in the secularized Western world. Throughout the affluent West institutional religion has been struck down by a debilitating decay. The emergent secularized society is largely dominated by confused agnostics, practical atheists, and hardened materialists, set heart and mind on purely earthly rewards. The ensuing sapping of our priceless heritage of Christian culture deeply confuses our fellow Christians, propelling many of them into apostasy from the faith. An almost

total loss of Christian values is said to have roots on the subversion of the traditional family unit. For Walter, all of this springs from a **neo-pagan** value system which, in large measure, has succeeded in corrupting the Western world's Judaeo-Christian moral foundation. "In its place has been substituted a fundamentally godless, hedonist and amoral ethic. Comparatively few Catholics now practice their faith. Instead, an obsession with the paranormal is fast superseding concern for the supernatural." But the real crisis does not lie simply in this massive tide of unbelief and pseudo-scientific skepticism. What is most regrettable, according to Walter is that "not only has the Post-Vatican II Church *failed* to combat this skeptical cynicism effectively but she has been forced to witness the ongoing infection and defection of her remaining members." Perhaps the teachings of the Second Vatican Council have been distorted. What about the Council's teaching on **Religious Freedom**, for example? Has it had any effect on modern man's understanding and interpretation of the natural moral law and the *Ten Commandments*, which in effect influence moral behavior? Walter thinks that the secularist standpoint is routinely upheld by a misappropriated notion of *religious freedom*, which he says is *falsely* attributed to the teachings of Vatican II. He explains:

Quite simply, this is not the Church's teaching. It is an ideological stance, in tune with the standards of behavior acceptable to secular society. It errs by interpreting the religious liberty taught by Vatican II as a personal autonomy, an unbridled freedom from restraint. What Vatican II actually taught about religious freedom is the right to be unimpeded by external force or coercion from doing what one conscientiously judges is objectively right and good.^{xxix}

Francis Cardinal Arinze of Nigeria^{xxx} - President of the Vatican Commission for Non-Christian Religion - has no doubt that the Council's teachings on religious freedom have been distorted. The Cardinal agrees with Walter that what Vatican II taught is that no one should by force, coercion, or any other "hidden agenda" be made to embrace any religious faith unwillingly. This distortion or misunderstanding of the Council's teaching applies also to some areas of the Catholic liturgy. Taking the Latin - the traditional language of the Catholic Church and liturgy before Vatican II - Francis Cardinal Arinze explains that Vatican II never abolished Latin as one of the languages of the modern Catholic liturgy. In his words, "Vatican II never sent Latin on a holiday." Latin, among all the vernacular languages of the world, can still be used in the celebration of the mass.

There is no doubt that teaching on religious freedom, autonomy of conscience, and human rights and their violations have had great impact on modern man's moral behavior and ideals. Otherwise, how comes it that people who had closely followed the Church's teaching on sin and evil have suddenly made up their minds on what constitutes evil or good. The situation nonetheless has been compounded by the secular state's readiness to legislate and impose for example death penalty, contraception, sterilization, abortion, euthanasia, etc. God's commandments and the precepts of the Church therefore have no place in the life of the people. As long as an action can be shown to be "politically correct," why should one bother about what the Church says?

Not only liberal Catholics distort or misapply some of the teachings of Vatican II. Some **conservatives** are going their own way, thinking that every one else has gone astray. They see themselves as the "remnants of the true Catholic traditionalists." Indeed most of the ultraconservative Catholic traditionalists still cling to the old Pre-Vatican II Church prayer books, including the breviary and the missal. They do not want to associate with anything that bears the stamp of the Second Vatican Council. For them it is the Latin mass or nothing. Judging from what they refer to as the "liturgical confusion" of the Post Vatican Church, most conservative Catholics think that by initiating liturgical reforms, the Second Vatican Council was a woeful failure. Therefore as far as most of the older generation **pre- Vatican II** adults are concerned, the Second Vatican Council must be held responsible for the "mess" in the Catholic liturgy! They pose a rhetorical question: "Was it not the Council Fathers who initiated the changes that destroyed the beautiful liturgy of the Catholic Church - the **Latin mass** and the gorgeous ceremonies of the Catholic Church, filled with pageantry and enriching mysteries of the divine?" It is interesting to read some of the views expressed by many of the older generation of U.S. Catholics concerning the changes in the Catholic Church. They insist that these changes have contributed to the disastrous decline in Church attendance, as well as the general confusion and loss of faith in the Catholic Church. They strongly believe that a return to the past will help to remedy the present ills of the rapidly dwindling Catholic Church. As bitter as these people are, they are ready to fight to any length to see that sanity is restored to the Catholic Church, especially in the area of liturgy, which they claim has been abused and bastardized by radical priests, bishops, and their allies. Many are ready to join any ultra-rightwing Movement of Traditionalist Catholicism such as that began by the dissident French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. They are the authors of the numerous burgeoning apocalyptic visions of the end of the modern Church directed by Satan and his apostles, the rise of

the anti-pope, and the final destruction of all that is new in the present Church.

The lamentations, the "songs of sorrow" and nostalgia for the past are overwhelming, as accusing fingers are pointed at Vatican II as responsible for the loss in *number* and *quality* of priests, particularly in the Western Church. Was it not the Council Fathers who opened the windows of the Church (to let in fresh air), thereby making it possible for most of the clergy to jump out and "crash," abandoning their God-assigned ministry? Those who summoned courage to remain as pastors of souls are not even faring better than those who courageously left the priesthood. Many of these 'unworthy pastors of souls' in fact should be challenged and forced to declare their stand, whether they are 'for Yahweh or Baal?' In the United States, many concerned ultra-right-wing Catholics have demonstrated against some bishops and the clergy, asking those they describe as "unworthy ministers of God" to resign. They have made their grievances public and in writing, appealing to Rome to remove some bishops and priests from their posts and *laicize* them. One critic of the modern clergy offers reasons why he thinks some priests have still retained a good image in spite of their failures:

One reason is that by force of long habit, residual respect remains for the clergy as institution. Despite recent departures from the "straight and narrow" by some, ranging from secular dress to serious 'legal' sins, Christ's ministers remain for the most part well intended, conscientious and worthy of respect. The situation is perhaps similar to honoring the 'office of the president,' while sometimes thinking very little of a given incumbent. In the military, it has been long ingrained that you "salute the bars," not necessarily the person wearing them.^{xxxix}

But whatever such respect for his sacred ministry may entail, the pastors of souls of all Christian denominations have many questions to answer. Lay people have leveled a number of accusations against the clergy. The accusations range from unfaithfulness to the vow of celibacy to mismanagement of Church funds. Ministers of God, who are referred to as "pathological pastors" are accused of various sex-scandals and their bishops are blamed for not taking proper action to discipline the offenders. Some bishops and higher-ranking Catholic prelates have not performed any better. Some have been forced to resign and relinquish all ecclesiastical duties at the request of the Catholic Church's hierarchy in the Vatican. Some have been deposed on account of their stand on theological and moral issues like **ordination of women priests, married clergy,** and

acceptance of homosexuals. Those who press for further reforms in the Church are further discredited by conservatives. As far as the far-right-wing Catholics and the present Catholic leadership are concerned, these extreme liberal bishops and priests should not be allowed to function in the Catholic Church. They may take to the lay state if they wish. Priest-theologians who demand noisily for the abrogation of clerical celibacy receive little sympathy from most Catholic faithful. It is widely believed that such priests have lost their faith and may not even be practicing the vow they are agitating to be done away with. As for the debate on clerical celibacy, sympathy comes from an unexpected party. The married clergy of the Protestant Churches have done no better in matters of fidelity to their marriage vows. One "sympathetic" wife of a Protestant minister wondered why people should molest young Catholic priests who are "making all efforts to live the life of celibacy." "What of our own husbands who run after other women?" she asked. From another perspective, some Catholics are not worried about the fuss over clerical celibacy. One staunch U.S. Catholic woman said about the celibacy: "I have understood that it technically means not having a specific partner - *not* necessarily abstaining from sexual relations." Such misconceptions surrounding clerical celibacy make further clarifications by the competent Catholic authorities imperative. On the accountability of Church funds, many parishes have dragged their pastors to court and litigations and lawsuits have closed down some Churches in the West.

To add insult to injury the recent practice in the Catholic Church of admitting **Protestant pastors** who defect and join the Catholic Church together with their wives is scandalous to many Catholics. The practice does not present good picture, particularly to the younger generation of Catholic clergy who must put up with the celibate life. The practice of re-accepting the "fallen priests," namely those who defected and took to married life or another lifestyle after many years of absence from the Church is for many Catholics, and particularly those of the Third World an intolerable situation. The faithful accept the teaching that "once a priest, a priest forever." But there is a limit to everything. It may be a sign of weakness on the part of the Catholic Church, as these liberal policies have their effect on the faith of Catholics all over the world. There is no surprise that many are calling for a Third Vatican Council to deliberate on these serious issues. Further clarifications are no doubt a healthy exercise for the Catholic Church.

Post-Conciliar Liturgical Abuses: Too Much Inculturation

When Pope John XXIII launched the Second Vatican Council on a positive note, setting as its purpose the updating (*aggiornamento*) of the Roman Catholic Church, the program of liturgical reforms was uppermost in the minds of Council fathers, theologians and most Catholics. Pope Paul VI, who continued the Council after Pope John's death in 1963, endorsed those changes. The initial reaction to the Council was generally favorable. But as currents of change continued to sweep through the Church opposition to the Council set in. The major opposition to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council was led by the retired (now dead) French **archbishop Lefebvre**, who in 1970 founded an international group known as the Priestly Fraternity of St Pius X. Lefebvre and his conservative Catholic group feared that the reforms of the Vatican II had become too radical. Since the death of Lefebvre, organized dissent by conservative Catholics has continued to grow. Opposition to changes in the Church's liturgy has become a rallying point for those whose discontent with change runs far deeper. Launching their attacks from dissatisfaction with what certain opposition groups refer to as "miserable failure in liturgical experiments," it is obvious that the group in the United States that identifies itself the "New Oxford Review Movement" has much to worry about as their following publication shows:

In many Catholic parishes today, the sense of the sacred - of mystery and majesty and even of worship itself - has largely been banished. The bells, incense, votive candles, and communion rail are gone. The tabernacle with the reserved Sacrament can't be found. Elegant statues of the saints are locked in the basement, replaced by balloons, banners with greeting-card sentiments, and other dime-store decorations. The organ gathers cobwebs. The sanctuary has become a stage. And the kneelers are now being ripped out, the crucifix taken down.^{xxxii}

If **sacred images, sacramentals**, articles of worship and furniture that used to add color to the Catholic worship, are for the most part not found in the Churches, what transpires at mass is another source of worry to many traditional Catholics as the publicity continues:

Homilists pander with (unfunny) jokes and (not quite the latest) pop-psychology blather. The words of the liturgy are impoverished upon by politically correct clerics and lectors with weird agendas. And we must clap, clap, clap for the band and the liturgical dancers and clowns - we aren't making a joyful noise unto the Lord, but only unto the amateurish

entertainers. Catholics who are alienated by trivialized or freakish masses often jump ship for an Evangelical Church, or just stay in bed.^{xxxiii}

There are many disillusioned Catholics in the United States and all over Europe who believe that "too much **Inculturation**" in liturgical reform has ruined Catholic worship. They make it clear that with their protests they will continue to fight until the "damaged liturgy has been repaired." "We articulate the Catholic faith in all its splendor and truth. We don't just chronicle liturgical horror stories, we cover the full range of issues of concern to orthodox Catholics."^{xxxiv} A raging controversy has centered mostly on what many conservative Catholics refer to as "the evils of liturgical abuses in the Western Church." Inculturation or adaptation was meant to bring about changes in the Catholic liturgy, particularly the mass, to make the celebration more meaningful to the people. For the non-European Catholics, the program of liturgical reform was the greatest achievement of the Vatican II. Indeed by allowing cultural adaptations in the Catholic liturgy the faithful have much to gain. Africans in particular were liberated from **Euro-centric** spirituality and worship. In the words of one African-American Catholic, "By adapting the Catholic liturgy to the African way of worship, Vatican II liberated the African spirit that has been caged in the dull Euro-centric liturgical world."^{xxxv} But for some Catholics in the West, the "reformers" have gone too far. Many "liturgical **aberrations**" have been reported from different parts of the Western Catholic world. Most concerned Catholics are convinced that there never was a time when Catholic Church sanctuaries have been so dishonored by breaches of liturgical law. For these people, the root of the present crisis in the Catholic Church can be traced to 'liturgical collapse.' And in most cases the "protesters" are correct. Some of the most serious excesses or abuses include the following:

- The confusion of roles, especially regarding the priestly ministry and the role of the laity. (Indiscriminate shared recitation of the Eucharistic Prayers, homilies given by lay people, lay people distributing Holy Communion while the priests refrain from doing so.)
- An increasing loss of the sense of the sacred (abandonment of liturgical vestments, the Eucharist celebrated outside Church without real need, lack of reverence and respect for the Blessed Sacrament.) The traditional Catholic belief in the "Real Presence" is in jeopardy. The person at the center stage of this controversy and the consequent "loss of faith in the Real Presence" is the pastor. His attitude does not manifest much faith.

- Misunderstanding of the ecclesial nature of the liturgy (the use of private texts, the proliferation of unapproved Eucharistic Prayers, the manipulation of the liturgical texts for social and political ends.)
- Problematic Scripture and Lectionary translations in which the "inclusive language" or the so-called "neutral English" is used. References are made to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible in use in Canada, the Revised New American Bible, in the United States. The various English versions of the breviary - United States, Irish, Canadian, etc. - frustrate most of the clergy and the laity in the Third World countries, who must depend on the English-speaking big-power-nations for their copies of the Bible, the breviary and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

In an article in one conservative monthly Church newsletter, titled "**The Evil of Liturgical Abuse**,"^{xxxvi} the list of liturgical abuses is long. The author, Msgr. Vincent cites the following:

- Refusal to give Holy Communion on the tongue, or to those who are kneeling;
- Bowing instead of genuflecting after the elevation;
- Unwarranted so-called liturgical dancing;
- Leaving the sanctuary to give the kiss of peace;
- Changing, adding, or omitting words even during the Canon of the Mass.

For Msgr. Vincent, one should not dismiss such aberrations as minor. "The relative seriousness of a given rubric should not be our primary concern; our primary concern should be that any deviation from the rule of prayer diminishes the legacy of unity which Christ on the eve of his death asked his Father to bestow on his Church."^{xxxvii}

Among what conservatives describe as "**Liturgical Horrors**" are what the author referred to as "clown masses, rock masses and the profanation of the Church as a sacred place by the pagan 'Missa Gaia.'" According to reports a recent liturgical 'atrociousness' was the 'Tyme Mass' in London, during which the young danced in a nightclub atmosphere. A young woman gave the homily and sesame-seed loaves were consecrated in ceramic bowls. In most Churches, Catholics - liberals and conservatives alike - are dismayed that the "old" chalice, ciborium, paten, and other accompanying sacred vessels have been thrown away, some finding shelter in the old Church shelves or in the basements of the sacristy or the rectory. These sacred vessels have been replaced with "modern"

types in ceramic, plastic and wood. In most cases the modern and psychedelic sacred vessels cannot be distinguished from everyday drinking glasses and cups found in every home and kitchen cupboards.

In some European Catholic liturgies it has become common practice for people to take Communion as many times as the "hosts" go round. **Everyone present** at Mass is expected to participate in the Eucharistic meal. Indeed it often happens at funeral Masses when all present, including **non-Christians** and **non-Catholics**, join in the meal. In view of this practice, rampant in most European and American Masses, few critics could understand the hullabaloo about reports that the United States President, Bill Clinton and his wife, both non-Catholics, received Holy Communion at Mass in a South African Catholic Church during the president's African visit in March 1998. For Msgr. Vincent, some of these "**liturgical atrocities**," among them the current common practice, of reception by **all**, or nearly all, of Holy Communion at every Mass is destructive of faith and morals. "This is at a time when sexual sins are rampant and our confessionals are deserted."^{xxxviii} He thinks that many have been led to believing erroneously that the Mass forgives mortal sins. "The teaching of the Church is that the Mass is an antidote by which we are freed from daily faults and are preserved from mortal sins." There is an overwhelming confusion about the teaching of the Catholic Church on the "Real Presence," too. Many of the faithful are disturbed that an increasing number of Catholics do not know about, or believe in the mystery of the "Real presence" any more. "Are the consecrated bread and wine still the Body and Blood of Christ?" This is disturbing to many older Catholics.

The "Liturgical Punishment"

Who should be held responsible for what one critic called "this liturgical punishment?" Pastors of souls have been accused of helping destroy what remains of the Christian faith. The conservative Catholics of the New Oxford Review Movement^{xxxix} do not hide their feelings: "Even if these priests look Catholic, we may wonder if they're just pretending to be Catholic. Some clerics, we now know, have been pretending to be celibate. There are broken vows, violated trust, abuse of position, flagrant sin and a field day for those, especially in the media, who hate the Church. Suspicion cast upon our good, hardworking priests. It's all so sad." Admittedly, nobody is perfect, and the worried Catholics expect more of priests than they do of others:

The priesthood isn't just another occupation; it's a sacred calling. Priests are charged with the cure, not the ruin, of souls. Those who make excuses for wayward priests, bishops, and religious are logically required to excuse all the Jim Bakkers and Jimmy Swaggarts too. This would be to make a farce of Christianity. Sex scandals in the Catholic Church were few before the sex revolution of the 60s and before Vatican II got misinterpreted to mean 'anything goes.'^{xi}

Those priests who think that lifting the ban on celibacy would resolve the crisis in the Catholic priesthood may have to think twice. The members of the *New Oxford Review Movement* do not believe that the crisis lies there. A married priest is no cure for the Catholic Church's present ills. They point out that many of the recent offenders aren't attracted to the opposite sex. Mandatory celibacy isn't the problem. But there is a problem, and it is profound. "Broadly speaking, the real problem is that in certain sectors of Catholicism there's been a failure of faith in the teaching authority Christ conferred upon His Church, and consequently a tragic capitulation to a decadent culture. If the full Catholic faith isn't being preached from the pulpit, we shouldn't be too shocked if it isn't being observed in the rectory either."^{xii} Not only the members of the New Oxford Review Movement are dissatisfied with the activities of some of the Catholic clergy and most of the liturgical reforms going on in many Catholic parishes in Europe and America. Some ordinary Catholics also find it hard to hide their frustrations. One parishioner complained.

They have thrown away and destroyed most of the images, statues, and sacred objects, which hitherto decorated the Catholic Churches and recalled the sacred nature of the Church, the holiness of God and his saints. Today the altars have only thin linen, when the pastor cares to place anything at all on top of the sacrificial table. Only few candle-stands remain and some are not lighted during the Eucharistic liturgy. The tabernacle has disappeared or has been removed to a remote corner of the Church or the sanctuary. You find most of the Church's sacred vessels and images in the basements of the Churches or rectories!

Despite a justified need for discretion and the avoidance of destructive and harmful criticisms of the Church and its clergy, most of the aggrieved Catholics openly blame the bishops and pastors for the crisis of faith in the Catholic Church today. Joseph Foegen, a professor and contributor to many American

Church-related periodicals, questions the rationale behind this practice of what is still useful, good, old, and holy.

For example, why is the Blessed Sacrament no longer on the high altar - if indeed a high altar still exists? Given a real belief in the True Presence, it seems illogical to relocate that Presence to some out-of-the-way corner. Labeling it 'a place of reverent repose' fools nobody. Out of sight reveals a clear perception of 'second-class status,' an almost ludicrous rationalization when applied to the Deity.^{xlii}

In the pre- Second Vatican Church images and pictures of the saints and the Blessed Virgin helped people pray better and the sanctuary resembled the *Holy of Holies* of the Old Testament Temple of Yahweh. Today most Western Churches look no different from the city halls and public theaters. Some have lost their pews and worshippers are not offered an option to kneel and pray. Even when it is appropriate to kneel in silent adoration some of the pastors discourage worshippers from kneeling. Genuflection at Mass or before the Blessed Sacrament has become a taboo to most of the pastors as well as to the faithful. One woman remarked that her two sons, among many of the altar servers in their parish Church, fled and refused to serve again at Mass since their pastor never genuflected nor would he tolerate such a gesture by those around him. The worried lady lamented over what she refers to as a tragedy that has struck at the heart of the Eucharistic adoration in the Catholic Church. She wonders:

How many others, like myself, have even given up the pious practice of genuflecting, after a lifetime of doing so, because it 'feels foolish' bending one's knee to the empty chair of pastor or bishop, now the common focus of attention? Exaggerating perhaps, but it could be seen as near-idolatry!

A frustrated lady, writing to her son who had recently moved to a new city in the southwest United States, lamented the action of their new pastor. She was upset by the new pastor's "treatment" of the Blessed Sacrament. She wrote:

I could write pages on the 'mess' here in our parish Church since our new pastor took over, but my doctor told me to avoid stress to keep my blood pressure normal. I don't like the way the pastor says his mass or the continual changing of the altar. He has moved the Blessed Sacrament three times and this week it ended up in a shelf on the south wall. So

when you enter the Church, you are genuflecting to *his* chair in the middle of the altar - you never know where the Blessed Sacrament is.

This lady's displeasure with the pastor's treatment of the Blessed Sacrament offered enough reason for her and some other members of their parish to abandon their parish Church in search of a more consoling atmosphere of worship. She continued in her letter to her son: "The only time I get something out of Mass is when I travel out. We go to neighboring parishes where the pastors still celebrate what looks like the Catholic Mass. At least in these places the pastors haven't taken the Blessed Sacrament off the altar. It is still in the middle of the altar where it always was and should be, so it is the main focus when you come into the Church." The worried lady did not stop at boycotting her pastor's Mass, as part of the protest against "irresponsible innovations" in the Church. They even took their protest to their former pastor, then posted to a new parish, some 50 miles away. After a satisfying Sunday Mass the two ladies took their old pastor out to a breakfast and then "he had to listen to all our troubles at his former parish. That was enough to give him indigestion!"

The "Tridentine Mass" is contrasted with the "Post-Second-Vatican Mass." "Those days," lamented one 80-year-old woman, "one felt the presence of God in the Church and particularly at the consecration. The bells were rung and people knew when the consecration was taking place. Today bells have disappeared at mass in some Churches. At communion one received the Body and Blood of Christ with reverence and deep satisfaction. Today, the pastor and his Eucharistic ministers 'desecrate' the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The way they handle the sacred species shows that they have no more faith in the **Real Presence** of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament." The woman continued to question the rationale behind this show of disrespect to the holy and sacred. "Why should 5 to 8 men and women crowd the sanctuary of the Church to distribute holy communion to less than 50 people who come to receive communion? Often you see ordained concelebrating priests and deacons sitting idle while lay people called "Eucharistic ministers" distribute Holy Communion." This woman was not alone in her lamentation over the "dilution of the priestly ministry by non-ordained helpers." Joseph Foegen also questions this practice:

Another question crying out for a convincing answer is why the clergy tolerates ongoing dilution of its ministry by non-ordained helpers? Granted much can still be said for obedience to legitimate superiors. Granted also, the idealized benefits of 'participation.' Still, since clergy

are neither isolated from society nor superhuman, it would seem reasonable to expect at least a small whimper of respectful objection to a trend that seems to make those ordained "appear less" - to alert parishioners, if not to themselves.^{xliii}

As Foegan maintains, the bottom line would seem to be that, if 'anyone can do it,' that is, be a lector, distribute Communion, etc, who needs a priest? Yes, key functions remain. "Impossible" though it might seem, however, one wonders how long it will be before even they are gone! As functions are abdicated to lay persons - however good the intent - the fact of declining vocations becomes ever less surprising!

Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests

Many well-informed Catholic lay persons express serious concern about the abuses associated with their functions at the sacred liturgies. What are and what should be the "official practices" of the Church are contained in the document **"Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the sacred ministry of priest."**^{xliv} The Supreme Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, in audience on August 13th 1997 approved in former *specifica* the "Instruction" and ordered its promulgation. The scope of the document is to provide a clear, authoritative response to the many pressing requests that have gone to the Catholic Dicasteries from bishops, priests, and laity seeking clarification in the light of specific cases of new forms of "pastoral activity" of the non-ordained on both parochial and diocesan levels. The document is aware of abuses that creep into certain approved Church practices. It declares in the premise: "Though being born in very difficult and emergency situations and even initiated by those who sought to be genuinely helpful in the pastoral moment, certain practices have often been developed which have had very serious negative consequences and have caused the current understanding of true ecclesial communion to be damaged."

It is the mind of the Church that the laity should collaborate with the ordained minister in the work of evangelization. In effect, a collaboration of all the faithful exists in both orders of the Church mission; whether it is in the spiritual order, bringing the message of Christ and his grace, or, in the temporal one, permeating and perfecting secular reality with the evangelical spirit. This is especially true in the primary areas of evangelization and sanctification. It is in this sphere that most of all the lay Apostolate and the pastoral ministry complement each other. In these areas, the lay faithful of both sexes have

innumerable opportunities to be actively involved. But in this great field of complementary activity, whether considering the specifically spiritual and religious, or *consecratio mundi*, there exists a **more restricted area** - namely, the **sacred ministry of the clergy**. As these tasks are most closely linked to the duties of pastors (which office requires reception of the sacrament of orders), it is necessary that all who are in any way involved in this collaboration exercise particular care to safeguard the nature and mission of the sacred ministry and the vocation and secular character of the lay faithful. It must be remembered that “collaboration with” does not, in fact, mean “substitution for.”

ARTICLE 8 of the document outlines the functions of the **extraordinary minister of Holy Communion**, and makes it clear that such liturgical service is a response to the objective needs of the faithful especially those of the sick and to those liturgical assemblies in which there are particularly large numbers of the faithful who wish to receive Holy Communion. The canonical discipline concerning extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must be correctly applied so as to avoid generating confusion. The following are clearly underlined:

- A non-ordained member of the faithful, in cases of true necessity, may be deputed by the diocesan bishop, using the appropriate form of blessing for these situations, to act as an extraordinary minister to distribute Holy Communion outside of liturgical celebrations *ad actum vel ad tempus* or for a more stable period. In exceptional cases or in un-foreseen circumstances, the priest presiding at the liturgy may authorize such *ad actum*.
- Extraordinary ministers may distribute Holy Communion at eucharistic celebrations *only* when there are no ordained ministers present or when those ordained ministers present at a liturgical celebration are truly unable to distribute Holy Communion. They may also exercise this function at eucharistic celebration where there are particularly large numbers of the faithful and which would be excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordinary ministers to distribute Holy Communion. This function is *supplementary and extraordinary*.
- To avoid creating confusion, certain practices are to be avoided and eliminated where such have emerged in particular Churches for example: Extraordinary ministers receiving Holy Communion apart from the other faithful as though concelebrants; The habitual use of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at mass thus arbitrarily extending the concept of a great number of the faithful. All particular laws, customs and faculties conceded

by the Holy See *ad experimentum* or other ecclesiastical authorities, which are contrary to the foregoing norms, are hereby revoked.

The above "instructions" do not need further comments as they respond adequately to some of the questions most concerned Catholics are asking about abuses that have crept into the Catholic liturgy in some places. These abuses concern mainly the role of the lay ministers in the liturgical celebrations. An older gentleman joins in the lamentation.

In the past, not everybody came up for Holy Communion. We went to confession before receiving communion at mass. What do you see today? Everybody receives Holy Communion, including those that have not been to Church for the past years. At funeral masses even non-Catholics and atheists are given communion!

He does not understand why their pastor and the Eucharistic ministers should give Holy Communion to every Tom, Dick, and Harry who shows up at Mass. Angrily he asks: "Why is it that rarely or never do priests question from the pulpit - or even in private - the perceived illogic of parishioners receiving Communion at every attending Mass, but hardly ever the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation?" He was convinced that pastors are nearly 100% in favor of the current situation, and do not recognize the glaring imbalance. The answer to the question is not farfetched. A lady who claimed she was not in the state of grace and therefore unworthy to approach the communion rails on Sunday narrated her encounter with their pastor: "I asked him whether I could receive Holy Communion at the wedding since I had not been to confession." "Why not?" was his answer. The pastor further explained: "You are free to take communion. That is what the mass is all about." There was a story of a pastor who told a reporter of a Church magazine that for the 45 years he had ministered as a pastor and heard confessions of his parishioners he had not been to confession himself!

As for the reception of Holy Communion, the guidelines approved by the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments as well as the regulations drawn up by the various National Conferences of Catholic Bishops, have made it clear who should receive and under what conditions.^{xlv} If pastors adhere to these regulations there will be less confusion in the administration of the Sacraments in the Catholic Church today. It is necessary to take a close look at these regulations.

For Catholics

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason when there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

For our Fellow Christians

We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions, which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may be one" (Jn 17:21) Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those Churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily **not admitted** to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires **permission** according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 A7 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844 A7 3).

For Those Not Receiving Holy Communion

All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

For Non-Christians

We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While *we cannot admit them to Holy Communion*, we ask them to offer their prayers for peace and unity of the human family.

In most countries and Churches, depending on circumstances, priests are required by diocesan and National Conferences of Catholic Bishops' regulations to read out all the above or parts of the "Communion Guidelines." Most Orthodox Churches make it clear to people who attend their services that the Holy Communion is for the members of the Church who have prepared for it according to the rules laid down by the ecclesiastical authorities for the reception of the Holy Communion in the particular Church.

"Clericalization" vis-a-vis "Laicization"

Expressing disapproval of the current practice in which the Eucharistic ministers have almost taken over the function of the priest at the Holy Communion, one concerned Canadian Catholic exposes the amount of confusion surrounding the current practices. She likens the situation to what she called "clericalization of the laity." This would consequently imply "laicization of the clergy." "It is difficult to know which one came first, or which one was the cause of the other," she wonders. But whichever came first, she was sure "that this transformation is every bit as real as the clericalization of the laity, brought about by the explosion of lay ministries. In a letter to the editor of a Canadian Weekly "Western Reporter"^{xlvi} titled "Priests should purify sacred vessels," Jeanne McCusker of Edmonton, Canada, offers a definite example, illustrating how many priests abandon duties to the lay ministers, duties the priests themselves should do. McCusker has no doubts about the usefulness of extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, who are mandated to help priests distribute Communion when needed. But should this function of the extraordinary minister be over stretched? Any other good observer and concerned Catholic will agree with her:

I am more and more convinced, for example, that the priest should return to the duty of doing the purification of the sacred vessels after Communion and not leave this task to a lay minister. The results are perplexing, the species being left on a side table until after Mass, without special attention, as if this is no longer the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus remaining entirely present in the least particle or the smallest drop.

Following the Mass, we can observe lay ministers doing the "purification," often in a rudimentary way and, as often, while chatting and laughing away.^{xlvii}

Most of these "abuses" attributed to "much inculturation" in the Western Church have prompted many devoted Catholic lay persons to advocate seriously for a return to the Pre-Vatican Tridentine mass. A younger man in his early forties said he would be ready to travel any distance to attend a Latin Mass if any was being celebrated within or outside his diocese. "That is the real Mass" he insisted. "Whether I understand the words or not does not matter to me. It is better than what our pastor celebrates and which he calls Mass." Perhaps worried Catholics would save themselves some grief if they answered honestly about the Latin mass question. As for Latin Mass, it is unlikely that those in authority could offer much to satisfy those who hunger for it, precisely because fewer priests can claim a good command of Latin these days. Latin has been abandoned for long as a "dead language" and not much Latin is taught in the seminaries or theological colleges these days. There is no doubt that the situation will continue to worsen in the future. Who can assure you that the priests ordained from early 1980s can sing Gregorian chant? Who is to blame?

Whether Latin Mass, Greek Mass or one in Syriac - that would not worry some discontented Catholics. They would be happy if the pastor would take time to say any Mass well in *any* human language. A young American couple on vacation in Ireland wrote one of their friends: "We are now in the land of "hurry-up priests." One of them said his Sunday Mass in 22 minutes and his homily was less than 5 minutes. His daily Mass lasts 15 minutes. After last Sunday's Mass one of our children asked us, "Does this count for Mass?" There are many stories of concerned Catholics who had attended a "second" Mass elsewhere, having been convinced that the "first" one they attended failed in several ways to assure them that a Sunday obligation had been fulfilled! The couple and their kids were not amused at the changes they saw in Ireland. It is all the same sad story: "There are many beautiful Churches and statues here and surely this land at one time was very sacred. We fear that the greed, the consumption and the misplaced priorities that are rampant in America are finding their way here - and Ireland will falter on its 'holy way.'"

The Second Vatican Council – A "Blessing" or a "Curse?"

There is sufficient evidence from critics - Catholic and non-Catholics alike, eminent Church leaders and theologians - that the Second Vatican Council was

indeed the greatest event to reckon with in the 2000 years of Christianity. Its reforms expressed in its 16 documents addressed not only the formerly ignored or worrisome issues confronting the Catholic Church. They also responded to various questions touching the Church and the modern world. The phrase, "**If it had not been for the Vatican II...**" has become a cliché as Christians of various faiths as well as non-Christians explore the riches and fruits of the Second Vatican Council. The Protestants, for example, are happy to add their voices that without Vatican II, Catholics would still be referring to them as "heretics and schismatics," instead of "the separated brethren." Obviously without Vatican II, ecumenism or dialog with non-Christian religions would not have been possible. The social teachings of Vatican II have been greeted by all and sundry. The Church should also be involved in what is happening in the modern world and should no more remain aloof or silent or ignore the problems of the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the needy. The Church should take stand on issues such as civil rights movements, racism, and ethnic oppression and should not limit its work to the salvation of souls.

With the Vatican II it was possible to talk about religious liberty and freedom of conscience. With its Decree on the Lay Apostolate, lay persons became collaborators with the pastors in ministering to the needs of Christ's Church. Many changes brought in by the Second Vatican Council have contributed to peace and justice, and have bettered relationship between the Catholic Church and other Churches and religions, indeed, so much that it has become difficult for critics to denounce the Council without contradicting themselves. As we have observed elsewhere, most Catholics who denounce Vatican II base much of their discontentment on the outcome of the liturgical reforms, ignoring most of the outstanding accomplishments of the Council. This attitude is regrettable. The following response from a Catholic theologian to a question concerning the role of the Second Vatican Council in the current problems in the Church serves a useful purpose.

We know that some well-meaning Catholics believe that the current liturgical disarray was actually caused by the Second Vatican Council, and that the current Roman Missal (*Novus Ordo*) contains theological errors. But there are very serious problems with this view, starting with the fact that the Council was an act of the entire Catholic Church, and the Roman Missal was approved by Pope Paul VI. The current problems with the Church's worship are due to misinterpretation of the Council's call for liturgical reforms, not with the Council itself.^{xlviii}

The Second Vatican Council was a great blessing to the modern world and came at the proper time in the history of the Church. The changes the Council Fathers advocated or effected in the Church were *not* entirely new or radical. Years before Pope John XXIII became the 261st Prince of the Roman Catholic Church and summoned the Second Vatican Council for changes in some areas of the Church's "mission in the modern world," many "reformers" - ancient and modern - had emerged from different parts of the Christian world calling for the same changes the Second Vatican council made. There were such "reformers" even from Africa in the late 1950s! Most of the African nations were still under colonial rule and Africa was completely considered a "missionary land" and in fact had not been recognized as a "full member of the universal Church." Voices of protests were least expected from Africa! But whether or not the African "emerging theologians" were still immature, it was clear to them that the "colonial Church" was truly foreign to the Africans, to the Indians, the Filipinos, the Chinese, and peoples of other non-Western nations. The rumbling of the local ecclesiastical rebuke directed to a young Nigerian theology student who advocated the use of the **vernacular** in the celebration of the Catholic liturgy was felt in some of the few seminary colleges in Nigeria as well as in Rome, the center of the Catholic world. Was another **Martin Luther** emerging from that poor and insignificant African region? Was that a challenge to the supreme authority of the Church? How could a "profane" and "barbaric" African language be used in the sacred liturgy? What had Africans contributed to the universal Church in manpower and financial resources to make her voice heard outside the black continent? There must have been some other reasons that were behind such a rebuke from the authorities that administered the African missionary Church in that ecclesiastical circumscription.

The ideas of the young African theologians as well as many others from European and American seminaries were discarded as irresponsible and uncalled for. Young theology students who expressed progressive views were either expelled or reprimanded by the competent authorities. Those who nursed any similar ideas were sternly warned. And, most regrettably, most of their leaders were denied promotion to the priesthood and religious life and dismissed for what the then Catholic missionaries in Nigeria referred to as "radical and dangerous ideas." Those blunt attitudes to change and openness to new ideas brought to an end a budding renewal movement of the Church coming from modern Africa. It was not the Africa of St. Augustine and the monks of the Nubian Desert. That was the pre-Vatican II Africa. It did not take long, however, before Africans, this time not through the Catholic Church but through

the *Independent African Churches*, took the initiative in religion. They could then make changes in a Church that would be both universal and African!

The young Nigerian seminary theologians had produced documents or "theses" specifying some areas of the Church's discipline that needed some changes. The liturgy was their primary concern. The liturgical celebrations were then mostly in Latin and English. The sacraments were administered in Latin or English. The majority of people did not understand Latin. Most spoke or understood little English. The missionaries had little or no interest in the local languages of the people and there were many such languages. They spoke to the people through interpreters or Catechists. Communication between the *Man of God* and the people was poor. The people confessed their sins to the priests who understood not even a word of what was confessed. Why should the vernacular not replace the Latin and English? Why couldn't the readings be done in the local languages so that the people could understand what God or His Christ was telling them? Perhaps history would be repeating itself at least in Africa if certain changes were not made, if the Christian Church was not adapted to the worthy ways of the lives of the people, in a word, if inculturation was not seen as serious ingredient in the survival of the Church in that region of the world.

Africa has indeed not entirely been a newcomer to the universal Church. The North African Church in the early history of the Church had made her significant contributions. North Africa had possessed noteworthy centers of learning and had enjoyed international recognition and fame. The School of Alexandria produced a great number of eminent scholars who were remarkable for their achievements. With nostalgia, modern African writers and historians recall African sons who were renowned saints, eminent doctors, erudite writers, and great men of learning. In the field of theology and philosophy, Christian eloquence, and treatises on spirituality and perfection, such names come to mind: Clement of Alexandria, saints Cyril and Origen. Others were St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, Tertulian, the first Christian writer to use Latin rather than Greek. Above all was the great giant, St. Augustine of Hippo, who is described as one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of eminent saints and scholars.

If great African Churchmen were outstanding in their contributions to the development of the ancient Christian Church, one must wonder why that flourishing Church never survived the onslaught of Muslim invasion. Lack of inculturation contributed much to the weaknesses of the early Christian Church in Africa. The Church of North Africa was too foreign and was truly an European Church, founded and administered on the patterns of Western Monasticism. Most of the bishops and priests were monks and hermits. Egypt was known to have harbored hundreds of hermits scattered all over the Nubian

Desert, and Saint Anthony of Egypt was known as the Father of Western Monasticism. While such achievements of the Church of North Africa on the global level could be reckoned with, it was also evident that the "foreignness" of the Church and certain strategies of the missionaries estranged the Church from the local populace. A Western Church in truly Western garb had been established on the African soil:

It was a static, desert Church, perhaps not meant for the local people. With its language, Greek and Latin (none spoken by the local people), it was certain that the North African Church was foreign to the majority of the Africans. No wonder then that when the ferocious wind of Islamic crusade arrived, it swept the entire fabric. Surely the natives did not rise in arms to defend what they never saw as their Church!^{xlix}

As Malachy Cullen rightly observed, "When the Moslems invaded Africa, it was the Churches that were incarnated in the local Church that survived – the Coptic, Ethiopian, and Nubian. The colonial Latin Church of Cartage vanished." With the opening of new missions in China, Japan and India after the Reformation, pioneer missionaries came face to face with new difficulties in native rites and customs. And as the missionary bodies could not agree on a common method of approach, the Church intervened and made strong statements to protect the values of the people's culture. **Pope Alexander III** gave his instructions to the Apostolic Vicars who were working in the kingdom of China in 1659. The address was later sent to the Apostolic delegates for Congo and Rwanda-Burundi in 1939. Some parts of the instructions are still very relevant today as regards the mission of the Church in the modern world:

Be on your guard, lest you through words and deeds, tear these people away from their rites, customs and traditions in as far as these are not flagrantly opposed to religion and good morals. For what is more absurd than to bring France or Spain or Italy or any other part of Europe to China? It is not these that you should bring but the faith which does not spurn or reject any people's rites and customs, unless they are depraved, but on the contrary try to keep them, admire them and praise what deserves to be respected.¹

Which language does God speak? Which languages of the world should be admired and others despised as *barbaric*? Which culture should be copied and

admired and which should be described as profane? The Pope found contradictions in the attitudes of some of those early missionaries and warned:

There is nothing that generates hatred and alienates people more than the alteration of their national customs, more still, on which they are used to as far back as human mind can go. Worse still, when you are in a place and discard the people's practices, you bring in the customs of your own nations. Never should you compare the habits of these people with those of the Europeans. Take care and acquaint yourselves with the people's customs. Admire and praise what is praiseworthy and what is not worthy of praise, judgement on such should be cleverly omitted. At least, do not condemn it at every instance without reflection.^{li}

Most of the Popes through the centuries before the Second Vatican Council had reiterated the instructions on inculturation, which continues to be the bedrock of the survival of any Church. **Pope Pius XII** in the Encyclical "Summi Pontificatus" of 1939 praised and encouraged missionaries who had adhered to the directives given to them. At the same time he emphasized that what was found to be good in the cultures of the people should be conserved and not discarded or despised.

Every nation has its own genius, its own qualities, springing from the hidden roots of its being...The missionaries of the Divine Word devoted years of patient labor to the study of the conditions of the places they were to work. They spared no efforts to understand the civilization and the institutions of the people they were dealing with. And then they tried to cultivate and develop the individual gifts of that people in such a way as to secure the richest possible harvest for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.^{lii}

He reiterated: "Anything in the national customs that is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and false doctrine should always be carefully considered and if possible preserved in tact." The Second Vatican Council fathers therefore were not the first to advocate changes in the modern Church. Most of the changes made came at the right time as in fact *signs of the times* made them imperative. One of the Council documents declares inculturation, for example as not merely as temporary option but a lasting imperative. The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, no 44, recognizes the constancy of the inculturation process throughout the history of the Church and sees it as an on-going process; indeed a kind of adaptation and

preaching of the revealed word which must ever be the law of all evangelization:

For, from the beginning of her history, she has learnt to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various peoples, and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, in so far as such was appropriate...For thus has a nation developed the ability to express Christ's message in its own way. At the same time, a living exchange is fostered between the Church and the diverse cultures of people.

The Second Vatican Council cannot be held responsible for any adverse effects of some of the changes it brought to the modern Church. It was necessary that the *windows of the Church should be opened to allow in some fresh air*. Much suffocation had for long hindered progress in many areas of the Church's mission in the modern world. That some members of the Church - clergy and the laity - decided to *jump out of the window* (and perhaps some broke their limbs and bones), as some people allege, does not invalidate the measures intended by the council Fathers to reform the Church. The overreaction or unbridled enthusiasm of some reformers and misapplication of the Council's recommendations may not serve as a pretext for discrediting the achievements of the Second Vatican Council. In fact as many well-meaning Christians – Catholics and non-Catholics maintain that the work of the Second Vatican Council has to be continued. The issues that provoked its convocation have not been finally resolved. There is therefore an urgent need for Third Ecumenical Council.

CHAPTER THREE

The Third Millennium Church: "The Evangelical Threat"

Even if past schisms do not make a comparable tragedy around the year 2000 in any way inevitable, they can make us attentive to the long-range implications of current trends. Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches are the most rapidly growing segments of Christianity in many countries today. If these trends

continue, what will Christianity look like in the 21st century? (The Catholic Church at the End of an Age).

The phenomenon that many authors refer to as "the Evangelical Threat" has already appeared on the horizon and will eminently determine what Christianity will look like in the next century. "**The Evangelical Threat**" helps much in our assessment of the successes and failures of the Mainline Christian Churches - Catholic and Protestant - at the end of the second millennium. It throws further light on the future of Christianity in the third millennium and on what the Third Millennium Church might look like. While Bahlmann sees the "Coming of the **Third Church**" identified with the Independent New Religious movements revolutionizing the lives of millions of African and Third World Christians, Ralph Martin has a fear - a glimpse of a developing **fourth major schism** within Christianity. For David Barrett's **Schism and Renewal in Africa**,^{liii} the schism has already taken place decades ago in the black continent! Those Churches described by students of religion as **Evangelical, Charismatic, Pentecostal Churches, or New Religious Movements** are growing at such a swift rate that they have overtaken the growth rate of the *Mainline* Christian Churches over the past 30 years. Some of the older religious literatures quoting the official or non-official records of the membership of the Mother Catholic and Protestant Churches are no longer reliable. Most figures are obsolete. Mother Churches no longer command great numbers of adherents. This view is reinforced by the number of Church structures that as result of decline in membership and ordained ministers have been dismantled over the last 30 years. A city in the United States that up to mid 1980s was served by 12 Catholic Churches has only 3 of the Churches functioning with resident pastors and a dwindling membership. The rest have been closed down, sold, or converted into social centers or museums. Many European cities have records of the same phenomenon and magnitude.

Over the last 30 years the number of Churchgoers has fallen to its lowest ebb in Europe and North America. In old Christian Europe, fewer than 15% of Catholics go to mass regularly. Across Australia, some 80% of the baptized Catholic population have already abandoned Sunday mass. In the Anglican Church fewer than 2% attend Church services. According to Vatican's annual statistical survey, covering the year 1996, the geographical distribution of the world's Catholic population has shifted. While significant increase is seen in the Third World countries, there is decline in Europe and North America. In 1978, 35.5 percent of the world's Catholics lived in Europe, and 7.8 percent in North

America; today those figures have dropped to 28.5 percent and 7.1 percent, respectively. In the other Established Protestant denominations, those who still care about membership in their local Churches are seen once or twice a year. In North America more than 60% of married couples are divorced. Most of these are Christians and are regarded as "fallen Christians" as long as they do not abide by the prescriptions of the Church's law on marriage. The Mainline Episcopalian and Methodist Churches have suffered major setbacks. Reports^{liv} indicate that there are as many Episcopalians now as there were in 1942. The Methodists have been losing about a thousand members a week for the last 30 years. The United Church of Christ, since 1992, has lost an average of 42 Churches a year - 27,500 members a year.

According to Vatican statistics, released by Catholic World News Service, July, 2, 1998, in Europe, the decline in priestly and religious vocations has been most pronounced in France and Belgium, followed by Italy, Spain, Germany, and Ireland. The seminary figures have declined in Canada and the United States. The old houses of religious formation in the Catholic Church - seminaries and convents - instead of closing down completely for lack of vocations have opened their doors to lay students wishing to upgrade their degrees in theology, philosophy, and religious studies. The students are mostly married deacons of the Catholic Church, religious nuns who have abandoned their regular convent habit to embrace "more challenging jobs" as "administrators of parishes or missions" that have no more resident priests. Seminaries and religious houses have expanded religious studies programs to include pastoral care, liturgy, counseling, and Canon law for lay people. In the Mainline Protestant Churches, radical feminism, which is the most powerful force to come out of the 1960s, is said to have become a major presence in the seminaries. "Today, 40 to 50 percent of the students in liberal Protestant seminaries are women; 40 percent of them are divorced."^{lv}

The onslaught by the Churches and movements described as **Evangelical**, **Pentecostal**, and **Charismatic** on the Mainline Christian Churches - Catholic and Protestant - is enormous. The factors contributing to their emergence, growth, and expansion are not entirely different from the factors that have led to schisms or that in the past have brought about reform movements within the Christian Churches. Strictly speaking, *schism* may not be an appropriate word to describe the "protest-movements" associated with the emergence and proliferation of Evangelical Churches. It is a rejection of a Church that has gone bankrupt and is unable to meet the aspirations of its members and a movement geared toward renewal and a more conducive atmosphere for man's search for religious fulfilment.

The movement consequently forces older Churches to close down as the new ones proliferate. As the new Churches grow in number, strength, and complexity, the Mother Churches dwindle. Most members who abandon the Mother Churches are not entirely lost in the confused crowds of those who have abandoned the Christian faith. They join the new Churches that respond adequately to their religious needs. Ralph Martin,^{lvi} in the second chapter of his book *The Situation of the Catholic Church Today*, provides substantial information about the growth of these Churches. In my first publication "**Prophecy and Revolution**,"^{lvii} I treated the same phenomenon from the African perspective. Most of the issues treated in *Prophecy and Revolution* are still relevant to this discussion.

There is little doubt that, taken as a group, the **Evangelical Church** might become the popular and successful Church of the third millennium. As many critics predict, the designation *Catholic* or *Protestant* may play little or insignificant role henceforth, for it is the same Lord who sent out his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations." He further warned them: "Do not forbid them; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us." [Mark 9:39-40] Paul also alerted the Corinthian Church to listen to what the Spirit was saying: "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, 'Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. [I Cor. 13.3] The writer of the epistle of John makes it clear too that "Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." [I John 4.3]

According to Ralph Martin's survey, among **Hispanic** Catholics in the United States, who now constitute nearly a third of U.S. Catholics, 5 million have left the Catholic Church in the last ten years to join Evangelical or Pentecostal Churches or other religious movements. In Latin America the "Evangelical explosion" has seen the number of non-Catholics in Latin America grow from 4 million in 1967 to 30 million in 1985. By 1991 that figure was greater than 40 million. It is estimated that the Evangelical percentage of the Latin American population has tripled over the past 25 years. If it triples again over the next 25 years, which it very well may do, evangelicals will constitute a third of the population by 2010. "From 1960 to 1985, evangelicals have **doubled** their share of the population of Chile, Paraguay, Venezuela, Panama, and Haiti; **tripled** their share in Argentina, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic; **quadrupled** in Brazil and Puerto Rico; **quintupled** in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Peru, and Bolivia; and **sextupled** in Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador, and Colombia."^{lviii}

The situation is most dramatic in Brazil, said to be the largest Catholic country in the world, with about 110 million who profess the Catholic faith. Most Brazilian Catholics have joined the Evangelicals. According to reports, during the Pope's visit to Brazil in 1991 Vatican officials were stunned by low turnouts for masses led by the Pope. In Brasilia, where the Pope drew 500,000 people for mass in 1980, only 100,000 turned out in 1991. On the day of the 1991 mass one of Brazil's most popular television evangelists drew a total of 400,000 people to outdoor prayer meetings in Rio, Salvador, and S◊o Paulo. In the light of these statistics, one observer of the situation claims that "Latin America is becoming Protestant more rapidly than Central Europe did in the 16th century." It is observed, too that more than 300 million of Latin America's Catholics are *not* practicing their faith. Surely they are not "fallen Christians." Most of them have joined the evangelicals! It is also predicted that in 20 years Latin America will be Protestant. The Catholic Church will be the national Church for ceremonial purposes; the religious life of the people will be with the evangelicals.

The situation, according to the above survey, is not much different in Europe, Asia, and Africa. In Africa, a hundred years ago the estimated number of Christians was half a million. Today the number is more than 300 million. Of these, about 122 million are Roman Catholics, 87 million are Protestants, and perhaps another 61 million belong to the rapidly growing Independent, largely Evangelical and Pentecostal Church bodies. There is no doubt that most of the figures given by Ralph Martin and many recent authors in the various situations are obsolete. The number of the evangelicals has continued to grow at an amazing rate. As for Africa, the statistics given by authors about ten years ago are no longer reliable. The rate of the expansion of the African Independent Churches can be likened to the rate of islamization of the continent and the world at large. Africa is said to be only 13.11% Catholic. The Mainline Protestant Church claims about 8% of the population, while the African Traditional Religion has about 6%.^{lix} If the Islamic religion takes the largest chunk of about 40%, it follows that the Evangelicals will have about 32%.^{lx}

A more general overview of the situation of the Evangelical Churches in Africa still serves a useful purpose. In some earlier studies of African Independent Religious Movements, the Independent Churches were by 1967 known to include more than 5,000 distinct ecclesiastical and religious bodies in 34 African countries. In an article in a German Church magazine titled "Wohin steuert Africa?" - "Where is Africa heading to?" - Horst Hohmann^{lxi} wrote the following about the Independent Churches: "The so-called Independent Churches have at present about 11 million adherents. Today there are in the

black continent more than 5,000 Independent Churches. They are represented in 41 countries South of the Sahara. Every year, about 400,000 Christians desert the 'Big' Churches to join one of these many sects." In its own article on the same subject, in *Mondo e Missione*,^{lxiii} an Italian Church magazine carried the following information about the Independent Churches: "In Africa, in 1972, there were more than 5,400 so-called Independent African Churches. These 'Free Churches', claiming to represent a 'native form of Christianity,' have in so short a time won adherents of over 15 million person." The Assemblies of God Mission, a Pentecostal denomination based in America, had only 2,065 Churches in all of Africa in 1970, by the end of 1991 they had 13,950 Churches. In Transkei, South Africa, in November 1992, one local Pentecostal Church baptized 70,000 new converts in one day. According to eyewitness reports, physical healing, deliverance from demons, and other spiritual manifestations took place as the newly baptized came up from the water.

Terrence Kardong, a monk of the Assumption Abbey, Richardton, North Dakota, United States, and the editor of the *Assumption Abbey Newsletter* (April 1998) described the religious phenomenon he encountered during his visit to Nigeria in March 1998 in an article he titled *The Red Dust of Africa*. Writing about a single New Church group he had this to say about the Independent African Churches: "They are called 'Cherubim and Seraphim, but what their theology is, is not well known. In fact Africa is full of 'sects,' that is, independent, syncretistic Churches that combine all sorts of incompatible elements such as voodoo and Christianity. What they all have in common is tremendous enthusiasm, which takes the form of drumming and wild chanting at any time of day and night. It may be 3 a.m., but they are drumming up a storm." Monk Kardong spent only a few weeks in Nigeria. He should have spent more time and traveled far enough in that vast nation of Africa to be able to assess the real impact of the Independent African Churches on that nation and on the entire continent.

As confirmed by many recent observers the proliferation of the evangelical Church movement has continued unabated worldwide. It is easy to imagine what the situation would look like in the year 2000. Recent reports confirm that the **Mormon Church** of the Latter Day Saints, the Assemblies of God Mission, the Jehovah's Witness mission, the German Pentecostal Mission, the Promise Keepers organization, the Zionist Church congregations, and many more new brands of Evangelical, Charismatic, and Pentecostal groups have continued to win converts all over the world. Every year these groups distribute millions of Bibles, religious literature, and other materials to their new members. Many Christians are thereby "born again" into these congregations.

Having received baptism of the Spirit, they, too, are ready for discipleship and mission!

Proliferation of the Evangelical Movement

Perhaps for too long we Christians have looked upon our mission of evangelizing as a "spread of religion" rather than a "call to conversion." [A Zambian bishop]

The inevitable question that troubles many leaders of the Mainline Churches that find themselves in the minority today, has to do with the factors that contribute to the shrinking of their membership and the consequent proliferation of the Evangelical Churches. Why are the pews in most of the Mainline Churches empty while massive stadiums and sports arenas have barely enough space for the evangelicals who gather for prayer meetings and crusades? Most of the former Catholics and Protestants are not truly abandoning their faith in Christ. They are only "crossing over" and joining the other Churches. The African situation offers some clues to the radical change and "reversal of fortunes." The results of the investigation into the factors that are contributing to the proliferation of the new religious movements will provide insight into the nature of the "Third millennium Church," hence "the Church that will survive."

The Christian Church, in Mother Africa as well as in Diaspora has from the early 1960s witnessed an unprecedented transformation and adaptation. Philosophers, theologians, and sociologists have referred to the phenomenon as "inculturation." From every perspective it has been a true "revolution," involving a rejection of many aspects of Christianity, mostly its liturgy and leadership that were alien to African way of life, and then an enthronement of a Church that looked *African* in many perspectives. For the first time, Africans had the opportunity to establish a Church to be proud of and thus jettison what looked foreign and meaningless to the black cultural heritage. The aftermath of that revolution has continued to affect the future of the Mainline Churches in Africa. Some European authors refer to the African Church revolution as "schism." As David Barrett sees it, the massive proliferation of the African Independent Churches, is figuratively speaking, only the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds more of such indigenous movements of renewal or protest remain in embryo inside the historical Churches at varying depths, not having as yet broken surface in schism. The schismatic bodies are therefore only part of a

much larger movement of dissidence, the bulk of which still remains in amorphous form within the Protestant and Catholic Churches.^{lxiii}

While some European theologians and authors see the "new African Church" (also referred to as New Religious Movements – NRMs, Independent African Churches, and Evangelist Churches) as "syncretist" or "adulterated brand of Christian religion," there is little doubt that the New African Church will continue to bear the marks of a truly popular Church in the third millennium. It might eventually supplant the western brand of Christianity. As a result of what some authors see in the practices of these Churches, some of the titles of their books point to their fears and perhaps conclusions: *Post Christianity in Africa*, by G.C. Oosthuizen, *African Initiatives in Religion and Schism and Renewal in Africa* by B.D. Barrett, *The Religion of the oppressed*, by V. Lanternavi.^{lxiv}

Not a few of these authors are, however, impressed by the "Schism and Renewal" in the African Church. For H. W. Turner, in these Churches, there is a most impressive and convincing breakthrough into dependence on faith in and prayer to the one living God of the Bible, as the biblical history of faith through struggle is being repeated in Africa. "African Independent Religious Movement" has also been described as having achieved a radical breakthrough from pagan idolatry and worship of a number of divinities, to worshipping the one, true, loving and all-powerful God of the Christian Scriptures. "The moment the African could read the Bible and especially the Old Testament for himself, he found himself introduced to a world much more closely resembling his own than the world of the European. Inevitably he began to ask questions."^{lxv} As far as some authors - European and African - are concerned a *requiem* should be sung for the Mainline or Established Churches, not only in Africa, but also in other parts of the black world.

In Cuba and Haiti, there are millions of baptized Catholics, but the country's most popular creed hails from Africa. Statistics shows that in Cuba about 4.7 million of all 11 million Cubans are baptized, but only about 150,000 attend Sunday mass. There are about 1 million active Protestants, and a much greater number - roughly 6 million to 7 million practice Afro-Cuban religions. What Europeans derisively refer to as **voodoo** or **Santeria** may after all not represent the pagan religion or ancestor-worship of the pre-colonial and pre-slavery era. What has emerged among many blacks of the Diaspora, particularly in South America and the Caribbean is a mixture of practices brought to these parts of the New world by African slaves and the Catholicism they were forced to espouse. Santeria, it is claimed, survived colonialism and revolution in Cuba, and experts estimate that 70% of Cubans practice Santeria. The fusion of

Spanish and African religions and artistic traditions – Roman Catholicism and African - may eventually become the basic structure for the New Church of the third millennium. This is true for Africans and most blacks of the Diaspora.

In the African situation, some factors are known to have contributed to the emergence and proliferation of the Independent Churches. Among the sociopolitical and religious factors, one will reckon with the impact of colonialism and Africa's struggle against oppression and consequently the quest for freedom from foreign domination. Most African liberationist thinkers identified the missionaries with agents of the colonial interest, as the missionaries, too, struggled to establish Churches of their national interest and often failed to speak out against the injustices perpetrated by the colonial administrators against the conquered people. Religious congregations were also regarded as colonial instruments for pacifying the conquered people, and it seemed, too, that the missions, to a large extent, tacitly supported the power organization of the colonial government. But the qualitative weakness of the African Christianity stems in large part from the way in which both the missionaries and the Africans approached conversion to Christianity. This factor should therefore be seriously considered in any renewal movement.

Often when Christianity arrived, it appeared as a religion of the victorious and powerful colonial powers. People saw it as the religion that went with firearms, material prosperity, technological advance, the amenities of western civilization, and - very significantly - schools and hospitals. For many years virtually the only schools and hospitals in Africa were those operated by the missions. Conversion to Christianity was frequently intertwined with a decision to try to get ahead and benefit from the white man's civilization.^{lxvi}

It did not take the Africans long to discover that the Western Church was not responding to their spiritual needs. The name **Prayer House**, which they call their places of worship, testifies to their yearning for spiritual growth. As **James Okoye**, a Nigerian theologian, points out in his study, "*A case in Christianity and culture*": "Those Catholics who go to *Prayer Houses* seem to be saying that the Catholic Church is for them not a House of Prayer, Isaiah 56:7." It has been acknowledged that one of the main problems of the African Church thus far is this failure in inculturation. The main cause for the sprouting of these Churches has been cultural dissatisfaction with the Established Churches.

As Father Okoye points out, the NRMs stress the power of God and Christ, the power of prayer, and concern for the angels and spirits they

borrowed from the African culture. They have refined the use of fasting and other techniques for endorsing vision - experiences, which at the moment enjoy great prestige in the culture. They stress personal choice and participation. Liturgy is derived from experience, and culturally meaningful symbols are used. Each person is known by name and feels accepted. Singing is prayer by all, not a cosmetic and impersonal extra by a choir. The prophet's lifestyle speaks. He or she studiously avoids social occasions and personal meetings and cuts down on travel and absence. He pays real attention to clients in non-evaluative listening that convinces his client that "my problem is his problem." The prophet binds himself to a period of fasting and other practices of spiritual training to dispose him to achieve the desired goals with clients. Most of these elements are lacking in Mainline Churches.

Elsewhere - in Europe and America - some other factors contribute to the miserable situation of the Mother Churches. The decaying structures and the inability of the Mother Churches to respond adequately to the growing aspirations of the modern man are no doubt among those factors. While the younger and newer Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches continue to win millions of adherents to their denominations and makeshift structures are hastily provided to accommodate new members, the older and traditional Churches are closing down and those that still remain open are often cold and look deserted. The story of a city police officer and a young Catholic family illustrates the situation clearly. The family was on a weekend vacation in one big city in the United States and wanted to attend Sunday worship. Unable to locate any Church around the city, they asked a police officer on duty at a street corner. The officer, who did not belong to any Christian Church, nevertheless knew most of the Churches around. He directed the family: "I don't know the names of the Churches, but there is one three blocks away, then another about four blocks away. There is yet another on the left, at another street corner, some four or five blocks away. You will definitely meet worshippers there. But if I were to recommend to you, I would ask you to attend that one, about three blocks away. It is the one I have noticed its members with friendly and happy faces each time they passed here after their worship!"

Mission and Conversion - The Missing Link

Strictly speaking, many religious factors, including theological and liturgical matters, are contributing to the proliferation and successes of the modern evangelical movement. Their method of evangelization, with basis in the Scriptures, is appealing to the converts. The African situation serves as a good

example again. The appearance of the sacred texts in the African languages was an event of unprecedented importance. Hitherto, biblical translations had been in languages foreign to the Africans and the missionaries had the final word in the interpretation of the word of God. Africans could now read and perceive that God was also addressing them in their own languages in which was enshrined the soul of their people. They could differentiate between "God's words" and "man-made laws."

Disaffection with the disembodied doctrine, prefabricated dogma, complex regulations, and harsh ecclesiastical discipline - all imported from Europe - became more serious among African Protestants than among Catholics, for the latter had less access to vernacular Scriptures. Gradually the Scriptures became for African societies an independent standard of reference to legitimize their grievances.^{lxvii}

Not only to the Africans, the biblical call for mission and conversion is more meaningful to evangelicals everywhere than the emphasis Mainline Churches have placed on doctrines and precepts, rituals, and other observances. The world is immersed in sin and there is need for conversion. Christ began his mission by announcing the reign of the Kingdom and repentance. "This is the time of fulfilment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel." This gospel of salvation has to be preached everywhere and all available modern means of communication must be used. These include Radio ministry, talk-show programs, as well as door-to-door evangelization. Listening to the word of God brings conversion and confession of sin. So no one would be surprised to see thousands of people who gather at Pentecostal rallies weeping publicly while confessing their sins. While the few members of the Mainline Churches who attend Sunday services or Mass are bored in their 30-to-40 minute services, the evangelicals listen to their ministers, who preach the word of God for hours.

The strategies for conversion are changing rapidly. Not much can be accomplished from the pulpit. There is need for door-to-door, family-to-family, person-to-person Apostolate today. The evangelicals and the other Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches have taken the initiative. The results of their efforts demonstrate that the methods are working. The Second Vatican Council instructed that for any effective evangelization in the modern world, the Church must discern "the signs of the times." The inability of any Church to discern these "signs of the times" will have far-reaching consequences on its future. And as one critic observes, it may be that "the Holy Spirit is using the reality of

the serious decline of the Church in its former strongholds along with the rise of the sects to turn the attention of the Church back toward the basics, to Christ and conversion."^{lxviii}

Accommodation

The first "mistake" of the Mainline Churches as they went out evangelizing the "pagan nations" was the alienation of certain groups of people from the Church. Some of these groups of converts were described as "fallen Christians" who were damned to eternal punishment on account of their "sins." In Africa, these were the polygamists. In Europe and America these are represented by the millions of divorced men and women. Some whose marriage contracts have been annulled have been readmitted to the sacraments, while the rest remain "fallen Christians." As far as the Church was concerned, unless the polygamists renounced their wives and took to a monogamous lifestyle, they had no chance of salvation.

For most Africans, it was an embarrassing situation. In a culture where polygamy was cherished for various motives, the Christian mission attacks on the institution did not win much sympathy from many disappointed Christians. Islam accommodated polygamy and most Africans could not understand the reason behind the Christian Church's condemnation of polygamy. Some Africans had to investigate the matter themselves. The bible offered the basic information they required. Many Africans, who left the Mainline Christian Churches and founded Independent African Churches, noted the slender biblical basis for monogamy, and their reaction was predictable. Isaiah Shembe, founder of an Independent Church declared that European monogamy was St Paul's invention: "It was Paul's legislation, but not God's. Had God not said: "Zalani nande" ("be fruitful and multiply")? Elijah Masinde, founder of another Independent Church, in western Kenya, after an exhaustive study of the Bible came to the conclusion that the prohibition of polygamy was an arbitrary rule of the Christian Churches, unsupported by biblical testimony. For *Watu Wa Mungu* (People of God Independent Church), "the *Nzungu*, missionaries, were not interpreting the Bible correctly. They only adopted the system of monogamy to suit their own ends." One of the Independent Churches sought a simple solution to the problem posed by the Mainline Christian Churches on the salvation of these "Fallen Christians." The Independent African Church of Israel, in Zimbabwe, broke off from the Seventh Day Adventist Mission, with the expressed purpose: "to help polygamists enter heaven."^{lxix}

We are not in any way suggesting that the Church should approve polygamy. At the same time, it is not out of place to point out that the way the issue was handled by the early missionaries disappointed many African Christians. Lack of sympathy by the Church, and the harsh conditions open to the polygamists, no doubt made many to turn away from the Church. Today homosexuals and other people with many sexual aberrations are tolerated in the Church and they are treated with kindness and respect. Indeed, the Kingdom of God is made up of all kinds of persons, including the notorious sinners who need the *physician!*

In the Evangelist congregation, no groups of people are singled out for eternal damnation. There is room for everyone who wants to "listen to the word of God and keep it." There is room for homosexuals, prostitutes, tax collectors, and criminals. Evil or sin is no more limited to those acts found only in Church moral and religious codes. Evil, which people must avoid in order to please God and attain salvation, must include a catalogue of sins that has often been ignored as "sinful" and are rarely confessed. The **new catalog of sins** in my evaluation should include the following:

The sins, evils, and bad attitudes arising from dirty politics, racism, parochialism, and ethnicism, draconian leadership, operation of economic systems that lead to the oppression and dispossession of the poor peoples and nations of the world. They include insatiable lust for material wealth, including scams and acceptance of stolen money and goods, litigation and lawsuits that ignore the Gospel injunction of forgiveness and peaceful resolution of conflicts, financial impropriety of various kinds. In the new catalogue of sins we find all sexual excesses and aberrations, concealment of evil, including indifferentism to evils perpetrated against other peoples and groups. Others are warmongering, laziness, obstinacy in sin and law-makers' sin, which includes legislation that contradict God's commandments, moral and ethical behavior, and many others.

The **new catalog of sin** can stretch longer than this. Most of the sins are serious offenses arising from "omission" and "commission," particularly insensitivity to the harm people do to others. Such sins are mostly found in the "public sector" of the modern society and have been mostly not considered as "sinful" in the past.

Rather than condoning evil in any form, the evangelicals challenge their members to adopt a new Christian lifestyle by abandoning their sinful past life. "**Public**", rather than "**Private**," confession of sins is required. Practical

reparations of the past damage a group's or an individual's sins might have caused other groups or persons are sought as the most appropriate measures that could demonstrate truly repentance and renewal. Arms around one another, brothers and sisters confess their past atrocities against God and those who had been injured. Restitution of stolen or misappropriated goods and monies is often the results of such conversion and re-conversion. Who does not see these as signs of true repentance and stronger faith in the God of justice and mercy, who demands obedience to his laws? The Lord does not delight in holocausts and sacrifices from those who transgress his laws. For the Lord "obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission the fat of rams." [1 Samuel 15: 22] In the new law, Christ urged reconciliation with an offended brother before any offering. "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." [Matthew 5:22]

Evangelical Fellowship

Evangelism has continued to revolutionize the lives of millions of young people - black and white - all over the world. There is no doubt that the revolution will continue to sweep aside other religious movements or Churches that have little to offer these young people in terms of satisfying religious worship, commitment to mission, and conversion. People like an atmosphere that generates warmth, friendship, and social interaction not a cold environment that does not support "movement by the spirit." Religious feelings expressed in open prayer meetings, hymn singing, and healing experiences give more satisfaction to worshippers than monolithic liturgies devoid of enthusiastic religious expression. The evangelicals have learnt to inculturate, using the most modern instruments in music and prayer to help their members experience the Spirit at worship. Father Eduardo Dougherty,^{lxx} a leader of the Catholic charismatic renewal in Brazil, has some interesting observations on the situation: "Why did the Catholic Church miss the mark? It's a lack of perception of the basic needs of the person - human warmth, healing, a deep spiritual experience... We have a lot to learn from our Protestant brothers." There is no doubt that evangelism exploded in most parts of the Christian world because its message touched the most essential part of the culture of the people, which is both spiritual and pragmatic.

The Mainline Christian Churches have remained the most segregated "communities" in the history of religious worship. Racism and discrimination against certain ethnic groups and races shut the doors of many Churches to

worshippers. The evangelist Churches have learnt not to repeat the tragedies of racism and discrimination in their gatherings. There is room for everyone to share the gifts of the Spirit and to reach out to other brothers and sisters in the Lord. What have the national Churches to offer to the young people through the various Christian factions that fought against one another in the past? Some of the proliferating New Religious and Renewal Movements have learnt to de-emphasize denominationalism, hence most of them make it abundantly clear that their renewal movements are **non-denominational**. This factor alone has helped them penetrate various regions and ethnic barriers to win members for the "New Church of Christ." The "Old" is, no doubt, giving way to the "New" and has become the minority Church.

Living in the Holy Spirit

In the United States, the Jesus Revolution of the early seventies has re-emerged as an irresistible force to reckon with at the end of the second millennium. The young people who are rarely found in any of the Mainline Churches throughout the year (except at funerals and weddings) fill various stadiums and open fields to capacity. Spirit-led worship is characterized by body-shaking, soul-stirring experience for millions of charismatic Christians. One particular exciting Pentecostal event that took place at Smithton Community Church in central Missouri, United States caught the attention of news magazine reporter, Kenneth Woodward. It was another well-recorded extravagant movement of the Spirit in recent times.^{lxxi}

Long before dawn, a procession of cars and campers with license plates from 30 states began circling the Brownsville **Assemblies of God** Church. By 7 p.m., 2,000 Spirit-seekers - some just arrived from Barbados and Belarus, Sweden and South Africa, Indonesia and Japan - have found their seats. Upstairs, interpreters are standing by with headphones. In the choir room, 150 prayer leaders are talking the Spirit's own language: they are speaking in tongues. Downstairs, a dozen converts wade into the **baptismal pool**, submerge and rise, **born again** to cries of "hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord." But the five-hour Pentecostal revival service, repeated four nights a week, every week for the last 33 months, has yet to begin.^{lxxii}

In Nigeria as well as in most other African countries, the Evangelical-Pentecostal group comprising the indigenous and foreign influenced types are generally of Protestant origin, and some of them can already be identified by

their aggressive proselytism. But there is no doubt that Catholics form a large part of such congregations during prayer meetings. Some have expansionist programs and their use of mass media that looks like commercialization of religion provokes diverse reactions from both the orthodox Christian bodies and non-believers. Often mass healing crusades and miracle witnessing rallies are advertised in the mass media, as evangelists and preachers of both national and international repute are invited to address the rallies. Thousands of people attend such rallies, after which some claim they have been physically and spiritually regenerated, or "born again." It is claimed that at these rallies, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, broken families find solutions to their problems, and enemies are reconciled. There is no type of "miracle" the organizers of these crusades do not claim takes place there. Many Christians respond to the appeals and attend these rallies because they find in them answers to their thirst for scripture reading, for singing and dancing, emotional satisfaction, and their need for concrete and clear answers to their spiritual problems and questions. What takes place in their prayer meetings may not be different from such scenes in the United States.

As the huge congregation rises, the Spirit descends. Off come shoes: this is holy ground. Young and old, black and brown and white alike, hop, twist and dance in the aisles. "Satan is under my feet," they sing. Then song gives way to a string of "ooohs" and "waaahs" and "la-la-lahs." The faithful are beginning to "sing in the Spirit." As in one cue, the hoppers and twisters drop to their knees. A man from France curls up in a fetal position, burying his face in the carpet. A woman from Arkansas remain erect, but can't stop bowing. Here and there someone begins speaking in tongues. "Get used to it," the music minister urges the crowd, caressing the keys of his Yamaha organ. "This is what heaven will be like."^{lxxiii}

The dynamism of their worship, their missionary drive, and the evangelistic responsibilities entrusted to their members and new followers often baffle other Christians of the Established Churches. In this class of the NRMs we find groups referred to as **Primary Evangelicals** - those that arose from the western Missionary Movement - and the **Secondary Evangelicals** - Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, those founded by indigenes. In this secondary evangelical group we find for example, The Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), Faith Tabernacle, AME - Zion, Assemblies of God, and various other groups of the "Apostolic Church."

The term "Primary" suggests that these Churches have had connections with European and American organizations that give rise to African movements, and they still have relationships with their overseas leaders. The leader of the Church of God Mission of Benin City, Nigeria, was Archbishop Benson Idahosa who died in March 1998. Although a distinct African movement, the Church of God Mission (CGM) has links with the US-based PTL Network. Their trust and means of evangelism include the use of mass media, magazines, pamphlets, and radio broadcasts. The **Secondary Evangelical Group** may be described as indigenous Pentecostals but are always the same with its Primary Group in faith and practice. The difference is that the contextual African features are more highly developed. In this group one finds many of the various Aladura Churches of West Africa, the Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim, and the Zionist Churches. Some of these indigenous groups have branches overseas, in Great Britain and in the Caribbean.

Charismatic Renewal Movement and Pentecostalism

It may be necessary to draw a little distinction between the **Pentecostals** proper and the **Evangelicals**. The Pentecostals form a large group and differ from the Evangelicals in that the former stress the "holiness of life" ethic, the mandate to mission as well as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, while the latter lay stress on preaching and conversion. The Pentecostal movement drew inspiration from many overseas groups, notably the American Pentecostalism. Within the Mainline Churches - Catholic and Protestant - they are called **Charismatics**. Within the Catholic Church a big problem has developed between the two groups of charismatic movements, namely those operating within the Catholic Church and those who disagree with some Catholic doctrines and challenge some Catholic beliefs and practices. So far, however, within the Catholic Church, the Catholic charismatic renewal movement has been contained as it operates under the guiding eyes of the bishops and priests.

The massive influence of the Protestant brand of Pentecostalism on the Catholic Charismatic Movement in Nigeria in the late 1980s was of much concern to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). The conference had issued Guidelines for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement of Nigeria. The Booklet, published in 1991, contains directives within which the movement would be allowed to operate within the Catholic Church in Nigeria. It states the aims and objectives of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, one of which is to deepen the spiritual life of the individual through conversion, commitment to Jesus Christ, daily prayers and the reading of the

Scriptures, and participating deeply in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church.

As far as the bishops are concerned the "Catholicity" or "Catholicness" of the movement within the Catholic Church cannot be compromised. It doesn't seem that with the publication of the guidelines this problem has been finally settled. The Church leaders believe that if the Charismatic movement is a genuine movement within the Church, it is expected to follow a recognizable course, that is, to rise, stimulate, and then settle back into main stream of Catholicism. If it is not truly and genuinely of the Holy Spirit, it will break off, splinter and fragment. So far the movement has continued to grow in strength and number, not only in Nigeria, but also worldwide. Rallies have always been marked by charismatic manifestations that excite both the young and old.

The intervention of the bishops' conference was felt necessary because some members were becoming *stubborn* and *extravagant* in their application of the charismatic gifts, and especially those of "**glossolalia**," or speaking in tongues, visions, dreams, and the similar phenomena. Some who claim they have been *born again* castigate other Christians and even priests as "unclean" and devoid of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Most of the born-again Charismatics truly try to live the Christian virtues. Many who had in the past led unworthy lifestyles have suddenly abandoned the old life. They, too, are now involved in global evangelism. But some others, influenced by certain Protestant sects, attack some doctrines of the Catholic Church concerning the Sacraments, especially about the sacrament of penance or confession. For others, Mary, the Mother of Christ, has no place in their movement.

The bishops therefore called for obedience and discipline within the movement and condemned pride, arrogance, and disobedience. They observed that charisms are for the general growth and good of the Church, and not for self-aggrandizement and show. But whatever the case may be, it seems that most of the upheavals that set in at that point in the development of the movement have been contained and are now under the watchful eyes of the bishops and their representatives. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement operates in a more peaceful atmosphere in almost all the dioceses in Nigeria. But much of their emotional exuberance, especially during prayer meetings, provokes protests from other Catholics and non-Catholics. It was a hard time for the Catholic authorities in Nigeria, as parish priests, in anger, closed down charismatic groups in their parishes and banned such stubborn members from the sacraments. Even today, it is still hard for some priests to recognize and encourage charismatic gifts that feature during prayer meetings. These include

speaking in tongues, mass hysteria, and other exotic behaviors. One observer described what he saw at one of the Charismatic meetings in a Nigerian Church:

With the announcement by Sister Kate that the Spirit was around, the crowd began to scream - "Oh! Ja - it is true - I feel his touch" as some of the convulsing bodies begin to drop on the floor. One staggers back as if in a drunken stupor. As they drop "dead" on the floor, Sister Kate and other attendants rush in a frenzy to cover the legs of the fallen women. Then came the weird sounds - "Ho, ho, ho, hi, hi, hi, ha, ha, ha! Tim, tim, tim, gbam, gbam, gbam, hu, hu, hu, yaaaaaaa, yoooooo!"

It usually takes a good amount of time before order is restored in the disturbed worshipping community. Those interviewed later claimed they could not remember what had happened to them. The Spirit was in charge and there was nothing one could do. Indeed the spiritual grip is irresistible! The above scene cannot be different from that reported by Kenneth Woodward at the massive movement of the Spirit during the service at Smithton Community Church in central Missouri, United States, in a five-hour Pentecostal power surge. Four hours into the "Pensacola Outpouring," evangelist Stephen Hill closed his sermon with the altar call: "They nailed His hands, they nailed His feet...Jesus did all that for you and you can't walk 20 feet?"

A first rush of 400 believers reaches the altar. Hill and a team of ministers work through the crush, touching their thumbs to forehead after forehead. At each touch, a body falls, "slain in the Spirit," or staggers back. One man lies flat, his arms raised stiff in the air. Another takes a smothering blow to the face when a woman topples onto him; he doesn't flinch. Hill moves down an aisle, stepping over the fallen, then climbs over the back of pews to spread the Spirit power. At a flick of his hand, a whole row of the faithful fall like dominoes.^{lxxiv}

Like their counterparts elsewhere, most Nigerian Pentecostals do not care much about doctrines and denominational differences. Personal experience of the Spirit is what Pentecostalism is all about. Often lost in the materialistic world and failing to realize the inner voice of the Spirit calling one to conversion, a friend introduces another to a prayer meeting where the central experience is the "post-conversion baptism in the Holy Spirit," signified by speaking in tongues and deliverance from demons. In most born-again experiences converts "confess the sins of their past lives." One young student who joined a Pentecostal group

in one State University in Ohio, United States, narrates his past life: "My parents never went to Church. My mother never believed in God. From the age of 6, I started stealing from grocery stores. I drank. I smoked. There was no type of sexual pleasure I did not indulge in. My life was in ruins until a friend of mine spoke to me about the Spirit's wonderful gifts of new life. Since I joined them my life has changed." In Nigeria "testimonies" of conversion and God's wonderful gifts occupy prominent place at Pentecostal prayer meetings.

Pentecostalism will continue to gain ground in the modern Church. The Spirit that people experience in the movement will continue to revolutionize their lives. As Kenneth Woodward rightly points out, Pentecostalism is the most **democratic form of Christianity**, and in the United States, from its lower-class origins, it has been the most blind to racial differences. The kind of Christians who are attracted to Pentecostal congregations have little interest in theological abstractions. They come to worship to feel the power of the Spirit to let the Spirit do for them what they cannot do for themselves, while the Mainline Christian Churches waste energy in theological and moral disputations and controversies.^{lxxv} Pentecostalists have no such preoccupation and thank God that they are spared from such controversies that have divided the Church throughout its 2000 years of history.

At the Pentecostal congregation, no roll call of members is taken. The Spirit is available to everyone. Anyone can become a prayer minister and that is what is of utmost importance. The preacher is not a special minister with juridical functions. "The preacher is there only to initiate the visceral call-and-response between pulpit and pew that gets the Spirit moving. The congregation's sense of release from sin as the Spirit takes hold inside each of them is almost orgasmic, to break free in the Spirit, at the same time, to recognize what the Devil has been up to."^{lxxvi} The emphasis is on repentance - that Christians should get their own acts together and get the sins out of their lives. This is of vital importance and gives credence to the Pentecostalist and the evangelist movement in modern times.

Itinerant Evangelical Groups

Among the groups of the NRMs are those that devote much of their time to evangelism. They include The **Jehovah's Witness** group, The **Assemblies of God**, and the **End of Time Gospel Crusaders**. These are made up of men and women, young and old, who are always ready to abandon their work and family commitments to bring gospel or biblical messages to people of all walks of life. Often they are seen in small groups, armed with handbags containing the Holy Bible and various religious literature. The itinerant gospel teachers and

preachers roam about cities and hamlets, confronting people of every faith and religion at street corners, road junctions, and even on farms, in schools and offices to force their new doctrines down the throats of their unwilling audiences. Insults or indifferent attitudes of the passers-by never deter them. And those who care to listen to them are subjected to a heavy barrage of psychological pressure.

On a higher level, evangelical groups organize international religious and soul-winning crusades in which renowned preachers from the United States, Switzerland, Germany and Austria are invited to preach. The tragic religious riot, that erupted mid September 1991 in Kano, Nigeria, was kindled by the presence of the German-born, itinerant evangelist and born-again Christian, Reinhard Bonnke. **"Christian Evangelical Crusaders Clash with Moslem Fundamentalists in Kano, Nigeria: Death Toll 500,"** was the headline of a newspaper report. As the story went, **Reinhard Bonnke**, whose group was based in Ikeja, Lagos, was in the predominantly Moslem city of Kano. So were hundreds of faithful followers, who trooped into the ancient city from the many states of the federation to hear the word of God. The Kano branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), organizers of the evangelical crusade, had mounted a sustained campaign to garner an attendance to surpass the 500,000 recorded in Kaduna in 1990, when the renowned evangelist Bonnke stormed that city.

It was not to be this time. Instead of the fire of the Holy Spirit, it was fire of death and destruction that swept through the city. As it was reported, a police jet saved Bonnke, together with the other evangelists and co-workers, most of whom were Americans. Just as hundreds of people were killed (some reports said more than 500), so also was property worth millions of dollars destroyed in the bonfire that kept the city of Kano enveloped in thick smoke for days. The Islamic fundamentalists simply would not tolerate Christian crusade in Kano - a predominantly Moslem city.

Militant Christian Evangelists

Among the NRMs of the Pentecostal - Evangelical group, there are fundamentalist and radical groups always ready to confront their "enemies" - Moslems and non-believers. They fight, kill, and die in the name of Christ as Moslems would die for Allah. As in the story of Bonnke and his group above, the crusaders and their Christian followers are always much more daring and ready to confront Moslem fundamentalists on whatever terms. In some University campuses and higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, this radical wing of Christian evangelists is strong. They dare to convert Moslems to

Christianity and see them as infidels that must come over to Christ, damn the consequences! For them it is either **Jesus** or nothing. While for Moslems in Nigeria, the slogan is "Islam for all," for our Christian militant evangelists, the slogan is "Jesus for all by the year 2000!" These young Christian evangelists oppose their Moslem counterparts and assert the superiority of the Christian religion over the Islamic faith in Allah.

Religious riots and major fistcuffs between Christian evangelists and young Moslem fundamentalists are regular occurrences in some cities of Northern Nigeria. Many Protestant and Catholic Christians express suppressed joy at this development. They feel that the orthodox Christian religion has never taken a militant stance before Moslem fundamentalism. Moslem fundamentalists at the least provocation go on rampage, killing and maiming Christians as well as other non-Moslems. They burn Churches and buildings belonging to Christians. "The era of turning the other cheek" to the aggressor seems to be passing away, some Christians think.

"Jesus People" Evangelists

Among the evangelical groups of the NRMs, we encounter another group that is usually referred to as "**Jesus People**" because of their attachment to "**Jesus, the Lord**" and the type of Christian evangelism they stand for. As far as this group is concerned, only those who accept Jesus as Savior matter. Those who profess unshakable faith in Jesus have got all because the fruits of Jesus' sacrifice belong to believers. So the plight of non-believers is of no importance to Jesus People. If non-believers choose to remain in the dark, that is their business. The Christians' duty to the deprived non-believers is merely to convert them so that they will prosper in Jesus name.

"Jesus People" spread their gospel message through Christian hymns. They also produce souvenirs and religious articles with various inscriptions, depicting the various redeeming acts of Jesus. One finds these articles in forms of badges, almanacs, posters, car stickers, and so on. Some of these stickers are placed at doorposts and at various corners of living rooms and offices. The people wear T-shirts and head-ties. Sellers of such articles and souvenirs make it a field day during Jesus People rallies, healing crusades, and conventions. Christian sponsors and non-Christians believe in the magic effects of these emblems or sacramentals. Some believe that faith in these can bring about healing. Some of these articles proclaim the superiority of Christ over Satan and are believed to be able to chase away evil spirits and protect users from harm. These articles have become "amulets" in the hands of these Christians. Some of the inscriptions read:

Thank God, I have **Jesus** at last. Relax, my soul, **Jesus** is in control. My case is different I am born again. **Jesus** is the answer. I am a terror to Satan. I have **Jesus**. Jesus is my life. Praise the Lord, no matter your condition. **Jesus** is real! The blood of **Jesus** covers me. Wise people still seek **Jesus**. Fall in love with **Jesus**. If you are in chains, **Jesus** can set you free. Man can't help you, but **Jesus** can. **Jesus** is my rock and my provider. Life without **Jesus** ends in hell fire. Who is your master, **Jesus** or Satan? Beware, **Jesus** is on my side. Don't give up, your Savior is on the way. I belong to **Jesus**, what about you? **Jesus** is the head of this house.

In these and in many other types of "Jesus ejaculatory prayers," the saving effects of Jesus action are depicted. It leaves no one in doubt that Jesus the Christ is the redeemer and all should trust in His saving acts. The devil has been overthrown and Christians have been set free. "Jesus People" are also known as "**Triumphalists**." For them Christ has saved mankind and all contradictions and dichotomies have disappeared. This brand of the "**Jesus Revolution**" movement has spread throughout Africa and the black world since the 1980s. According to them, God met all needs of the human race in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share in the victory of Christ over sin, sickness, and poverty. A believer therefore has a right to the blessings of good health and wealth won by Christ, and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith in Jesus.

Deliverance Ministry Singers

Another group of "Jesus People", who are called Deliverance Ministry Singers, spread their brand of gospel message through Christian hymns and religious theatrical performances. Some of their popular hymns recorded on discs and cassettes are sold in many places and are patronized by Christians of various denominations. Their hymns and songs are played in music shops, marketplaces, and busy streets and are adapted from popular biblical texts that are usually given fundamentalist interpretations. These hymns serve their evangelical and didactic purposes. Often other religious groups, including Catholics, indiscriminately copy and sing the hymns in their own Churches and religious gatherings and festivals. The doctrines, these gospel singers propound show their pattern of life and attitude toward other Christian bodies. They can also be detected from their well-composed hymns. For example:

Jesus has anointed me
 Jesus has anointed me
 He has given me power
 And sent me out to preach
 Jesus is my shepherd!

Here these evangelist singers trace the origin of their divine call to proclaim the good news of salvation of the master and Lord, Jesus. They believe that no one has any right to stop them like their master Jesus in proclaiming the gospel. No one has any right to question their authority to preach: "By what authority are you doing all these things and who gave you the authority?" (Mt. 21:23) In another popular hymn, adapted from the parable of the prodigal son, the evangelist singers exhort all sinners to repent now, sin no more, that nothing worse befall you (Jn. 5:14).

I will arise and go to my father,
 I will arise and go to my father,
 And I will say to Him, I have sinned,
 Father I have sinned
 Father I have sinned ... (Lk.15: 18)

Sinners must repent or face the consequences of God's vengeance. They see the end of the world messed up in sin approaching speedily. They thus proclaim "*dies irae, dies illa* " that day of wrath, that day of terror when the Lord will judge the living and the dead and destroy the world by fire. In this case this group of Jesus People can be described as a **Millennial sect**, stressing the imminent **Second Coming of Christ** and eventual reversal of fortune of the various social and economic groups in the sinful world. There are some people who think that the Gospel Singers group is a puritanical sect. Judging from their vocal stance on certain moral issues or religious practices, this group can be uncompromising on most moral issues, including sex. In one of their hymns they leave no one in doubt about the fate of those who indulge in immoral acts:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom?
 Do not be deceived, neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor the adulterous, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Unlike some other religious bodies that are often silent on these moral issues, this subset of Jesus People is very vocal. In songs and street preaching, including early morning sermons, they condemn all sorts of societal evil and malpractice and prescribe divine punishment for those who refuse to abandon their sinful ways. Their open and unequivocal condemnation of sex and promiscuity can be disturbing and can often leave passers-by abashed, as our evangelists single out *sexism* as one of the worst crimes and moral offences in the world today. This evil, they insist, leads all offenders to hellfire. The Gospel singers leave no stone unturned in their crusade against sexism in the modern world. One popular record song is titled "Abomination of Desolation in the Holy of Holies - House of God." Like the true prophets of the old, they have no good word for the impostor in the house of the Lord. Hear them again:

Come to the holy of Holiest, the house of God, our Churches and quarters and behold what happens there, abomination of desolation! Approach, and see, behold what crimes that are perpetrated in those places; some are full of hatred for others, sow seeds of discord. Some poison their fellow Christians, while other indulge in immoral acts; but watch them, watch these people, the very Christians who profess faith in Christ. Even their leaders take part in these criminal offences. What am I seeing! Look, how impostors, hirelings, criminals, dubious, and evil fellows have taken positions in the house of God, in the Holy of Holies and desecrate the very house of God they are placed in charge of!

References are made in the scriptures as these impostors are condemned in strong terms: "So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)" Mt. 24:15. Another reference to Ezekiel 22:26ff is well brought out in the hymn:

Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the clean and the unclean and they have disregarded my Sabbaths so that I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst of her like wolves, tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed for them with whitewash, seeing false vision and divining lies for them. The people of the land have practiced extortion and have committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and the needy and have extorted from the sojourner without redress.

The gospel singers have devastating words for Christians and for priests and leaders of the various Churches, who fail to live up to expectations. Equally condemned are lay people who close their eyes to these evils perpetrated in God's house. Christians are ultimately admonished to change their bad ways and turn to Christ who saves. "Repent now and accept Jesus as your Savior." Other popular "Jesus Hymns" have recently burgeoned and are freely used by Christians of various denominations during thanksgiving services, offertory processions, and other religious functions. These express infatuation with Christ.

End of Time Gospel Crusaders

This brand of evangelism or gospel crusade is the indigenous "**Secondary - Evangelical Group**" from the Jehovah's Witness sect (**Watch Tower International**.) This is the most disturbing of all Evangelical groups of the NRMs. With them dialogue is impossible. Members of other Christian denominations recognize them and avoid confrontation with them. Manipulating mankind's natural feelings and fears, they predict doomsday on account of societal evils, including corruption in high places. The Witnesses claim that they have resigned from the world. The world's problems, wars and politics are so complex, so pervasive, that they no longer concern the witnesses. They claim to be citizens of a better society, "Jehovah's New World Theocracy" (or Kingdom), and therefore owe loyalty only to Jehovah God. Consequently they refuse the duties of earthly citizenship. At schools and colleges their children and wards are very difficult to deal with, as these refuse to participate in school and government programs, which they refer to as "mundane practices." These include prayers, singing of national anthem, the recitation of national pledge, observance of public holidays, and so on. They hate religious organizations and governments, which they claim are *Satanic*.

The Jehovah Witnesses worship a vengeful God who plans the bloodiest war - the Armageddon - in which the wicked and all religionists will be annihilated. The "approaching End of the World" is the center of their message to believers and non-believers, unlike other sects that merely include the "End in - Sight" slogan as a part of their evangelist program. In times of social, economic, and political crisis, this group seems to appeal to people on the fringe of society. In fact in the history of Christianity, there have always been moments of predicting the imminent end of the world. For this group in particular, history is divided into stages, each marked by a different relationship with God. According to their scheme, we are now living at the End of the Last

Days, which will see the tribulation of great suffering on earth, after which Satan and his followers will be cast into hell and the saints will live in eternal happiness.

The End-of-Time evangelists claim that their theory is the teaching of the bible and they go to quote many texts that support their stand, particularly from Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation. Naturally the social implications of such hot gospel are great among the poor and suffering people. Besieged by many problems - political instability, tribal and ethnic conflicts and civil wars, mounting economic problems, joblessness, poverty, and lack of social amenities that make life worth living, the oppressed look forward to the Day of Salvation. Even military coups and violent changes in government are greeted with great relief and jubilation. Perhaps "true salvation" can come through the military boys who chase away the corrupt politicians or military dictators from office and government houses. But alas! The new "dictators" do not usher in an era of peace, tranquility, and prosperity. Some are even worse than their masters whom they chased away or murdered. What a vicious circle!

One should not be surprised at why the "End of Time Evangelists" preach a hot gospel of doom for oppressors and sinners. They call on the God of the "Old Testament" to "re-appear in His ancient form, as in the days of old" and inflict punishment on the erring and the wayward men and women of this age. 'Tit for Tat', "Here and Now" and "in a decisive manner" should regulate the actions of the "merciless Jehovah." As the people of this age have closed their ears to reason and have continued to sin, they have themselves to blame as the Doomsday approaches. All has been foretold!

As the Apocalyptic texts give great prominence to disasters of every kind, this End -of-Time Crusaders tend to see all kinds of hardship and deprivation as foretold, for these are the "End of Times." If God ordains these disasters, they are by definition unavoidable. This way of thinking thus gives some false relief and engenders passivity and resignation among those who have always borne the bulk of suffering, namely the poor and the marginalized. It can even lead to the cult of suffering, in which suffering is seen as blessedness, a proof of being one of God's chosen Remnant.

Because the end is supposed to be near, nothing else matters but preaching the Gospel of fulfilling the great commission (Mt. 28.19, Mt. 1.14). Evangelism is all that matters and to get involved in anything else is to distract oneself from the one important task of winning souls for Christ. There are many "End-of-Time" gospel crusaders in Nigeria. Armed with the Bible (and possibly a public address system) they address their message of doom to passers-by. "Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand!" The so-called *Early Morning Gospel*

Crusaders or *Horn Criers* direct their message to all perpetrators of evil, including community leaders, village heads, town union leaders, heads of government, and others occupying responsible posts in public and private sectors of social and economic life. It is time to stop the evil deed and return to God and be saved. Oftentimes they only stop short of calling names of those they think are enemies of the people and God.

The End-of-Time crusaders have time for their work. Like the Jehovah Witness itinerant evangelists all over the world, they abandon their daily engagements, take positions at street corners, and mount soap boxes at public squares and markets, preaching the message of repentance and the imminent end of the world. During important Christian religious celebrations and festivals - such as Easter and Christmas - this group of Witnesses, in collaboration with Scripture Union people, born-again Christians, and Deeper-Life Christian Ministers, used to organize gospel crusades at market squares and open village spaces to distract other Christians attending services. Large public address systems are mounted and the whole area electrified with fluorescent lights of all colors. The whole setup can be attractive. But what they preach can only attract the interest of ignorant passers-by or those they hire to swell their membership. They can constitute a nuisance to Christians who go about their business or religious functions.

Truly the End of Time witnesses represent a real menace, and generally speaking, it is a waste of time arguing with them. For members of the Mainline Christian Churches, it is wise to take note that the Jehovah Witness preacher or the evangelist visitor is certainly unreasonably prejudiced, and often ignorant. Only those Christians who are sufficiently qualified might hope to gain anything by discussion, for their system is based on the destruction of Christianity, all organized religion, and all lawful civil authority. Their methods and commitment to witnessing must be of great interest to Christians, for the ordinary Jehovah's witness is expected to attend five hourly meetings a week and to devote about ten hours a month to witnessing! And most of them hold tenaciously to this evangelism program.

The Promise Keepers' Renewal Movement

It was like a new Pentecost, as the Promise Keepers traveled to the nation's capital. Like the Jesus Revolution of the 1970s, the scene of evangelistic and revivalist Christian movement was the United States of America. The American Family Association Journal news editor, Jim Vitagliano, described the coming together of men, touched by the Spirit of God and willing to re-create society in the image of their faith. The hundreds of thousands of men were "gathering like

locusts" (Book of Joel, Chapter 2) and the meeting place was Washington Mall on Saturday, October 4, 1997, to take part in a sacred assembly to repent of their sins and pray for revival. They arrived from every state in the U.S. and almost 60 nations, traveling in cars, on buses, and on more than 175 chartered planes.

Every man on the spot knew why he was there - **conversion, repentance, confession of sin, and re-dedication to Christian life**. As the innumerable journeys across varied terrain were underway, many of the men who arrived in Washington had already begun their spiritual journeys. Whether they had started months ago or hours before, they had been asking God to search their hearts, that they might repent of their sins that had kept them from being the men of God they were called to. Not any of the **born-again** Christian men would listen to their detractors who accuse the Promise Keepers of harboring some political hidden agenda within their newfound faith in Jesus. None would be deterred by their enemies' misinterpretation of their religious motives. Their reactions to side and political talks and their commitments to the movement's objectives could be summed up as follows: "I'm not here to make a political statement, I'm here to make a personal commitment, to humble myself before a living God...We realize we cannot change this country in our own strength, but we have to depend on God to change it...My prayer is that this is a turning point, that this is a day where America sits up and takes notice of men who are concerned with families and men who love the Lord."

"I see the Churches coming together": Spiritual Revival of the World!

Ellis Cose^{lxxvii} captures a vivid picture of the great religious revivalist movement in America, the **Promise Keepers Crusade**. By bus and train, by chartered jet and Harley, even by bicycle they came, by the hundreds of thousands, to bow down before their God. And if their vision is true, their journey was just beginning and would end in nothing less than the spiritual revival of America - perhaps of the world! Bill McCartney, the Promise Keepers founder, believes that men, touched by the Spirit of God, will recreate society in the image of their faith: "You're going to see them move across the community unlike you've ever seen, and connect in ways in which they have not connected...I see the Churches coming together. I see jobs coming out of it. I see the poor being fed 'cause God's going deep into the hearts of these men." Ellis Cose would not like to be dragged into the complicated spiritual exercise of discerning the type of Spirit that was moving the Promise Keepers. Maybe it was the Spirit of God or perhaps the spirit of the moment, but something clearly

seized the hearts of the endless sea of Promise Keepers gathered on the Mall at Saturday's huge sacred assembly. Even before the meeting officially opened at noon, a solid mass of men was already stretched from the Capitol to beyond the Washington Monument. Washington indeed resembled the eschatological Zion City, the Heavenly Jerusalem, where the saints gather at end of the final pilgrimage:

No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the Spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel. See that you do not reject the one who speaks. [Hebrews, 12:22]

They did *the wave* and chanted Jesus name. There were hugs, high-fives, and the murmur of prayers coming from tepees set up on the Mall. The Washington gathering was more than a liturgical festival. "We're here to pray for the nation and ourselves and our personal crimes," said Andrew Doughert, of Sunbury, Pennsylvania, who credits Jesus with rescuing him from crack. But both contrast beautifully well. The biblical commentator on the above passage seemed to have been aware of the Washington gathering of the faithful: "This remarkably beautiful passage contrasts two great assemblies of people: that of the Israelites gathered at Mount Sinai for the sealing of the old covenant and the promulgation of the Mosaic law, and that of the followers of Jesus gathered at Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the assembly of the new covenant."^{lxxviii}

The gathering of the Promise Keepers was as extensive as part of the spiritual mission they have embraced: "In the capitol of a nation that has left God, Christian men of different races, tongues, and denominations stood before the Lord on the grassy mall stretching from the building where legislators pass our laws, past the Smithsonian Institute, the National Gallery of Art, and the Air and Space Museum past the Washington Monument; to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial."^{lxxix} The Promise Keepers were there for serious business. For more than six hours, these men who had traveled so far, both geographically and spiritually, worshipped God, listened to the preaching of His Word, and prayed. Many had been and were fasting. And when their leaders called for repentance, thousands and thousands of men literally fell on their faces asking for God's forgiveness. On the grass and underneath the trees, with hands spread out before them or tightly clasped in quiet desperation, men cried out to God in their own

way. Indeed, some wept openly, others whispered their prayers, still others petitioned their God in silence.

What are the Promise Keepers up to? While women and politicians rattle over the spiritual and political motives of these men, there is no doubt that many Church leaders, including the Mainline Catholic and Protestant leadership are pleased with the results of spiritual revival provoked by the Promise Keepers Crusade. There is no reason to "stop" them. Jesus cautioned his disciples to be slow in contradicting those they didn't find within their own group. "Do not forbid them; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us." [Mark 9:39] It is likely that what attracts these men to such large religious assemblies, among other factors, must be the spiritual satisfaction they experience. A socially sanctioned place to be with other men offers, too, some psychological satisfaction. But the ultimate goal of the Promise Keepers Movement is indeed a spiritual revival. It is only within such a milieu that they could undertake such religious and spiritual commitments embodied in the **Seven Promises** of a Promise Keeper:

- 1. Honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit;**
- 2. Pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that I need brothers to help me keep my promise;**
- 3. Practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity;**
- 4. Building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values;**
- 5. Supporting the mission of my Church, by honoring and praying for my pastor and by actively giving my time and resources;**
- 6. Reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity; and**
- 7. Influencing my world, being obedient to the great Commandment [Mark 12:30-31] and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).**

Even though the Promise Keepers religious movement is greeted with skepticism in some quarters, there is no reason to discredit them. The rise of new revivalist movements points to one common factor, namely the need for change. If men have not lived up to their religious, social, political, and family commitments, there is need to summon them to renewed action. In a world where the dominant group in leadership has not lived up to expectations, there is nothing wrong in seeking a way out of the dilemma. Most often the ills of

modern society need religious and spiritual solutions. This is what all the new religious and revivalist movements are about. If they succeed in calling people to conversion and a new way of life, surely they are no threat to any person or institution. "Every Spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." (I John 4:3)

The "Evangelical Threat" may indeed be a blessing for the Third Millennium Church. It may be preparing the way for the true "United Church of Christ." In the Evangelist Movement people already see **the Churches coming together!** The Mainline Protestant Church that claims the name the "United Church of Christ" does not in anyway manifest unity in word or action, within its own membership or with other Churches. The phenomenon of "unity" among the Christian Churches at the end of the 20th century is a misnomer. The "**United Church of Christ**" has been a divided Church of Christ. More than 30 years of search for the unity of the Christian Churches has eluded those that accepted seriously the prayers of Jesus "that they may be one." Something spectacular may emerge from the *Evangelical Threat*. A new "Movement" or "Church," that can accommodate all believers, shun discrimination and racism within its community, and preach conversion and love may not be seen as a *threat* any more.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Church, Moral Conscience of the World: Fruitless Endeavor and Loss of Power

The Third Millennium Church that emerges as the "leader" of all the Christian Churches - in the fierce race for supremacy - may not compromise on the gospel of liberation from sin. It may not equivocate on the issue of social evils that stand in man's way to self-fulfillment. By abandoning God's ways and his commandments, believers and non-believers contribute in diverse ways to human misery and deprivation. There is disorder in the world. There is need to confront people who do not live up to expectations, trouble their consciences, and elicit contrition for misdeeds. The Third Millennium Church must be able to prick people's consciences, and bring about a change of heart.

The greatest success of Christianity at the end of the 20th century should be measured by the amount of influence it has exerted on the moral conscience

of humankind. The bearers of the good news of salvation - often regarded as the "**Troublers of Israel**" (I King 18:17), may after all not be the most popular and beloved of persons. Prophets of the old as well as most founders of world religions suffered persecution and rejection by their people as a result of their confrontational attitude. Whether Christianity will successfully continue to model the conscience of humankind is in doubt. There are obvious signs that believers and non-believers alike are no more in the mood to follow the directives of the Church. The tendency is for each person or group to rely on the dictates of individual conscience or follow the state legislatures, usually shaped by collective decisions after following some type of democratic guideline representing majority opinion. Divine authority thus ceases to be the guiding principle in reaching an acceptable conclusion about many difficult moral issues.

The Bearers of the Gospel Message as "Troublers of Israel" (1 King 18:17)

For nearly 2000 years Christianity has remained the most recognizable voice among the many world religions, pricking the conscience of humanity, even when it seems that the crusade against evil is being lost and all have gone astray and have chosen the way of the impious. The prophetic voice of the Church continues to ring in the wilderness, announcing the gospel of salvation. Christ while commissioning his disciples on this mission pointed out that it was a continuation of the same mission of the prophets of old. The messengers of the word of God would face opposition and persecution, but they should not give up this assignment to be the "*Troubler of Israel*" as Elijah was, the bearer of the message of doom as Jeremiah and Nathan were.

Only those chosen and properly prepared for these tasks could accomplish them with success. And so one like Jeremiah was already chosen from his mother's womb to be a bearer of the difficult message and was destined to suffer hardship on account of this vocation. The Man of God, the prophet, was expected to announce unpleasant messages and lay conditions for salvation. Unlike messengers who had not been sent or commissioned (false prophets), the prophet should not be influenced by wishes of the people or their governments or deterred by threat from carrying out the mission. He might fall out of favor with the majority of the people and those in authority. Not even the popular wishes of the people or opinion poll can determine the prophet's line of action. Divine authority and mandate can be the only valid criteria. Abandoned and discredited by his people the messenger of the divine word will often suffer

much torment. Opposition might come from various quarters - from co-workers in the Lord's vineyard or even from closest friends.

In olden times, in the midst of opposition and criticisms, most messengers of the word did not give up their difficult tasks. In the face of danger they prophesied and preached conversion. Some of their listeners repented. It always required great moral and even physical courage to confront the offender. The prophet Nathan had to carry out the difficult task of announcing to King David that he was the sinner: "Thou art the man!" [2 Sam. 12.7] And for Elijah, it was another direct confrontation with a king. As far as **King Ahab** was concerned, Elijah was a **troubler**, the **disturber of Israel**, for his prophetic pronouncements would not grant the king any rest of mind. Elijah's response tells the rest of the story: "It is not I who disturb Israel, but you and your family, by forsaking the commandments of the Lord and following the baals." It was a moment of decision as Elijah challenged the king and people: "How long will you straddle the issue? If the Lord is God, follow him; if baals, follow him." [2 King 18.21] There was no room for equivocation. Jeroboam, King of Israel, could not withstand the devastating prophecies of the prophet Amos. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (the king's friend), had sent word to Jeroboam, warning him to chase the prophet away because his words were distressing and confrontational: "Amos has conspired against you here within Israel; the country cannot endure all his words. For this is what Amos say: "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be exiled from its land." To Amos, Amaziah said: "Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah! There earn your bread by prophesying, but never again prophesy in Bethel." [Amos: 7.10] But Amos would not be intimidated:

Now hear the word of the Lord! You say: prophesy not against Israel, preach not against the house of Isaac. Now says the Lord: Your wife shall be made a harlot in the city, and your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword. Your land shall be divided by measuring line and yourself shall die in an unclean land; Israel shall be exiled far from its land.

During his five-day historic visit to Cuba [January 24 - 29, 1998], "Pope John Paul II's message was heard - though not always welcomed," writes *Newsweek* [February 2, 1998]. "In Santa Clara there was silence when the pope condemned abortion, which takes place in Cuba at the rate of 60 for every 100 live births, an abominable crime. But when he announced that parents should have the freedom to choose their children's education, there was sustained applause."

Perhaps the *Cuban silence* over the abortion issue should not be interpreted as an "unwelcome message" to a people who have not been taught or been well informed and are unfamiliar with the rudiments of their faith about the Church's stand on such issues. Like the Israelites of old, the Cubans were challenged and their consciences were troubled. The *sins of Cuba* may not be as serious as people think. On the judgment day, who knows how it will go with "Christian nations and peoples" who have heard the message and enjoyed religious liberty but still refused to keep the law! It is believed that in the most "Christian" nations the abortion rate is as high as 80 per 100 births, and promiscuity and licentious living match those of the biblical **Sodom and Gomorrah**.

It may be wise to be slow in judging the "pagan and godless nations." Christ was clear in his attitude to those "who have heard the word and do not keep it." (Matthew 12.48) "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them - do not think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!" [Luke 13:2] In Elijah's confrontation with the people, [I Kings 18.21], the Bible tells us, "The people, however, were *silent*. They did not answer him." It was indeed a Herculean task for Elijah to drive the hard facts into the conscience of Israel, forcing the people to take a decision on an issue for which only a few saw the need.

The divine life confronts beautifully, is involved in, and decisively qualifies the life of history. To repudiate it ("the people of Israel have forsaken the Covenant"), to delimit it or run in the face of it ("have you killed and also taken possession?"), to attempt to compromise with it ("how long will you go limping with two different opinions?"), is not merely folly but unqualified disaster, the loss of meaning and fulfillment, the imposition of chaos and death.^{lxxx}

For some of the messengers of God, it was not easy accepting this burden of preaching repentance to stiff-necked people, a hardened and wicked generation! But the divine master could apply force to assure some success. So it was with *Jonah, the prophet*. This disobedient prophet who attempted to dodge his divine mission was cast overboard and swallowed by a great fish, rescued in a miraculous way, and sent to preach to the people of Nineveh. Like Sodom and

Gomorraah, "their sins were great before the Lord." The Lord ordered Jonah: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh and preach against it; their wickedness has come up before me." [Jonah 1:2] But to the surprise of Jonah, the wicked city listened to his message of doom and repented. All Ninevites, from the king to the lowliest subject, humbled themselves in sackcloth and ashes.

Not every prophet or God's messenger was as successful and lucky as Jonah was. Less lucky was *John the Baptizer*. It was not an easy task confronting the king and reprimanding him for his heinous crimes. **Herod** had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." [Mt. 14:3] John's boldness in confronting the king cost him his head; for the king ordered that John be beheaded in prison. John's head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, Salome, who took it to her mother, Herodias. [Mt. 14.10]

Modern Church history records many bloody incidents arising from stubborn and confrontational attitudes of *modern prophets* when approaching wicked and immoral kings and rulers. There are stories of martyrs who died for their faith on account of their stance with evil men and women. There were occasions when the Christian Church and its leaders spoke out against the actions of evil kings and emperors. An uncompromising attitude cost the Church and her future generations more than several heads. **Henry VIII** stands out clearly as the Herod of the modern times. He did not only allow many heads to roll as a consequence of his inability to obtain the Church's approval for his illegal marriage; he also caused irreparable damage to Church unity.

To a large extent the modern prophets and missionaries have been encouraged by the very attitude of the Divine Master to defy all dangers and threats to life and confront the rulers of this world who refuse to repent. Christ confronted the religious and political authorities of his day and pronounced divine judgment on them as a consequence of their misdeeds and hypocrisy. His open denunciation of the **Scribes and Pharisees** must have shocked his listeners too as he pronounced a series of "woes" on them, repeatedly calling them "hypocrites, fools, serpents, a brood of vipers, murderers, and blind leaders." The seventh "woe" is especially devastating: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing." [Mt. 23:27]

These series of "woes", as commentators point out, remained the heart of Jesus' teaching on uprightness of character and those vices that often becloud it. Leaders who do not lead by example or who shamelessly contradict the very principles, which they should protect, must be confronted by the prophets. The phrase "woe to" occurs often in the prophetic and apocalyptic literature, expressing horror of sin and punishment. As Jesus Himself predicted, such vehement denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees led to his death and it could not have been otherwise: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous and you say, if we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophet's' blood.' Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out!" [Mt 23:29]

Gospel of Political Correctness vis-à-vis Confrontational Evangelization

There would be less debate and confusion on some of the contentious moral issues of modern times if religious values had significant impact on the moral and spiritual lives of the adherents of the Christian religion. But, alas, it is not to be! The separation of religion from the state - God from Caesar - makes it impossible for religious and moral beliefs to influence state laws. In fact the reverse is true. State laws have come to exercise supreme authority over modern man's moral conscience. In most part state laws have superseded most of the religious laws so that the observance of laws and what people believe to be the best moral judgment do not arise from the dictates of an unseen spiritual force or God, who must be obeyed. It is what the state laws say that generally guides moral principles of most people, including Christians. Western democracy tries to liberate man from those religious beliefs and practices, that would otherwise cause conflict and in the view of civil leadership would jeopardize peace and unity. In certain areas of modern world today conflicting views on particular moral issues will continue to attract the attention of all and sundry, government leaders as well as the people they govern.

The culture of **political correctness** has no doubt weakened the proclamation of the gospel message in modern times. The popularity of a message or a doctrine is basically assessed by its *political correctness*. Indeed many people accept the theory that as far as moral judgment is concerned today, we are in the era of *political correctness*. To speak *politically* - and *correctly* - one must speak about those things people like to hear and the way they like

them presented. It therefore is *politically incorrect* to be plain in one's language or hit the nail on the head of the subject. A preacher of the word who openly confronts his congregation with their sins without first filtering his ideas and language may be thought imprudent.

The political correctness culture is contagious. In order not to be left out in the dark or thought ignorant or unsympathetic with the offenders or "sinners," the best attitude is to side with the majority and speak the acceptable and palatable language of *politics*, free from influence of religious or orthodox moral principles. In such circumstances, no references are made to religious laws as bases for supporting a moral view. Some ministers of religion have been caught up in the web of the political correctness culture. Instead of finding their support for basic moral issues from an old book of the **Bible**, the **Koran** or some other unwritten religious code, certain religious ministers leave nobody in doubt about the sources of their moral guidance.

Instead of the sin of **adultery** finding its support in God's Commandments, believed to have been handed over to Moses by God and to be observed by all believers, the point is made that adultery is bad because it violates the human rights of a woman. **Theft** or **dishonesty** is wrong, simply because some one else's basic right to own the stolen property has been violated. **Abortion** is *not* wrong because *correctly and politically speaking*, government legislation sees the life and rights of the mother more important than those of the fetus. Moreover abortion helps control the growing world population. It is important because uncontrolled growth would contribute to the scarcity of food. Similar examples illustrate how a new religion of *political correctness* is replacing the moral codes of the ancient religions of the ancestors, which have influenced morality for centuries. The modern preacher - the pastor, the television or street evangelist - has a difficult task. Where does he stand? What is he up to?

The prophetic mission of the Old and New Testament times was strictly **confrontational**. The outbursts of the prophetic message, always irresistible and often dramatic, were meant to bring about an immediate reaction from the audience. That reaction was not always predictable. It could be **positive**, bringing about an immediate change of heart or **conversion**, for example in the case of John the Baptist, at the beginning of his ministry - a voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [Luke 3.4] Even though John became more aggressive and confrontational when he saw many of the **Pharisees and Sadducees** seeking baptism - calling them "a brood of vipers" - these and others who came to listen to him were touched by his

preaching. They asked for forgiveness and penance for their sins. Among the crowds of people who came asking for forgiveness were **tax collectors, soldiers, and other notorious and public sinners.**

The crowd asked him, "What then should we do?" And he meted out the various penitential acts to them for the reparation of the offenses they had committed: "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He answered them, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." Soldiers also asked him, "And what is it that we should do?" He told them, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone and be satisfied with your wages." [Lk. 3:10 - 14]. This same John the Baptist was not as lucky with this group of his listeners as with Herod. Perhaps the king had not got the grace of repentance as had this first generation, who received baptism of repentance from John.

As can be seen from many examples from both former and contemporary times, confrontational evangelization has not always been popular. Nevertheless it has often succeeded in eliciting the desired response from the people - repentance instead of the hardening of the heart. Most of the Pre-exilic prophets preached repentance in view of the approaching danger and God's wrath. The people did not listen to them and disaster struck. Instead of listening to the prophets, the people plotted for their death. Perhaps Yahweh relented and had pity when the people hearkened to the words of the Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophets. An era of peace returned and Jerusalem was restored to its original beauty and status! Just as in the former times, confrontational evangelization in modern times can act as a **double-edged sword**. It can provoke repentance and bring about peace, tranquillity, and restoration. It can equally provoke bitterness, anger, and hardness of heart. How are the Christians of the present reacting to the various methods of evangelization employed by the modern prophets and the Church? This is a very important question, one that must be investigated in order to assess properly the successes and failures of the Christian religion as we approach the next millennium.

Confrontational Evangelization: A double-edged Sword - Obey God Rather than Man?

Can the modern prophets of Yahweh, the pastors and preachers of the word hold up to the traditional confrontational evangelization, requiring obedience to God rather than to men? Not even the threat of death could scare the immediate post-

resurrection preachers or prevent them from carrying on the task facing them. When they had brought the Apostles in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin, the high priest questioned them, "We gave you strict orders - did we not? - to stop teaching in that name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles said in reply, "We must obey God rather than men." [Acts. 5:29] There is strong evidence that the Church's traditional confrontational stance is being weakened by pressures from political leaders, multi-finance institutions and other pressure groups who hate to be confronted with the sins of their institutions.

Pressures arise too from some Christians who like to remain within the Church but would not like to keep the rules and commandments of the Church and God. Either that the followers are no more ready to follow or the leaders are no more able to lead. Coldness on the part of the Christian leaders is evident when the confrontational stance is dropped. The word of God becomes blunt and does not achieve its goal. It is no more a double edged sword because the preacher has compromised the terms by *not being persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient, reprimanding and encouraging through all patience and teaching...*"[2 Timothy 4.1] In the Catholic Church many aggrieved Catholics think that bearers of the word have watered down the message of the Gospel. Some issues are thought to be controversial or dangerous that many preachers feel it is best to avoid mentioning them in Sunday homilies and evangelist crusades. Others simply ignore such issues to avoid being categorized as 'conservative.' These concerned Catholics lament:

The Vatican thunders against abortion, tyrants, illicit sex, consumerism, dissenting theologians, disobedient priests and nuns, and more. But walk into your average parish. Where's the beef? We get crumbs - and platitudes. We don't hear much, if anything, about the Church's teachings on abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, pornography, the indissolubility of marriage - "too controversial." Birth control and Hell are taboo subjects. Pop psychology and feel-good theology are "in." Sin is "out," prompting one to wonder why Christ bothered to get crucified.^{lxxxix}

In fact there are not a few lay persons in North America today who are confused as to what they, as Christians, should accept and believe. They blame their pastors and some leaders of the Christian Churches for watering down the teachings of the Christianity or not even teaching their flock anything. One concerned parishioner admits that pastors could have their "private" opinions on

some teachings of the Church but does not agree that "private views" of individuals should be allowed to overshadow the official teaching of the Church. "We demand that they tell us what the Catholic Church teaches, whether they agree or not. We, their subjects expect them to teach us about our faith so that we do not stray." Confrontational evangelization has been replaced with a laissez-affair, easy-going telltale stuff, expressed in a politically correct language that does not prick the conscience of the listeners or challenge the followers of Christ. Hear them again:

Cowardly clerics, fearful of being politically incorrect or challenging the flock or offending some stray soul, keep the full Catholic message from us. In effect we are blindfolded - left to stumble in the dark, prey to false prophets and the sirens of the world, not even knowing why we are Catholics...How long is American Catholicism going to censor itself, bow down before an alien culture?^{lxxxii}

There is no doubt that confrontational evangelization is in jeopardy. In most cases, instead of the bearers of the word rising to the challenges of their office they are easily intimidated by the enemies of the Word and instead of challenging the impious, they tell them not to worry about their sins. "There is no cause for alarm!" Like the false prophets of the old, those of the present times are indicted:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Listen not to the words of your prophets, who fill you with emptiness; visions of their own fancy they speak, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say to those who despise the word of the Lord "Peace shall be yours"; and to everyone who walks in hardness of heart, "No evil shall overtake you. Now who has stood in the council of the Lord to see him and to hear his word? Who has heeded his word, so as to announce it? [Jeremiah: 23; 16 - 18]

At the end of an age there is great fear, that *confrontational evangelization*, in the manner of the "true" prophets of the old and the Apostles, is being abandoned. The tendency for the preachers of the gospel to pick and choose *only* those topics that interest their congregations has made conversion and renewal movements difficult tasks for the modern prophets. It is to avoid some issues which people would not like to hear. Thus instead of hurting anybody, it would be better to avoid raising dust. Succumbing to blackmail is a tragedy for

the Church and siding with the masses to appear popular is a disaster. This situation is best illustrated by the anti-papal protest against Pope John Paul II's stand on many moral issues of the 20th century.

While some agnostics, atheists, and enemies of Christian religion were pouring abuses on TIME Magazine for selecting the Pope as the **1994 Man of the Year**, one admirer of the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church congratulated TIME for choosing a man, and indirectly his Church, for being the lonely consistent voice among world leaders and peoples of influence for condemning evil and promoting peace and love in a world that has lost its conscience. Perhaps not many read that piece of note on the Pope and the Catholic Church. Those who wrote furious and abusive letters were calling for the head of the Pope and other Church leaders who condemn *abortion, contraception, homosexuality, artificial birth control, suicide, euthanasia, same-sex marriage*, and other controversial "sins" that some advocates of **new morality** see as exercise in freedom of conscience. For them, people who indulge in such acts have not broken any law, divine or human.

Anti-papal crusades also marked Pope John Paul II's September 1996 visit to France. As the embarrassed Catholic world was told, the demonstrations against the Pope - ranging from letters of protest to the planting of bombs in the Churches where the Pope was to stop - was sparked off by the Vatican's removal of a *popular* French **Bishop Jacques Gaillot** as a result of his unorthodox views on *homosexuality, priestly celibacy*, and other touchy issues. No one was surprised that Bishop Gaillot remains immensely *popular* in France while the Pope is not! By their popularity in the biblical prophetic tradition it was always easy to distinguish the prophets of Yahweh from the prophets of baal - the false prophets.

The French anti-pope movement offers us a lot of material for reflection. **Cardinal Poupard**,^{lxxxiii} a French prelate and the president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in an interview granted to a Catholic newspaper, pointed out that the changes in France could be attributed to many factors. Most striking is the cultural transformation. As the Cardinal pointed out, "The dominant culture pretends as if there is neither good nor evil, and this is found in both the field of thought as well as mores. But good and evil do exist. The Pope says it, and they find it very bothersome." As far as a TIME correspondent who covered the Papal visit to Cuba in January 1998 was concerned, some parts of the Pope's moral message made little sense to the people. The correspondent thought: "In a country where abortion ends roughly 40% of all pregnancies and copulation begins in early adolescence, Cubans will be shocked by John Paul II's stern

views on sex. His reverence for the family will seem odd in a society where illegitimacy is common.^{lxxxiv}

Cardinal Poupard described the dominant culture today as one in which "weak thinking" has triumphed. "Anybody like the Pope, who speaks unambiguously - the result of "strong thinking" will be looked upon as intolerant." The Cardinal identified the *dominant culture* with what the people regard as *freedom*. The fundamental point is the link between *freedom* and *truth*. The Church is for freedom, but the dominant culture is for *license*. Cardinal Poupard pointed out that the quest for freedom - when freedom is confused with license - also leads one to reject authority. "So the Pope becomes bothersome simply by his presence and in fact a sign of contradiction for the world."

No serious Christian will be surprised therefore that the true word of God is being sacrificed today at the altar of the "dominant culture." And it seems that both preachers and hearers are forgetting that "Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him whom we must render an account." [Hebrews: 4: 12 - 13] But should the Church and the modern prophets be intimidated and shy away from their sacred mission, thus neglecting the solemn charge, to proclaim, in spite of odds?

There is no doubt that the time "when people will not tolerate sound doctrine" is already with us. Such periods have manifested themselves in history, but there can be no worse period than the present. The picture of a sinful, intolerant and insensitive generation which a Catholic commentator presented and titled **The wages of sin**^{lxxxv} illustrates our point better. A society where gross scandals are condoned and vices mistaken for virtues is a decadent one. Those who commit atrocities feel no sense of shame:

One marvels at the obscenity of it all: What lessons do our children draw from the triumph of vice over virtue? What message do they hear when virtue is treated as little more than fantasy, the impossible dream UN-lived by more than an odd handful of folks. If taboos are a society's way of protecting itself from corrosively anti-social behavior, our society seems nearly defenseless.^{lxxxvi}

If our society does not differentiate between evil and good, should the preachers of the word follow suit? Should the slogan, "If you can't beat them join them," be preferred to, "be persistent whether convenient or inconvenient?" Have the modern prophets ceased to be the "conscience of the nation?" The commentary - *The Wages of Sin* - offers more food for thought. The confused moral orientation is startling:

A doctor who "helps" people kill themselves in his rusty van becomes a celebrity whose sweaters are raffled off at charity auctions. A man is confronted with his adulterous behavior and not even his wife is able to call a sin a sin. Some call this tolerance, but it is nothing more than moral laziness.^{lxxxvii}

What has become most frustrating is the failure of both preachers of the word and their listeners to call a spade a spade. Arguments are brought up to justify evil and anyone who fails to side with the majority is considered out of tune with the times! No wonder then that certain modern prophets are *popular* in their localities where their so-called "understanding" or "sympathy" for homosexuals, prostitutes and other public sinners makes them the ideal "Men of God," carrying out the work of God in the midst of those who have been rejected by society. It is a deplorable situation.

Our society has no language for sin any longer. We cannot name an action evil, whether it be promiscuity, adultery, deceit or the taking of life. Our tongues will not speak the words: to sleep with prostitutes is wrong. To betray one's marriage vows is wrong. To kill a child, to cheat an employer, to exploit another for one's own gain is wrong.^{lxxxviii}

But when the preachers of the word fail to confront the evil man - king or his subject - and tell him "Thou art the man" [2 Samuel, 12:7]; then it becomes a tragedy that will have terrible consequences on the future of the Church and the word of God.

New Evangelization: Preaching to Invite, to Engage, and to Challenge

In the area of evangelization, pastors of souls have been consistently exhorted to make a new beginning, to initiate a new evangelization, so as to overcome the effects of secularist incursion in the modern society. Such goals can always be

achieved by solidly rebuilding the foundations of faith on the Person of Christ. The **Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI – *Evangelii Nuntiandi* – On Evangelization in the Modern World** proclaimed some 26 years ago considered seriously "how we can bring the Christian message to the modern man." The old ways of accomplishing this task are no longer yielding the desired results. New ways of presenting the good news of salvation to the modern man were of crucial importance as far as the Roman Pontiff was concerned. "We wish to do so on this tenth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, the objectives of which are definitively summed up in this single one: to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century."^{lxxxix} If the Church had encountered problems with announcing the Gospel to the modern man of the twentieth century, surely more problems must be envisaged in the twenty-first century. Pope Paul VI did not fail to point out some of the flaws in the past methods and strategies. New ways of accomplishing this important mission of the Church must be explored:

We are aware that the modern man is sated by talk. He is obviously often tired of listening and, what is worse, impervious to words. We are also aware that many psychologists and sociologists express the view that modern man has passed beyond the civilization of the word, which is now ineffective and useless, and that today he lives in the civilization of the image. These facts should certainly impel us to employ, for the purpose of transmitting the Gospel message, the modern means which this civilization has produced.^{xc}

Has the Pope's recommendations on *Preaching in the modern world*, been carried to the extremes? There are not a few pastors who accept without any critical evaluation that authority no longer lies with the preacher's making authoritative pronouncements from the pulpit. Today's congregations are said to be media savvy, shrewdly informed, highly educated, sophisticated, and demanding. Because they challenge the preacher to convince rather than to instruct them, preachers are therefore expected to present a homily that is "an event-in-time, rather than simply an elaborated explanation thematically shaped or deductively outlined." Search for the most "modern" way of presenting the word of God to the modern man has led to further complications. Some of the "listeners" are not only disappointed at the modern preacher's methods; equally perplexing to them is the substance they are fed upon. Most controversial is the

so called "**narrative preaching.**" The advocates of the narrative style want modern homilists to compete with the television. This is the medium that is largely narrative and it shapes the way congregations think. Like the television, narrative preaching uses stories to develop an idea, attitude, or experience. It is precisely in the plot, the characters, and emotions that the message unfolds. Its relevance is found not in logical reasoning or objective proof in its relationship to our actual life situations and to scripture.

It is precisely on account of the sterility of the word as presented in the past as in the present times that the popes continued calling for **new evangelization** and hence **new methods**. To achieve its goal therefore, the word must **invite, engage, and challenge** the hearers: "For just as from the heavens the rain and the snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it. [Isaiah 55:10] Adapting to cultural styles, as good as it can be, can be taken to the extremes, however. Here it becomes counterproductive and most often *substance* is exchanged with elegance of presentation. In *Who Listens to Stories?*^{xci} Scott Black Johnson cautions:

Many preachers have jettisoned solid exposition and rational argument in favor of storytelling and pulpit drama. This homiletical strategy represents a dangerous capitulation to a culture shaped by the modern media. For in attempting to make the gospel palatable to contemporary listeners, preachers have replaced sermons that *explain* with those that *entertain*...When narrative sermons are nothing more than culturally appealing - though theologically vacuous - episodes of pulpit storytelling, then narrative preaching must be charged with sponsoring ecclesial malnutrition. Such preaching feeds homiletical candy bars to a Church that hungers for food of substance.

Thomas Reeves attributes the phenomenon of the *empty Church* also to the barrenness of the sermons presented to the people. They respond by staying home:

Why the clergy amorality? Why the horrible sermons, written hastily on Saturday night? You never hear about sin or salvation or judgment. There's no reason to get up on Sunday morning to go and hear a sermon

about AIDS and a God who is nice. I can stay home and read *The New York Times* and get the same message.^{xcii}

Scott Johnson does not think that adapting to cultural styles should mean abandoning substance. He insists: "There is a real urgency to raise our moral and spiritual voice against that which ails society."^{xciii} Moreover, he reminds preachers that the purpose of preaching is to present a life-world that is creditable, that can be appropriated, out of which the community is authorized and permitted to live a different kind of life. The inability of the presented word to achieve this objective has led to the phenomenon of the many Evangelist Churches that are filled with Catholics searching for direction and substance. Preaching that does not invite, engage, and challenge the hearers can equally be dismissed as worthless. For Scott Johnson, the challenges the preachers of the word face are enormous. "Unless we honestly appreciate the current social and cultural situation, we will be unable to compete with it...We are not only competing for our congregation's attention but for their heart and soul."

Pope John Paul II's New Evangelization emphasizes the need for *new strategies* as well as *substance* lending more weight to what his predecessors had said. The Pope does not stop at calling for New Evangelization; he also insists on Re-Evangelization. "Mission" in modern times is no longer limited to "foreign pagan nations" in distant lands thought ignorant of the knowledge of God and His Christ. Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* spoke about the *First proclamation to those who are far off*.^{xciv} To reveal Jesus Christ and His Gospel to those who do not know them has been, ever since the morning of Pentecost, the fundamental program the Church has taken on as received from her Founder. The whole of the New Testament, and in a special way the Acts of the Apostles, bears witness to a privileged and in a sense exemplary moment of this missionary effort that subsequently left its mark on the whole history of the Church. The **first evangelization** is also termed **pre-evangelization**. An almost indefinite range of means were used for the purpose of pre-evangelization: explicit preaching, of course, but also art, the scientific approach, philosophical research, and legitimate recourse to the sentiments of the human heart. From the first evangelization, the Church has since moved on to what the Pope called **renewed proclamation to a dechristianized world**. The first proclamation was obviously addressed especially to those who have never heard the Good News of Jesus, or to children.

But, as a result of the frequent situations of dechristianization in our day, it also proves equally necessary for innumerable people who have been baptized but who live quite outside Christian life, for example people who have a certain faith but an imperfect knowledge of the foundations of that faith, for intellectuals who feel the need to know Jesus Christ in a light different from the instruction they received as children, and for many others.^{xcv}

Nations and peoples who need to be evangelized or re-evangelized are there at the doorsteps of the hitherto Christian nations of Europe and America. The phenomenon of dechristianization is not limited to "innumerable people who have been baptized, but who live quite outside the Christian life." There are also in Europe and America innumerable people who have never received baptism. The situation can be likened to that of the many poor people, street lads, and abandoned children who find themselves in the midst of plenty and what the modern man thinks are the best things in life. In many cities of Europe and the United States poverty and affluence dwell together. There are indifferent neighbors who care little about the apparent shameful discrepancies in their neighborhoods. In some big cities of the United States and Europe, Christian social workers, who describe themselves as "Ordinary people on extraordinary mission," speak of millions of **hard-core gangsters** and **drug addicts** who are neither baptized nor have heard about Christ. These, and many others, as the Pope points out, need to be evangelized. They are among the sick in need of the physician.

The present circumstances provoked another Roman Pontiff during many occasions to call for the **re-evangelization** of Europe. In his Angelus audience of Sunday, February 15, 1998 Pope John Paul II invoked the figures of Europe's three great patron saints - Benedict, Cyril, and Methodius - as examples for all Christians. The Holy Father said that today's world needs the same evangelical spirit, to stimulate the "re-evangelization" of Europe on the eve of the third millennium. The number of the non-baptized in the First World is as alarming as the number of those baptized who do not practice the Christian faith. These are the well known *once-a-year* or *twice-a-year* Christians who are seen in the Church only at their **baptism, wedding, and funeral**. A Christian poet wonders at the attitude of this unfaithful Christian at the end of his sojourn on earth:

Oh! Unhappy comrade, Unhappy Christian!
When will you learn to identify yourself?

At **baptism**, your mother brought you to the Church
You were next seen in the Church at your **wedding**
It was your friends that led you into the Church
Now, at your **funeral**, some of those friends
For the last time have brought you into the Church.
You never made it by yourself - even once!

Evangelii Nuntiandi points out that today's non-practicing Christians, more so than those of previous periods, seek to explain and justify their position in the name of an interior religion, of personal independence or authenticity. "Thus we have atheists and unbelievers on the one side and those who do not practice on the other, and both groups put up a considerable resistance to evangelization."^{xcvi} These are not counted among the millions of adherents of the non-Christian religions. They still need to have the word of God preached to them. In the program of New Evangelization or Re-evangelization this group is no more the focus of attention. It is rather the non-practicing Christians who make up to half of the membership of the Christian religion who are a source of concern to the leaders of the Christian Churches. They are part of the very large number of baptized people who for the most part are entirely indifferent to the Church and not living the faith. The phenomenon of the "non-practicing" is said to be a very ancient one in the history of Christianity. "It is the result of a natural weakness, a profound inconsistency which we unfortunately bear deep within us."^{xcvii} The Scriptures, Old and New, challenge such Christians to declare their position. There is no need to limp with two different opinions; if Yahweh is God to be adored, take a stand; if baal, it is equally necessary, to declare it. [I King 18.21]. In the New Testament, the visioner addresses this group of Christians: " I know your works, I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, 'I am rich and affluent and have no need of anything,' and yet do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." [Rev. 3:15] By calling for **re-evangelization** of Europe, the Popes and many other Church leaders imply that the first evangelization did not take root and so did not bear fruit. The need to begin again is urgent at the threshold of a new millennium.

Here Church leaders and bearers of the word will have to find out what had gone wrong. Why have the seeds sown for quite a good length of time not yielded a rich harvest? On what type of soils were the seeds planted? How did the people receive the good news? How did they understand the faith? How did

the first evangelizers see their mission? No doubt the words of the African prelate who bemoaned the deteriorating situation of the Mainline Christian Churches in the face of the growing Evangelist Churches offer some food for thought. He offered an explanation for the muddled impasse in evangelization in the modern world. Not a few concerned Christians would agree with him that for too long preachers of the word have looked upon their mission of evangelizing as a "spread of religion" rather than a "call to conversion." If this is true, as surely it is, the need for *New Evangelization* is even more urgent. That it has to be **new** presumes that the old methods **must** be abandoned and should be replaced with more realistic and challenging ones that take into account the *signs of the times*. Emphasis must be placed on the cultivation of Christian virtues, rather than on embracing a belief or an article of faith.

The Third Millennium Church will continue to face more problems in the area of evangelization. It can never ignore Pope John Paul II's call for a *new era of evangelization*. It must re-visit the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI *On Evangelization in the Modern World*. The Christian Church that may survive in the third millennium - among the thousands of denominations and sects that are competing for followership - may be the one that will be able to face the present challenges of re-evangelizing the people. If the main water source is bad, it is likely that the pollution may have affected the entire supply. If the first evangelizers and the Mother Churches fail to provide the necessary leadership the converts might relapse into their old religions or non-Christian lifestyles. The most likely possibility is that the converts or the late-recipients of the Christian faith will take control of their newfound faith in Christ and His Church. And having consolidated their ground they may go back to help in the re-evangelization of the first recipients of the Gospel message. Christianity in the West is already witnessing this last option.

But the most brutal challenges to the de-Christianized Western Church will come from some of the other World Religions, including Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and the New Age Religions that have not been affected by the waves of Western secularism and irreligiosity. As distinctions between *the orthodox and unconventional* continue to narrow, people are always ready, without any qualms of conscience, to embrace any religious and ethical doctrines that respond to their aspirations. As one religious belief is as good and valid as the other, why should one bother oneself about the superiority of one religion or Church over the other? In many parts of the world today cultural revivalist movements and New Age Religions are winning more members than the Christian Churches. One high-ranking Roman Catholic prelate has observed

that in the past Roman Catholic Church commanded the largest number of **practicing Christians**. Today, the same Catholic Church has the largest number of **fallen Christians**! This factor alone makes re-evangelization an urgent program as Christianity celebrates 2000 years of its birth.

Spread of Religion vis-à-vis a Call to Conversion

If evangelization in the modern world does not stop at spreading the faith of a particular Christian sect but extends its mission to the call to conversion, the third millennium Church has a greater and more meaningful task to accomplish. Most of the 2000 years of Christianity have witnessed more controversies over articles of faith than the call to conversion. Perhaps a large part of humanity would have known little division and hatred if the first evangelizers had concentrated more on the call to repentance and abandonment of sin than on the establishment of individual Churches and winning of members to these Churches. Alas! It has taken the leaders of the various Christian Churches and other world religions such a long time to realize that much effort has been wasted on irrelevancies that have neither brought man nearer to God nor changed man's tendency to choose evil instead of good. In many cases millions have perished for refusing to accept **Islam**. Millions have had to pay heavily with their lives for professing a particular faith. Others who contradicted a particular article of faith were accused of heresy and most were burnt at the stake. In some regions of the modern world barricades must still be raised to separate two warring communities of brothers and sisters who differ only in a tiny article of faith in the same Christian Church.

The unity of Christ's Church has been forfeited as a result of minor controversies over **dates of liturgical celebrations**. Issues concerning theological and biblical interpretations of **texts, concepts**, and words like "**and**" and "**but**" have been enough to provoke schisms and divisions, that have lasted up to the end of the 20th century. It took the leaders of the once "United Church of Christ" several sessions of Church Councils - spread through many years to arrive at the **Trinitarian formula** and the Church's **Creed**. In spite of the great disputations, reformations, and counter-reformations little or no agreement was achieved. Had such resources in manpower and wisdom directed to theological controversies instead been channeled into condemning evil and upholding what is good in the world, there would be little talk of re-evangelization. But whatever the case may be, it is obvious that the world religions and particularly Christianity have learnt their bitter lessons; to succeed

in promoting the work of God in the modern world, the Church has to move in the right direction. While no one is advocating that the Christian Churches should abandon their doctrines, there is an irresistible force pushing the bearers of the word of God to reckon with the signs of the times. The Church of the third millennium must address man's greatest enemy - sin - and any phenomenon that hinders man's self-realization or contributes to disorder in the world. Only by facing to such challenges can the Church demonstrate her relevance to man and the world.

The Third Millenium Church and the Evils Ailing Modern Society

To serve as a respectable moral and spiritual voice in the third millennium, the Church must always address the problems that are ailing society. It cannot equivocate or remain neutral. First and foremost is the place and role of the **family**. The disintegration of the family in most countries of the developed world has contributed to the growth of evil and moral decadence. Violence in modern culture is fed by multiple forces - media influence, rise of gangs, availability of weapons, and mostly, by the disintegration of family life. The world has become dangerous for children and destructive to families and values. The institution that is counted on to nurture children seems to be failing. The future indeed looks bleak. There is strong feeling on the part of most concerned Christians that the Church needs to bring back the ideal that family is the center of the larger community.

"**My Child, My Fear**," was a part of a CNN documentary, "**Democracy in America**," which took an in-depth look at the profound changes occurring in the American family and culture, and how these changes are affecting children. The seven-part series explored the concerns of the American people and the issues most nations of the world face on the brink of the 21st century. Reports of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders^{xcviii} showed that the most violent place in America is not in the streets, but in the homes. More than 50 percent of the women murdered in the United States are killed by their partner or ex-partner. Millions of children are victims of family violence.

The Promise Keepers Christian revivalist organization has received support even from some distrustful agnostics who think that families and society at large have much to gain if these men keep firmly to one of their "vows" - build strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values. Because most men have abandoned their duties toward children and their wives most families are in disarray and the cost is heavy on the society.

The leadership of the Promise Keepers Organization in the United States boasts that it is out to retake male responsibility - and re-establish male leadership in a country that it sees as badly detoured from a godly and natural course, falling into the snares of *poverty, illegitimacy, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency and disease* because American men have forsaken Christian values. Indeed most of the men have showed some external signs of repentance as in tears they have publicly confessed their *sins of adultery and alcohol and drug abuse* in their Washington revival extravaganza, a six-hour program of worship, repentance and prayer titled "Stand in the Gap." The same scenario of public weeping and confession of sin marks each Promise Keepers convention. The deterioration of family life and the loss of community leave too many without moral direction and personal roots. Fatherless children mostly are affected. Promise Keepers whose illegitimate children are among the hundreds and thousands of street kids are asked to go out in the streets and reclaim their children. More than a few have taken such summons seriously, adopting abandoned kids and reintegrating them into the families where they naturally belong!

The modern licentious culture has inflicted an irreparable wound on marriage and sexuality. From legal, cultural, social, and religious perspectives, the meaning of marriage has been in a state of flux. There is much confusion about this institution. At one time the essence of marriage and sexuality was clear in minds of people everywhere. The bedrock of society was the family. Families were and are being formed all the time. From a broad religious spectrum, marriage was recognized as a commitment by a couple to support each other and live together monogamously "*till death do us part*". The essence of marriage likewise embraced procreation and rearing issues according to the mind of the creator. There was no doubt about those capable of contracting marriage in any culture. Marriage was a legally sanctified contract of mutual support between two consenting adults of the *opposite gender*. But with so many aberrations beclouding marriage and sexuality in the modern society, things would no more be the same again. With the introduction or recognition of unions like *same-sex marriage, marriage for leisure, marriage for sex* and some other structures or agreements in which children and permanent nature of marriage are excluded from marriage contract, marriage will no more be what it used to be for years to come. Surely *gays* and *lesbians* have existed in societies for centuries but few people took notice of them or prized their lifestyle. Always in hiding for fear of persecution this group of people never showed their faces or let people know they had a different lifestyle or sexual orientation. But with the liberalization of sex and sexual behavior, gays and lesbians have emerged

and in most countries are having field days with their chosen *partners* without inhibition.

Some factors have helped gays and lesbians come out openly and seek their rights in modern society. Some lawmakers are themselves gays and lesbians and have sympathy for their group. Christian beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuality are rapidly changing. Christian Churches are split on most sexual matters. Some liberal Church congregations, towing the *political correctness* stance, are now giving gays and lesbians full access to membership and ordination in their Churches. Sympathetic psychologists and other experts try to show, too, that sexual abnormality is fixed in childhood and is caused by genetic and environmental factors outside a person's control. About a century ago, marriage was for life and only a small percentage of couples divorced. Today fewer than half of married couples believe that marriage is a life commitment to conjugal love.

Divorce seems to be the most devastating plague on most marriages in the western world. Experts claim that in North America and Europe divorce terminates about half of all marriages. The situation has continued to worsen as some Churches contribute to the rising divorce rate by making annulments of marriages easy for partners who want to terminate their marriages for one reason or another. The Catholic Church in the United States has been heavily criticized for being generous in granting annulments of marriages. According to statistics, United States Catholics in 1994 received 54,463 annulments, 75% of all those granted worldwide and more than 90% of all they requested. Many people are unhappy about this situation, which they view as a worsening and weakening of the holy union of husbands and wives, meant to last "till death separates us." There is little doubt that to speak in economic terms, the inflation of annulment has debased the currency of marriages.

For centuries in the Catholic Church, canon law has specified the factors that could nullify Catholic marriage. These include of course lack of consent, mental illness of either partner, or impotence before marriage. But it seemed that the expansion or inclusion of some other factors, described as *psychological insights*, has helped in the liberalization of annulments of Catholic marriages. This trend has affected other religious bodies and cultural groups. The reaction from various quarters point to the seriousness of the situation. According to reports,^{xci} in 1993 a Vatican spokesman called the American annulment figures a *grave scandal*. Robert Vasoli,^c author of the book *Tearing Asunder: Annulment American Style* observes that on this issue, the Church in the United States is practically in schism with Rome. In 1994 Pope John Paul II warned the

Roman Rota, the Vatican Marriage Court, against a "mistaken idea of compassion and mercy" that might cloud true justice. As far as Thomas Doran, U.S. bishop of Rockford, Illinois, is concerned, U.S. Catholics live "with a divorce mentality." They are also subject to Catholic canon law, which has always strictly carried out Jesus' teaching against divorce.

Worse still many women are having children outside marriage. Experts again confirm that among the developed countries of the world the United States has the highest number of teen mothers and more than 75% of U.S. children are born *out of wedlock*. This is surely scandalous and hardly good news for these kids and the future generation. Some other statistics on family and sexuality are equally disturbing. Large numbers of *heterosexual* couples are living together without being married. Some men and women who are married have decided to pursue two careers and have no children. Surrogate motherhood is said to be on the increase. More than **30 million abortions** are committed in the United States every year. Most European countries register a high number of abortions in the approved abortion clinics littered over the cities. For **David Carlin**,^{ci} an associate professor of sociology and philosophy at the Community College of Rhode Island, one of the great political puzzles of the last quarter century in the United States is how ineffective, relatively speaking, Catholics have been on the abortion issue. The bishops of the United States who have stood almost alone as significant foes of abortion have not received much support from their Catholic faithful. In an article titled "*Why U.S. Catholics tolerate abortion*," David Carlin observes a striking fact - and a scandalous fact, too - that pro-abortion political forces are strongest in precisely those parts of the country where the Catholic population is concentrated, especially in the Northeast. It is a paradox that Catholics who should oppose evil are the ones who promote it without any qualms of conscience. The effective political opposition to abortion, writes Carlin, doesn't come from Catholics. It comes from conservative Protestants, especially those in the South and Midwest. "Many members of Congress with strong and consistent pro-abortion voting records are themselves Catholic. They were raised Catholic, in many cases attended Catholic schools and colleges; they still go to Mass each Sunday; and they are Rocks of Gibraltar for the pro-abortion cause."^{cii} The paradox is even more evident when one notices the reactions of pro-life Catholics who express shock at the Catholic politicians' pro-abortion stance.

But politicians do nothing alone; they always need the permission of voters. Catholic politicians take a pro-abortion stance because this stance

gives little or no offense to most Catholic voters, who keep sending these co-religionists to Washington, where they fight to make the world safe by the continued killing of unborn babies. In other words, it isn't that Catholics have failed to use their political muscle to stop abortion. They have done exactly the opposite: they have used their muscle to protect and preserve abortion. If it weren't for the generous help of Catholic voters and politicians, America's pro-abortion movement would be in big trouble.^{ciii}

The so-called **partial-birth-abortion** debate has increased the bitterness of the pro-life Christians and their leaders. For the United States bishops the abortion culture in their country has worsened the situation of violence:

A society that destroys its children, abandons its old, and relies on vengeance fails fundamental moral tests. Violence is not the solution; it is the most clear sign of our failures. We are losing our respect for human life. How do we teach the young to curb their violence when we embrace it as the solution to social problems? ...We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing. We have reached the point in one very visible case where a jury has urged the execution of the person who murdered the physician who was destroying unborn children. The cycle of violence diminishes all of us - especially our children.

Most of these trends and worrisome situations are causing people to alter their perception of marriage and broaden their definition of the term. The idea of *same-sex marriage* now seems to many people to be simply one more variation. The impact of such changes in concepts of an important institution such as marriage is great worldwide. The effects of anomalous practices, which receive state and Church approval, will definitely affect lives of millions of other peoples of various cultures and religions.

Many European countries as well as some states in North America are known to have passed laws recognizing the rights of gay and lesbian lifestyles and marriages. In 1996, in the state of Hawaii, U.S.A., gays and lesbians were permitted to marry, although the state refused to issue them marriage certificates. According to reports, only Cambodia [95% Buddhist] extends marriage rights to *homosexuals*. In March 1995 two *lesbians* were legally married in the Kandal province. And on January 1, 1997, five countries allowed *gays* and *lesbians* to apply for registered partnerships. This gave them some of

the rights and obligations enjoyed by heterosexual married couples. These countries are *Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden*. Many cities in *France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United States* have partnership registration, but they guarantee few, if any, of the rights given to heterosexual married couples. According to reports in the *Danish gay newspaper Pan-Bladet*, in 1995, there had been about 1,449 gay and 634 lesbian registered partnerships under the law. 23% of the *lesbians* and 14% of the *gay* couples were reported to have since divorced. There is great confusion in the area of sexual morality and the Church is not expected to remain aloof.

Youth and Sexuality

Most western governments and Churches are sharply divided on many issues concerning life and sexuality. When does life begin? How should pregnancy be prevented or terminated so that new life will not interfere with the carnal enjoyment of sex? Is abstinence possible in modern times? Should the Church preach chastity and virginity and condemn pre-marital sex? These and many other questions are being asked today about life and there seems to be little or no consensus on the *modus vivendi*. Sexual matters are usually the center of most television talk shows and other debates. Most hot religious issues in schools and in the Internet are sexual issues, and most conflicts in family and society are related to youth, marriage, and sexuality. The degree of interest shown by people in many of the inter-related topics reflects the seriousness of the issues involved. Some of these topics include *whether human sexuality should be taught to young people, whether methods of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases should be included in sex-education classes*. Others concern *whether abstinence should be taught alone or in addition to disease and pregnancy prevention, whether condoms should be supplied to students in schools and whether homosexuality and bisexuality should be taught in class*.

Conflicts often occur at the local school level where more heat is often generated than light. Some schools are accused of excesses by alarmed parents as their children are exposed to a large variety of prurient literature and pornographic materials. In some cases religious and civic education classes are turned into sex-technique exercises as young people show great excitement about sex. More confusion is created as adults in a desperate effort to fight the spread of AIDS and teen pregnancy, indirectly encourage sexual gratification among young people. They seem to tell young people: "You can have sex when

you want. But beware of AIDS and unwanted pregnancy. Use condoms and pills!" So young people carry condoms wherever they go. Some American and European parents have little or no inhibition about recommending condoms to their kids. One American woman told an interviewer in a TV program that she would make sure that at 13 her son was well *schooled* in the use of condoms. Another declared she would not be in the position to force her daughter to "*close her legs to the menacing playboys.*" Rather the daughter must be provided with enough pills or other protective materials to prevent any trouble – pregnancy or AIDS!

Consensus is almost impossible in all cases and debates about youth and sexuality. But many people accept that sexuality is an important part of life. The best way for a child to learn about sexuality is in the home, from knowledgeable parents who can teach it in a relaxed manner. Others think that the school system can handle the issue through sex-education programs. These maintain that some parents give little information to their children and often lack sufficient knowledge or feel awkward when talking about this subject. Some adults want abstinence taught exclusively, without any mention of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy prevention. They feel that to talk about chastity and condoms delivers a mixed and confusing message to youth. Others feel that abstinence should be promoted, but that disease and pregnancy prevention is important topic for the majority of youth who choose to become sexually active before marriage. Some adults want homosexuality and bisexuality taught as depraved lifestyles that are a personal choice and can be changed at any time. Others want them taught as alternate sexual orientations that are healthy, unchangeable, and normal for the individual concerned.

The above line of debate surely lends support to the proposition that an unprecedented *sex revolution* as well as confusion has erupted. It is also uncontrollable. James L. Lambert,^{civ} in his book *Porn in America*, believes strongly that pornography has had terribly harmful effects on the individual and the community at large. Proliferation of pornography has worsened the sexual lives of most youths and adults. The harm (including mental, physical, and spiritual effects this material presents to the populace) is devastating. Pornography is a problem for millions of men across the United States and Europe simply because it is so much more available than it was just 10 years ago. He writes:

It seems easy for some of us to hide our heads in the sand and ignore the harm this material causes in our communities, yet daily the sale of hard-

core pornography significantly contributes to the epidemic of sexual violence and crime in America...Not until we become educated about the long term effects of porn and the messages it conveys, will we be able to understand how this material desensitizes our perceptions about women, children, family, and the proper role of the gift of sex in our lives.^{cv}

Most young people are confused, and many have been led astray. The sexual revolution is being compounded by daily reports of *rape* and *sex scandals*. *Sexual misconduct* lawsuits have become a lucrative business for many and some get rich quickly. It is not unusual to find a man in his seventies getting up one morning, recalling vividly, after about 60 years, how traumatized he was, how his life had been badly affected by the awful experience of *sex-abuse*. He claims some adult sexually abused him when he, the accuser, was about 5 years old! He seeks redress in the court of law and a judge delivers his ruling. The accuser may become a lucky man, as a large chunk of cash is awarded to *repair the psychological damage the claimed sex-abuse had done to his life!* Many *dramas* of sex-abuse and rape are rehearsed almost everyday - on television, on radio talk shows, on news reviews and news magazines. But adults forget the impact of these open debates on the sex-lifestyles of the youth. Not even married couples are shielded from such scandals of rape and sex-abuse imbroglios.

The impact of the *sexual revolution* is overwhelming on the youth, and adults have little or nothing to offer the youth toward proper appreciation of sexual life and its application to modern living. Young people certainly have nothing to learn about decent sex when big television networks and news media and tabloids devote much of their news and programs on sensational and debased topics on sex. Sex news is given bold headlines. One can imagine the impression youths receive from headlines and top and breaking news on the television screens. For example, one news article read: *58% of men polled said they have had sex with women they actually disliked!* At least in the animal kingdom beasts love their sex partners. There is no doubt that as far as modern moral sanity is concerned, the future looks bleak. Most of the future parents and leaders may not be able to handle the situation, as the adults are not laying a good foundation for the younger generation.

Many African sons and daughters living in the United States and Europe are exposed to the devastating influences of broken families caused by a culture of divorce, pornography and other sex-aberrations. Many African families in Diaspora have fallen victim to the traps of the western excesses in sex and

violence. This sad situation is enough to provoke a new crusade for moral and ethical revolution that should form part of the grand project for a return to the forgotten roots. On **pornography**, the warnings of James Lambert may not be ignored by any well-meaning Christian: "Our tolerance of this material runs contrary to all decent, traditional standards. If we knowingly allow ourselves to financially support this industry and businesses that are involved in this industry, we become part of the problem, not the solution."^{cvi}

There are not a few Americans who believe that unbridled sexual promiscuity is at the root of the societal moral dilemma, which includes poverty in a nation blessed with abundance of riches. Tracing the root of poverty in America, Greg Pulles, writing in one Catholic news paper^{cvi} in reaction to the paper's lead story on *poverty* in the United States, blames it all on **illegitimacy**, one of the bitter fruits of the sexual revolution of modern times. He laments: "I think poverty has increased in our country because illegitimacy has increased. This has continued to grow too because of welfare, which enables teenagers to start their own homes and because of the sexual revolution instigated by libertine liberals who taught a receptive cultural elite in this country that uninhibited sex with everything that walks is alright." Encouraging "children to have children," or, as some put it, "babies to nurse babies," is one of the worse signs that sexual morality is at its lowest ebb in modern society. Providing child support for single mothers is definitely not the answer to poverty and the problems created by the sexual revolution and promiscuity. As Greg Pulles argues: "The social pathologies we face in our cities are not caused by poverty, nor will they be cured by a government-mandated wage system with a "livable" wage. The pathologies, rather, cause the poverty." Pulles continues: "Illegitimacy is at the core of that pathology. As a society, we need to say it is wrong for teenagers and unmarried women to have babies. It is not OK to have sex with whomever you want. Until we conquer the problem of illegitimacy, we will not make any headway in reducing poverty."^{cvi}

Rooting Out Sin in Modern Society: What Is the Christian Evangelist Up To?

As the Churches are divided in matters of faith, so also are they in matters of morality. Within each Church denomination are fragmented groups sharply divided on political lines that influence some of their moral decisions. In the United States some identify themselves as *Democrats*; others, *Republicans*. Some, by ideology or Christian affiliation, are referred to as *Environmentalists*

or *Christian Coalition*. Within some bishops' conferences in the Catholic Church there are divisions in the hierarchy. Terms and expressions that usually belonged to the field of politics are freely applied in ecclesiastical circles. Individual Christians, priests, bishops, Church leaders, and even popes are categorized as **liberal, conservative, left-wing, right-wing, moderate, or extremist**. Armed with the knowledge of someone's religious or political "camp" it is almost possible to predict the person's reaction or stand on certain moral issues. This is no doubt an ominous development in 20th century Christianity. While a "**conservative**" view may in reality represent what is "normal," "orthodox," and traditional, to a group of people such a view may be loathsome. A strong opponent of the Church's traditional teachings may be a hero and a "saint" to the camp of **liberals**. A phenomenon such as this has also affected evangelization as well as the unity of the Church in tackling most of the moral problems ailing modern society.

One concerned lay Catholic in Chicago, U.S.A., could not understand a group of Catholic bishops criticizing another group of bishops. "I am a little confused at the spectacle myself and the sight of bishops arguing with each other in public is too much for me," he said. But for Father Richard Antal of Painesville, Ohio, what is happening in the Church today is not really new. He recalls that what is happening in the Church in the United States reminds one of the divisions within the Anglican Church, which anyone who has read 19th century British literature has to recall. As Father Richard expounds there were three parties within the Anglican Communion, and their opinions and doctrinal tendencies were categorized as **Low Church, Broad Church, and High Church**. Low Church meant a doctrine and liturgical style that resembled Continental Calvinism. Broad Church was content with the old forms but indifferent about substance. High Church was a Catholic tendency epitomized by the *Oxford Movement*, which eventually swept Cardinal Henry Newman into Roman Catholic Church. Father Richard wondered whether the Catholic Church in the United States was not falling into a similar pattern of ecclesiastical partisanship in the Church.

From another perspective, the ominous shadow of Catholic extremism which Greg Erlandson,^{cix} *Our Sunday Visitor's* editor-in-chief detects is a formidable obstacle to unity and common ground for moral action in the Church today. If *extremist* in views, and not united in anything, at least *extreme* Catholics are united in a radical critique of the current state of the Church, and a profound alienation not only from their fellow Catholics but also from Church authority and tradition. The **Wanderer** (an ultra conservative Catholic paper)

and the **National Catholic Reporter** (a liberal Catholic paper) underscore the extremist standpoints of the leftists and rightists. Both papers hate to be mentioned in the same breath, alleges Erlandson, but incidentally have become flagships for their respective extremes.

Both papers share obsessions with authority and sex scandals, and they both reinforce in their readers a sense of institutional distrust. "That is why it is increasingly possible to hear traditionalists dismiss Pope John Paul II as a naïf, or worse, while the progressive rhetoric regularly presents the Pope as a reactionary autocrat, cruelly suppressing all he opposes in the Church...The extreme right is driven by a tyrannical nostalgia, the extreme left by a tyrannical vision of a Church yet to be born." This is an unfortunate development in the Church. Instead of uniting to fight the common enemy of man and society - sin - the Churches and their members, including their leaders, divide into camps and are at each other's throat fighting ideologies. If only a fraction of the energy spent on rhetoric were devoted to the message of salvation, society and its peoples would greatly benefit from the Church. The perplexing problem is not only that there are divisions but that there is lack of knowledge. Most Catholics are not well informed about their faith, found in the Gospel, catechism, tradition, scripture, and authority.

The religious illiteracy afflicting Catholics of all age groups has left them defenseless in the face of twin attacks by both the values of popular culture and, in some cases, the extremists next to them in the pews. Without knowledge, there can never be a strong Catholic identity or evangelistic fervor. Without it, they will not think Catholic, vote Catholic, live Catholic...That there is lack of common ground, when it comes to one's knowledge and understanding of the faith is the problem, and one that grows more serious by the hour.^{cx}

In order to tackle the work of re-evangelization, re-Christianization, or New Evangelization, there is need to fight the division created by Christians who see the Church as a political arena where ideologies and not faith should play the major role in shaping the moral lives of all people. As far as moral principles are concerned, it has become necessary, before jumping into rhetoric and dividing into ideological camps, to investigate what traditional society and other non-Christian religious faiths hold and teach. This may be one of the ways to assure that Christians and non-Christians adhere to what is just and morally correct and not ideologically and politically correct. What is sinful in one place

must be regarded evil in other places. The universality of the Christian faith demands that the Church and the bearers of the word should speak with one voice, when they condemn evil and commend what is good. Christ's faithful are not always rebellious and disobedient. Most are law-abiding and wait for the leaders to give the right directives. Confusion sets in when they hear discordant voices and contradictions. They want to be told unequivocally what the Church teaches and what they believe is God's rule.

It is not useful to overlook even details of moral imperatives and appeal to the faithful to use their conscience. An uneducated conscience cannot arrive at a valid moral judgment. What, for example, does the Church teach about **bribery and corruption**? Is **lobbying** an *indifferent* moral act? Most government leaders are castigated daily for their corrupt practices, ranging from the looting of their countries' public treasuries to the squandering of such wealth on private ventures. On account of corrupt practices relating to embezzlement of public funds by government officials and their agents many African nations are daily castigated for these heinous crimes. Some of them are in fact worth nothing before their countrymen and concerned people all over the world. Poor African citizens condemn their leaders for the calamitous effects of corruption on the economy of the African nations. But the story should not end here.

Africans are quick to learn that fraudulent practices with all their ramifications have earned *new names* overseas. Questions are bound to be raised. Can corruption be equated to other fraudulent practices, including cheating and stealing, that go under the name "business?" Why do European and American banks accept for safekeeping the alleged billions of dollars stolen from Third World treasuries by corrupt leaders and thieves? Why don't these foreign banks return the identified stolen goods and money to their owners at the end of investigations? Why does the virtuous white Christian manager condone evil and feast with criminals? Africans have no good words for such collaborators, for the African saying puts both condemned parties in one place. ("Aka nara jikwaa bu ohi" - One who accepts stolen goods is also a thief.")

But when questioned, these criminal collaborators who help Africans in their fraudulent practices maintain they are *doing business* with their clients. For them, there is nothing wrong in sharing the booty with the criminals. *Business is business* and there are no moral inhibitions! It is an eyesore conducting business with a thief. Or has the concept of stealing changed? In the past few years Africans have been castigated for indulging in fraudulent practices, often referred to as "scam." They have been accused of duping and double-crossing their international business partners. Cases of rip-offs or swindling involving

Africans and foreign companies and individual Europeans and Americans have been regularly reported in the foreign news media. Some honest Africans have taken the task of investigating some of those reports. While not exonerating anybody involved in any dishonest practice, investigations have revealed that those companies or individuals that felt that dishonest Africans had duped them were really crooks and should be regarded as worse criminals than those they reported had cheated them.

Once again the saying that one who does business with a thief is also a thief leaves no one in doubt that those foreigners who engage in fraudulent business enterprises with dubious and unpatriotic citizens are criminals themselves who must be feared. Like the Swiss bankers that collect stolen money from those Africans who defraud their home governments for safekeeping in their banks, these so-called foreign business partners have in no less measure contributed to the misery and poverty of millions of African men and women. In their greed to accumulate wealth through dishonest means, these foreigners have aided many corrupt Africans in the looting of public treasures. They have often been pushed into believing that as long as they agree to pay those thieves a small fee in cash, millions of dollars will become theirs in matter of minutes! When a crook outwits his fellow crook, which should complain? Sinful acts committed in these so-called international business transactions may not be ignored by the modern prophets as they preach the message of repentance. Their predecessors, the Israelite prophets of Yahweh, unequivocally condemned fraudulent practices and people who perpetrated them. They condemned Greed, fraud, and corruption:

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land! 'When will the new moon be over,' you ask, 'that we may sell our grain, and the Sabbath, that we may display the wheat? We will diminish the bushel, add to the shekel, and fix our scale for cheating! We will buy the lowly man for silver, and the poor man for a pair of sandals; even the refuse of the wheat we will sell! The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Never will I forget a thing they have done! Shall not the land tremble because of this, and all who dwell in it mourn! (8:4-8)

Another area in which Christianity has failed woefully to influence the moral conduct of Christians is in the **culture of revenge** or **tit for tat**, manifested daily in the countless number of **lawsuits** often instigated by lawyers for financial gain. In these lawsuits there is little or no place for the Christian ethics

of forgiveness and reconciliation. Religion helps regulate human relationships and often these relationships can be ruined by sin. It is principally through the actions of believers that they are easily known that they are Christians - in the way they love one another, tolerate, accommodate, share with one another, and mostly by the way they forgive when they are hurt. Our present discussion is relevant to basic religious and spiritual values that most other religions - ancient and modern - have in common and try to exercise in various ways. Every religion worthy of the name has some rules guiding adherents toward the exercise of justice, fair play, reward, and punishment. Judaism did not recommend forgiveness for an offense committed against a person. It commanded *tit for tat*, or revenge.

But when Christ, the new Law giver came, He commanded forgiveness: "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors...But I say to you..." Even Christ commanded His followers and His Church (the new Israel) not to avenge injustices done to them. Instead of seeking revenge, they should love their enemies and those who maltreat them. It was a revolutionary teaching, which for some of his followers was not easy to adhere to. But whether or not they liked the teaching, it was part of the discipleship and mission of the believers. And it is by close observance of such commandments of love that "your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly father." (Mt 5:16) Even the divine Master established a *golden rule*, which no human being has been able to attack or challenge: "Do unto others whatever you would have them do to you." [Mt. 7:12]

Excessive application of the law of *tit for tat* in the modern western democracy (in the form of lawsuits and the cult of revenge) to the detriment of the religious law of forgiveness is a phenomenon which has a negative impact on the spiritual values of the modern society. Whether or not they still practice their faith, people all over the world still cherish some natural virtues in man, that act as driving force, helping him to perform good acts and avoid evil. Kindness is naturally preferred to wickedness, humility to arrogance or pride, love to hatred, and forgiveness to revenge. At least many religious groups promote virtues among the adherents and condemn vices and evil. Unfortunately, as in most other cases we have considered in this work, the state laws or civil considerations have often overshadowed religious principles that encourage, for example, *forgiveness* instead of *revenge*. In no other way is this situation best illustrated than in the law suit system in the modern western democracy. One wonders whether there are no other better ways of settling cases or repairing injuries done to others.

In what way, for example, would an award of a million or more dollars to a person killed in an accident help to bring the dead fellow back to life? How would such awards help to repair injuries, that the numerous sex-harassment victims claim have been inflicted on them? In what ways do these huge sums of money repair the claimed psychological, moral, and spiritual damages? The consequences of *an eye for an eye culture* being promoted by the modern justice system, are grave. This is surely a deathblow to the spiritual values of forgiveness and reconciliation, peace, good neighborliness, friendship, and joy among communities and neighborhoods in modern society.

Church and Sex

Sex is daily on the news and sex-scandals are reported with reckless abandon by all the news media and most of the news is reported on the front pages of newspapers and magazines. While some scandals are in for long lawsuit litigations and people divide along ideological and religious lines, what do the bearers of the word in the Christian Churches say? If there was any sin, which the Western missionaries who went to evangelize the "pagan nations" viewed with extreme seriousness; it was certain that any one related to sex ranked number one. Catholic offenders were severely punished for indulging in any sexual activity, *in thought, word, and deed*. Young couples who indulged in pre-marital sex, even *in thought*, were given severe penance at confession. Young unmarried Catholic girls who got pregnant were made to kneel before the congregation during Sunday mass to atone for their sins of illicit sex. In some cases they supplemented the public disgrace with some manual labor. Women who got pregnant before their wedding day were not allowed to put on the veil or the wedding gown on the wedding mass, if any would be celebrated in their honor. It was obvious that engaged couples could not approach the altar for Holy Communion until they are married in Church, as the traditional marriage contract was not recognized by the Catholic Church. Engaged couples remained virtually ostracized by the Church until they are married in Church. The fate of polygamists was never in doubt. These were the unfortunate folks that have their reserved places in hell together with the wicked powers that operate there. It was obvious that the way the missionaries handled sins against purity did more harm than good. Most young African Christians were so scarred and confused. The missionaries introduced foreign sexual ethos unknown to the Africans. Some of the concepts have no expressions in the vernacular thus confirming that some of the practices were not known in most African regions.

These include: *homosexuality, lesbianism, child-abuse, rape, sodomy, and sex-harassment*. Children were taught never to touch one another, and they did not know why they should not! As learnt in the Catechism class, any "**immodest touch**" was sinful! For the children, all "touches" are *always* indecent! Even when the white missionaries left, the "song" went on even louder, as the young African priests became stricter and less sympathetic with offenders. More stringent rules were introduced and married couples and polygamists found themselves even in the deepest parts of hell!

Africans in the Diaspora, particularly in Europe and America, were quick to observe that the *rules* on sexual matters have changed or rather that the rules had not been the same. In Europe and America, illicit sexual acts are known by various "decent" names. The *pre-marital sex* is known as *dating*. *Friendship* between men and women does not exclude living together for any number of years. *Polygamy*, which was an abomination in Africa, goes by the name *concubinage*, or simply *friendship*. Married men at their eighties could talk about their 'lady friends.' Young people who go to the men of God for spiritual direction about their turbulent sexual attitudes are counseled to use condoms. Many of these young people are not told that what they are doing is simply not good. They are told most often by some confused clerics that sex is something everyone has to put up with. It is something good and should not be thought to be evil.

In the developed world sexism is a real trade and it is available everywhere - from the television screens to the ubiquitous sex-shops at the corners of most major cities. Sex-shops are among the most frequently visited spots in the white man's land. They often go by the name - *Adult Library* or *Adult Video*. Although meant for adult consumption, young people are admitted as long as they have the entrance fee. Pornography is widely promoted. While sex dominates much of the television materials, in most Christian Churches not much is said about it, even when immorality is the theme of the Scriptural readings.

In one Catholic parish in the United States, one African student-priest got into trouble with the pastor because the visiting foreign priest condemned *illicit sex* in one of his homilies during the season of lent. The "prudent" pastor cautioned him and made it clear to the visiting priest that it was not good to "embarrass his congregation!" At least this is the rule in the United States. When the visitor questioned the pastor on way the problem of *the woman caught in adultery* should be handled in a sermon, he was told that the only way to get out of trouble and not to "embarrass" the congregation was simply to

preach the love of God for "all sinners!" There are many other examples of confused teachings in the moral and ethical spheres of life in Europe and America and these have continued to influence young people. We have selected the above examples to illustrate our points. The above sample is nevertheless only a top of the iceberg. In no way do we condone any distorted concept of *sin* and *evil*, whether in the *new*, or in the *old dispensation*. Evil is evil no matter where it thrives - in the developed and under-developed worlds.

Christians, whatever their denominational affiliations are, cannot afford to equivocate in vital moral issues as found in God's commandments and in the New Law of Christ. No amount of political gains can lend support for evil that threatens order in society. More crucial in its role as the *troubler of Israel*, is the unity of all the bearers of the word, as they proclaim it to humankind without fear or favor. Contradictions can only mar progress in this vital mission of the Church of Christ. One such distressing contradiction was manifested in the reaction of one Most Rev. David W. Dunbar, a bishop of the Orthodox Catholic Church in Ohio. His attack was directed to the National Council of Catholic Bishops of the United States on the *partial-birth-abortion* debate. The Orthodox bishop writes:

While I sympathize with the sentiments of the National Council of Catholic Bishops, in their objections to partial-birth-abortion, I cannot help but wonder if their arguments and protests might be more effective if they counted even a few women bishops and cardinals among their number. Perhaps their stand could be viewed strictly as a moral and theological issue, which I believe it to be, if at least some of these men had wives and daughters, or even granddaughters who might just come face to face with personal difficulties involving pregnancy. As it is, the stand of these men seems nothing short of dictatorial and arrogant.^{cxi}

Church leaders can afford to quibble on articles of faith, leadership, details of worship, and other contentious issues that had consumed much of the Church leaders' energy and resources for the last 2000 years but not on moral issues. Churches and the bearers of the word must uphold Christian principles in their search for solutions to humankind's tragedies, or they will cease to function as God's instruments for the establishment of moral order in the world. They have to prick the conscience of the people and remain the recognized enemy of any evil that stands on man's way to self-realization. As the *Catholic Framework for Action on Confronting a Culture of Violence in the United States* admonishes,

our society needs a moral revolution to replace a culture that is devoid of moral virtue with a renewed ethic of justice, responsibility, and community. "New policies and programs, while necessary, cannot substitute for a recovery of the old values of right and wrong, respect and responsibility, love, and justice. God's wisdom, love, and commandments can show us the way to live, heal, and reconcile. "Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal" are more than words to be recited; they are imperatives for the common good."^{cxii}

There is no time in human history that moral crusade should be carried out than at the threshold of the third millennium. The Christian Churches have been blamed for not doing much to stem down sexual excesses in modern society. Most of the successes said to have been recorded in the area of youth and sex are not part of the Christian solution to moral laxity. According to a federal study in the United States, released recently,^{cxiii} teen pregnancy was said to be on the wane. Surely religious factors have not been part of the "success story." Why the downturn? "For starters, contraceptive use is way up among teens. There is more than a fourfold increase in the use of condoms. Fifteen years ago only 11 percent of teens used condoms. Now it's 44 percent. And inner-city teenagers are increasingly using highly effective Depo-Provera injections or Norplant."^{cxiv} The rate of teen pregnancy is high in the U.S and among the Western nations. Four out of 10 American teens - nearly a million every year - become pregnant at least once before they turn 20. Of these, 80 percent are unmarried. By one estimate, teen pregnancy costs the country more than \$7 billion a year in lost taxes, public assistance dollars, and criminal justice costs. For years, social scientists and public-policy analysts issued depressing and indisputable statistics: teens who become pregnant are more likely to drop out of school, and end up on welfare than those who don't. Children of teenage mothers tend to be sicker and they wind up pregnant or in prison in disproportionate numbers. However the most consoling news about the reported wane in moral excesses is that religious mores may be playing some role in convincing teenagers that abstinence from illicit sex may after all be the most reliable option for those who do not want to get into trouble. As Isabel Sawhill, president of the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy* reports:

Some teens are simply choosing not to have sex - an indication that the once ridiculed idea of advocating abstinence may actually be catching on. My sense is that more kids realize it's OK not to have sex - that, in fact, it may even be cool. We seem to have succeeded in convincing teens that delaying sex may be a better idea, because more are doing it. A

growing number of schools across the country have formed "Virgin Clubs," with members publicly pledging not to have sex."^{cxv}

If social workers could wade through the turbulent area of sexual morality - an area most evangelists and pastors of souls - timidly and cautiously avoid in their sermons at Sunday masses and evangelist crusades, is it not time the Church authorities reexamined the role of the ministers in *troubling the conscience of the nation*. There is no doubt that parents have a unique role to play to help restore moral sanity to the families. Social and religious experts have argued that if parents took up their rightful role in the upbringing of their children, there will be less evil in the world. Researchers insist that if more parents talked plainly to their kids about sex, teenagers will truly be moving in the right direction - toward moral sanity. Studies have continued to confirm this: "Teens highly value their parents' advice. Teens who are close to their parents are more likely to remain sexually abstinent, postpone intercourse, and have fewer partners. Teens consistently report that they wish their parents would give them specific advice on dating, sexually transmitted diseases, and how to say no to sex."^{cxvi}

If teens would be willing to receive help from their parents and be ready to adhere to the instructions they receive from such guardians and superiors, how much more would they be happy to listen to the Church's ministers of the word? Teens, as well as their parents and all adults, especially those who belong to the various religious organizations and Churches are ready to listen to their pastors, as these ministers of God challenge them to embrace moral life worthy of their calling, as followers of Christ. To be able to accomplish this delicate task, it is obvious that the bearers of the word should themselves live up to expectations. By word and example they have to show the way to their followers, and like Caesar's wife should remain above suspicion. To be able to exercise any meaningful influence on her members, as well as on the modern world, the Church of the future must recover the lost ground, and engage in the task of molding the conscience of the people. The Church's ministers, too, like the prophets of the Old must continue to be the "troubling of Israel."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Third Millennium Church: Healing the Wounds of Grave Forms of Injustice - A Thorn in the Flesh

*Another painful chapter of history to which the sons and daughters of the Church must return with a spirit of repentance is that of the acquiescence given, especially in certain centuries, to intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth...And should we not also regret, among the shadows of our own day, the responsibility shared by so many Christians for **grave forms of injustice and exclusion**? (Pope John Paul II - *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*)*

The Third Millennium Church must wrestle with the past and present sins of the Church if it will make any reasonable impact on a large section of its membership. The Church may not continue to ignore her sins against sons and daughters who profess faith in Christ and his Church. In thought, word, and deed, Christians confess their sins daily at worship and above all during reconciliation services. Sins are committed through complicity or collusion, inaction, neglect, or indifference, and ignorance. The oppressed people of the world have at one time or another demanded unreserved apologies from their past oppressors as part of the global reconciliation and the healing of wounds. Blacks in the New World, and in Mother Africa have insisted that the Western World should apologize for the sins of slavery and colonialism, while Indians demand compensation or restitution of their land and dignity. There is no consensus about the form of apology, compensation, and restitution. Even some governments and institutions that are required to show remorse for their past sins and make restitution are not convinced that they have been guilty of any offense. But not a few have openly expressed some type of regret for the past sins. The Vatican has expressed regret for not standing more strongly against **anti-Semitism**. A stronger opposition and attack from the Church on the governments and peoples who perpetrated heinous acts against the Jews would have saved more victims of the **Holocaust**. Even an open and stronger denunciation of **Apartheid** and action from Western governments and the Church could have brought the demise of the apartheid regime to an earlier end. Better late than never! In his Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Pope Paul II affirmed that the Second Vatican Council was a providential event, as it focussed on the mystery of Christ and his Church and at the same time open to the world.

This openness was an evangelical response to recent changes in the world, including the profoundly disturbing experiences of the Twentieth Century, a century scarred by the First and Second World Wars, by the experience of concentration camps and by horrendous massacres. All these events demonstrate most vividly that the world needs purifications; it needs to be converted.^{cxvii}

What purpose would an apology or remorse for past sins serve? "Mea culpa" accompanied by the beating of the breast is a well-recognized sign of repentance in the Catholic Church. Repentance, conversion, and reconciliation are key elements in evangelization and the mission of the Church. Any Church that ignores such an important task of its mission fails to identify with Christ. As Ellis Cose,^{cxviii} the black American writer points out, the very fact that such apologies - or quasi apologies - are made is evidence that they serve some pragmatic and perhaps psychological purpose. Apologies can also serve the larger purpose of helping the victims of past iniquities or their descendants to reduce their grief. Remorse for one's evil action can bring about reconciliation and remove an option of revenge. The new law of Christ has no place for retaliation. It urges the settlement of disputes at the earliest opportunity and this can be effected through various acts of reconciliation. "Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison." [Matthew 5.25]

Healing of the wounds of racism and past injustices against all victims of unjust treatment in whatever form must be an urgent task that must be addressed by the third millennium Church if the Church of Christ can still play any meaningful role among the nations of the world. Whether governments or Churches perpetrated the injustices, it is incumbent upon the Church to take the leading role in bringing about the required healing. If nations and heads of governments can initiate actions geared toward the healing of wounds of past injustices, it falls on the Church of Christ and its leaders to do even more. Jesuit Father **Robert Drinan**, a professor at Georgetown University Law Center, who served on a commission charged with initiating measures to prevent the United States from ever again treating a minority group the way it did some 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry during the World War II, is among the numerous Christians as well as non-believers who are convinced that remedies for injustices of the past must come in one form or the other. In an article captioned "**Nations must do penance for their sins**,"^{cxix} Drinan reminded his countrymen and women as well as peoples of other nations that "the evil we do

has a way of troubling our souls and bothering our conscience. Nations, like persons, feel shame at their misdeeds, even if those deeds were done in wartime for the soundest reasons." He expresses satisfaction at the current reconciliatory mood of the Americans. He adds "America's repentance is a joyous reminder that Americans, despite all their faults and their racism, can sometimes follow the better instincts of their nature."

Apologies followed by restitution go a long way toward the healing of wounds. The very notion that a nation should make reparations for its sins is new in world history and should be seen as a move in the right direction. All the 79,600 surviving Americans of Japanese ancestry who were interned during the Second World War received each \$20,000 for a total of 1.3 billion as reparation for the injustice perpetrated against them. The United States is not alone in this obligation. Germany was the first country required by international law to offer financial assistance to survivors of the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis. Those payments are said to have continued to this day. One of the latest nations to be charged with wrongdoing is Switzerland. Charges and revelations related to the Holocaust have continued to appear more than 50 years after these events allegedly occurred. There is a clear and even-deeper feeling in the conscience of humankind that nations, like individuals, should be required by law to make whole the persons they injured. In spite of the recent initiatives by governments and some Church leaders toward healing of wounds caused by past sins of omission and commission, a long and rough road lies ahead when one considers the amount of injuries black people have suffered. There is an urgent need to address black people's injuries.

That feeling is surely deep in the souls of some 40 million black South Africans who were victimized by some 3 million whites for decades. Although the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** of Archbishop **Desmond Tutu** has done an amazing job on the healing of wounds, there is still a long way to go. Ellis Cose's observation in his article "*We're So Terribly Sorry*"^{cxx} calls for a deep reflection. When South Africa opted for democracy, it had the highest known disparities of income in the world, and that inequality runs almost strictly along racial lines. In the past few years a handful of black South Africans have become wealthy, and substantially more have climbed into the middle class. Still, unemployment among the poor hovers around 50 percent. Black and white South Africans continue to live in very different worlds. If South Africa was broken up by race, the **white country** would rank 34th and the **black country** 138th on the United Nations' human-development index.

Perhaps the picture of South Africa which Cose is painting looks equally the same when the situation of whites and blacks are compared in the United

States. Some conclusions are bound to be drawn. If the United States would pay compensation to its citizens - the Japanese Americans it injured in the past, nothing should hold the whites in South Africa from repairing the damages of apartheid without any further delay. Then, if United States made reparations to those Japanese it hurt, the nation should then begin to consider reparations to the blacks whose ancestors were kidnapped from Africa and brought to the United States. Those European nations that scrambled for Africa and other nations of the world they conquered and ruled and later left them in ruins should consider reparations for damages they did. Such gestures - in words and actions - must form the basis for future cooperation and mutual respect among the nations of the world.

Unfortunately, the right steps toward compensation or reparation of injuries done to the Africans in Diaspora are not being taken. The reverse is the case. The **Affirmative Action**, one of the few ways in which the nation could truly take positive action to overcome the social sin of racism is being dismantled in the United States as a result of an overwhelming pressure from the whites. It is a stunning development and a hard blow to the movement toward the healing of wounds. Will the hardening of hearts on the part of those expected to demonstrate their sincerity at reconciliation and true sorrow for past mistakes help to heal the "self-inflicted injuries?" Anthony Walton,^{cxxi} author of *Mississippi: An American Journey*, laments the situation:

After affirmative action is dismantled, after the borders are sealed, after "blacks" are thrown off welfare and taxes are cut, after all the barriers many whites feel blacks create for them in society are gone, white Americans will still be living in a ruthless, competitive national and global economy designed to benefit stockholders and very few elite corporate buccaneers. This is the society that the majority of the middle class - based on its performance at the polls - desires.

A strong evidence pointing to the drive to dismantle affirmative action, for example, is seen on the part of many whites as some kind of magic solution for the pressures they experience in their own lives. But Walton, like many other critics, wonders whether, in the aftermath of grave injustices perpetrated against the black people, America is moving in the right direction toward reconciliation and the healing of wounds. "But after we change welfare, affirmative action, and immigration laws, technological advance and the push for profit will still rule the day, and the problems represented by our society's failure to deal with the needs of large numbers of blacks will still be there."

In South Africa, which evidently shares the same experiences with the United States, many critics think that the white population of South Africa has not responded well to the ideals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was set up in that country after the demise of apartheid to hasten the healing of the wounds of past sins perpetrated by the white minority government. Certainly words of regret, of confession, and even forgiveness could only go so far. Such gestures could help the families of certain victims put nightmarish experiences behind them. As Cose^{cxxii} rightly points out "they can answer the nagging questions about the fate of loved ones. But they cannot reverse the effects of centuries of inequality." Some more concrete actions and programs are needed, to address the continuing black distress, such as affirmative action or massive investment in education. Such measures, however, require a certain sacrifice, at least on the part of the formerly privileged class. Here, the whites of South Africa share the same attitude with their counterparts in the United States. These are opposed to concrete measures by government to repair the sins of the past.

Reports confirm that many South African whites are annoyed at the very idea of directly tackling the problem of inequality rooted in apartheid. Among many young whites there is widespread resentment at preferences granted blacks. Claudia Mutschler, a 24-year old fellow with the South African Institute of International Affairs, finds that among many young whites there is widespread resentment at preferences granted blacks. "If I'm to get anywhere, I need to be black, female and disabled," is how she sums up that attitude of discontent. History may only repeat itself if the South African situation takes the turn of *reverse discrimination* imbroglio of the late 1970s in the United States. There is even the possibility that a worse situation of the United States *Proposition 209* could create a new social turbulence in South Africa if nothing was done to counter the white resistance to programs being devised in South Africa to repair the damages of apartheid. In the face of the unrelenting hardening of hearts and the increasing injustice in the world, one is forced to ask, "What are the Christian Churches doing?"

In the United States, the passage of California's Civil Rights Initiative against affirmative action, **Proposition 209**, has provoked mixed reactions from various quarters - all the way from Los Angeles archdiocesan offices and other Church quarters to the White House steps in Washington. Many blacks and white sympathizers have not failed to urge Church leaders throughout the United States to speak out against the recent blow to peace, reconciliation, and the healing of wounds of the past injustices against the blacks and other minority groups in the United States. The controversial measure to abolish state

affirmative action programs eliminates consideration of race and gender as criterion in contracting, promoting and hiring in state institutions. Reports indicate that black civil rights leaders, some government officials as well as many Church leaders denounced the Proposition 209. In a statement, the Los Angeles archdiocesan Office for Justice and Peace, said the Proposition 209, euphemistically pegged as the "California Civil Rights Initiative" on the state ballot, only "emphasizes the divides there are in our community." Many concerned people have criticized the deceptive way the initiative was presented to voters. Probably there were many who voted for it who didn't know they were voting to abolish affirmative action - a program which has a noble goal of repairing the injustices of the past generations.

But whatever the setbacks such programs geared toward the healing of wounds of past injustices are confronted with, many well-meaning leaders - civil and ecclesiastical - strongly believe that every available opportunity must be exploited to make amends for past offences and also insure that tragedies of the past are not repeated. The President of the United States set the ball rolling as he apologized for sins of his country's victims of oppression, neglect and collusion. In May 1997, Bill Clinton apologized for the injustices done to blacks who were deceived into thinking that they were being treated for **syphilis** when in fact they were not treated but were part of a macabre medical experiment. During his six-nation African tour of March 1998, the President of the United States rendered apologies to the Africans victims of oppression and injustice. These injustices ranged from sins of **slavery** to those of **genocide** - for American slavery, for complicity in apartheid, for inaction in the situations of those Africans who suffered genocide and ethnic massacres. Hundreds of thousands of innocent lives could have been saved if the big powers had intervened. Clinton apologized for slavery: "We were wrong in that." He apologized for the support Washington gave dictators and kleptocrats in the name of cold war anticommunism. He apologized for the failure of the international community to act quickly enough in the Rwandan genocide: "All over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which you were being engulfed in this unimaginable terror."^{cxiii} If the president of the United States had taken such steps toward the healing of the wounds of past injustices, what have the United States' Churches done? What of the leaders of other Churches who have in one way or another taken part in the oppression of other peoples and nations or have supported injustice in any form?

Split with the Mainline Churches: Consequences of Extreme Racism and Discrimination

Formation of black Churches and other black separatist movements have deep roots in extreme racism within the Christian Churches. In Africa, the early sixties - through the seventies and eighties - witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of New Churches and Religious Movements and burgeoning of neo-cultural revivalist movements. Most of these are the offshoots of Christian Churches brought into Africa by the Christian missionaries. The missionaries came mostly from Europe - Ireland, England, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Scotland, and France. They set up their *national Churches* where the colonialists had ruled, thus opening the road to the winning of the souls of the conquered Africans. In some places the faith which the missionaries preached did not take deep root. This was primarily due to cultural differences. Some of the missionaries did not address the problems and aspirations of the Africans. The rise of political independence movements no doubt inflamed the demand for a return to African traditional values. *Authenticity* became the watchword after political independence was attained in most of the African countries. Africans encouraged one another to reject foreign and imposed values, whether these were found in the secular or in the religious spheres.

The Christian Church was witnessing major changes, as Africans seized the initiative too in religion. Most African political leaders were seeing Christianity as an imported religion that was not responding to the problems of the Africans. Stories of *segregation, discrimination, and racism* in Christian Churches in Europe and America worsened the situation. It was not the time for sitting idle. Blacks on their own part began to establish their own Churches - all-Black Churches - that would take into account the plight of the black congregations. That was how the **African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church**^{cxxiv} - the largest African American Methodist denomination in the United States was born. The denomination was founded by Richard Allen and his followers, who refused to worship as *second-class* members within St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church of Philadelphia. Longstanding grievances came to the fore on Sunday morning in November of 1787. Allen and other African American worshippers were pulled from their knees at the altar rail, their customary place of worship, by white members who directed African American members to a gallery area. Allen and Absalom Jones led their group out of the Church.

Similar situations led black Church leaders in the United States to pull out from the white-dominated Churches to form the Independent Black Churches.

In 1796, under the leadership of Peter Williams, James Varick, and Christopher Rush, the **African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church**, the second-largest African American Methodist denomination in New York, was founded. Blacks objected to not being allowed to preach or become voting members of the white-dominated Church conference. The blacks in the United States did not stop at founding their own Churches, where they could worship in freedom; they also embarked on foreign missions and established the black Churches in South America, the West Indies, Haiti, and in Liberia, and many other African countries. Evidently most of the modern African Independent Churches referred to as "Zionists" are the indigenous offshoots of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of the United States. In Nigeria and some other West African countries, the Zionist Churches are called "Aladura." They are "Pentecostal Churches" in which baptism by immersion, faith-healing, and Charismatic manifestations feature prominently. Prior to the Civil War in America, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was referred to as "Freedom Church" because of its involvement with the Abolitionist Movement. Many AMEZ Churches became way-stations for runaway slaves in the underground railroad

Africans in Mother Africa, and in the Diaspora - in the United States and Europe - were convinced that the white-dominated Church was not serving the interest of blacks. In spite of the zeal of the Diaspora Africans to embrace the Christian faith in the face of colonialism, slavery and humiliation, it was obvious blacks were not welcomed in the white Church. No body would blame them for founding their own Churches. At least in the area of worship, Africans needed a different kind of Church, where they could freely worship in their own way. In *The Coming of the Third Church*^{cxxv} B † hlmann exposed the same issue at stake: "Such movements are reactions against a form of existence which has become burdensome to people aware of the advantages of civilization without actually possessing them, and are always accompanied by resentment against the white man, who has humiliated them, who dominates and despises them."^{cxxvi}

The split with the Catholic Church and the founding of the African American Catholic Church by former **Father George Stallings** in the United States is one of the consequences of racism and discrimination within the Roman Catholic Church in America. With the inauguration of **Imani Temple** (Swahili for Faith) on July 2, 1989, in an emotionally charged liturgy in Howard University's Dumbarton Chapel, the final rift with the Roman Catholic Church and the establishment of the African Catholic Church in the United States took a dramatic turn. The rift has continued to deepen. Outside the extreme racism

within the Catholic Church, which Stallings had faithfully served, the Catholic Church authorities' insensitivity to the black members' aspirations made Stallings' decision to leave the Roman Catholic Church inevitable. He had over time developed a way of ministering to black Catholics that was not only congenial in terms of their culture but an evangelistic enterprise happening on a number of levels, creating individual and community growth.

The black Catholic frustration, found not only in America but also in Africa and elsewhere in the African Diaspora, has been that the institutional Catholic Church has not sufficiently paid attention to black people's problems and protests. The most disturbing was a result of racism and discrimination - the exclusion of black worshippers from the Churches in which by choice and faith they belonged. From another perspective, little adaptation or inculturation was taking place in the Church to which many blacks have been devoted members. Their reaction to this insensitivity on the part of the Catholic hierarchy has continued to take great toll on the number of African Christians, who abandon the Mainline Churches to form their own African Independent Churches. **Cyprian Rowe**, who also left the Roman Catholic Church and joined the **Imani Temple - the African Catholic Church** clarified the black people's stand on inculturation. In an interview with a Catholic newspaper,^{cxxvii} Rowe insisted that Stallings' break with the Roman Catholic Church must not be understood as primarily a protest against Roman Catholicism, but, rather, black Catholics' "desire to grow in a way that does not ask them to be something they are not." Blacks in the African American Catholic Church are challenged to discover in themselves and their culture all those things that for years they were not allowed to consider - the prayer style, liturgical style, the various spiritualities that might be available. With the black leaders in control, at the pew level they work on incorporating into the liturgy what blacks know of African history and culture as well as black liberation theology. In the African American Catholic Congregation with its Imani Temples in several United States cities, Rowe said, "We don't have to go outside anymore and ask 'May we?' Inculturation was so high in the agenda of the African American Catholic Church that in September 1989, 150 U.S. black Catholics traveled to Rome to discuss "Evangelization and Culture: An African American Catholic Perspective" at the Vatican.

The decision of the former Marist and black academic - Brother Cyprian Rowe to leave the Roman Catholic Church and be ordained as priest and bishop in the African American Catholic Congregation, established in 1989 by the former Roman Catholic priest (now Archbishop) George Stallings according to Rowe has deeper roots than many had imagined. The decision in many ways was a culmination of a lifetime of struggle within an institution that, he

believed, never took black issues seriously. Moreover, Rowe thought that was the best way to free his conscience. "I decided it was best to stop colluding. It was getting to be a sin not following what the Lord was calling me to." Colluding with sinners or remaining indifferent to other people's aspirations and problems within Christ's Church will continue to evoke protests from the marginalized members and may lead to further schisms in the Christian Churches. Having watched with amazement at what has been happening in the Christian Churches and particularly within the Catholic Church in the United States, Father **Allan Deck**, a prominent Hispanic scholar, said it was possible that at some point that a Hispanic "George Stallings would emerge in the U.S. Catholic Church." Although that has not yet happened, it is not early to ask whether out of frustration the Latinos in America will found their Hispanic American Catholic Church. An urgent and most sincere solution must be sought to save further divisions in Christ's Church. The third millennium Church must see this as a necessary part of its mission.

Extreme Racism within the Catholic Church: Physician, Heal Yourself

The bitterness of blacks in the United States has also been directed more to the Catholic Church, the most powerful institution among the Christian Churches. Many blacks do not want to be identified with the Roman Church and so it is not surprising that the Catholic Church remains a minority Church in the black Christian community. It is widely believed by blacks that the Catholic Church showed the least sympathy to their cause through slavery and continued oppression. Out of a population of 40 million African Americans only 2 million are Roman Catholics. A new study from the U.S. Catholic Conference identifies racism in the Church as one of the biggest challenges still confronting African-American Catholics. The study calls for renewed examination of *racial bias* and *insensitivity* in the U.S. Church. These two factors among others have persistently constituted the root of the black protest and the subsequent split with the Mainline Christian Churches, including the Catholic Church. There is no wonder that the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops has urged Catholic colleges and universities to increase research on African-American culture and recommends that parish schools and adult-education programs should expand African-American studies to enrich the Church.

The document, "**Keep Your Hand on the Plow: The African-American Presence in the Catholic Church**"^{cxxviii} describes the 2 million African-American Catholics as "a strong, vibrant and colorful component of the Church in the United States." The document produced by the USCC Office of

Research and the Secretariat for African-American Catholics of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops acknowledged that the United States Church reaps fruit of the seeds planted by blacks amid racism. The undaunted spirit of African-American Catholics on the face of persecution, discrimination, and outright rejection in the Church to which they belonged, is clear testimony of their faith in the Church of Christ. But the importance the present and future black members of the clergy in the U.S. Catholic Church attach to problems of racism in the Church should be a wake-up signal to Church leaders. Father **Rollins E. Lambert** of Chicago repeats the warning: "The real or apparent neglect of African-American communities and their problems with bishops and religious superiors is an impediment to both evangelization in general and recruitment of African-American clergy."^{cxxix}

Church Leaders in the United States Decry Racism in the Catholic Church

Both in the past and in the present times, not a few Church leaders, including bishops, pastors, and lay persons have decried racism in the Catholic Church and called for national atonement for the evils the Church by omission or collusion has perpetrated against its black members. No one will deny that the Catholic Bishops of the United States have never ceased to bemoan this evil on the national level and have persistently through pastoral statements called for an end to the evils of racism. There are many such statements that should command our attention here. In **1943** when the United States was devoting its energies to a world war designed to maintain human freedom, the Catholic Bishops issued a prayerful warning to their fellow citizens. The bishops called for the extension of full freedom within the confines of their country. Specifically, they noted the problems faced by the blacks in the U.S. in obtaining the rights that are theirs as Americans. Part of the statement read:

In the providence of God there are among us millions of fellow citizens of the Negro race. We owe to these fellow citizens, who have contributed so largely to the development of our country, and for whose welfare history imposes on us a special obligation of justice, to see that they have in fact the right which are given them in our Constitution. This means not only political equality, but also fair economic and educational opportunities, a just share in public welfare projects, good housing without exploitation, and a full chance for the social advancement of their race.^{cxxx}

In November 14, **1958**, the Catholic Bishops of the United States released another statement on **Discrimination and Christian Conscience**. As in their earlier statements, the bishops condemned all sorts of injustice in vogue. It included the problem of compulsory segregation of races. For them the heart of the race question was *moral* and *religious*. If the Christian law of love is thrown overboard as people carried out their religious duties, then something was seriously wrong: "But if our hearts are poisoned by hatred, or even by indifference toward the welfare and rights of our fellow men, then our nation faces a grave internal crisis." Should personal differences among people form a basis for grave injustice? The bishops did not fail to point the error of judgment here: "But discrimination based on the accidental fact of *race* or *color*, and as such injurious to human rights regardless of personal qualities or achievements, cannot be reconciled with the truth that God has created all men with equal rights and equal dignity." The bishops unequivocally condemned legal segregation or any form of compulsory segregation, which imposes a stigma of inferiority upon the segregated people. Equally condemned was the **Jim Crow** doctrine of "separate but equal." To the bishops the reasons advanced by government, institutions, and persons who favored discrimination against black people were ridiculous and evil.

Today we are told that Negroes, Indians, and also some Spanish-speaking Americans differ too much in culture and achievements to be assimilated in our schools, factories, and neighborhoods. Some decades back the same charge was made against the immigrant Irish, Jewish, Italian, Polish, Hungarian, German, and Russian.^{cxxxix}

If the Irish, the Jews, the Italians, the Polish, the Hungarians, the Germans, and the Russians at last achieved their rightful status in the American community, why not the blacks who seek the same opportunities? The bishops questioned the rationale behind the type of the bigoted-treatment being meted to the blacks. "They wish an education that does not carry with it any stigma of inferiority. They wish economic advancement based on merit and skill. They wish their civil rights as American citizens. No one who truly loves God's children will deny them this opportunity." The pastoral letter of the United States Catholic bishops, November 14, **1979** - **Brothers and Sisters to Us** - explicitly acknowledged racism as fact in the United States. It is also a grievous sin. Looking back to sad history of their nation with regard to the ill treatment of a section of its citizens, the bishops identified racism as part of the social fabric of America since its European colonization. It has been a painful history:

Whether it be the tragic past of the native Americans, the Mexicans, the Puerto Ricans, or the blacks, the story is of slavery, peonage, economic exploitation, brutal repression, and cultural neglect. All have suffered indignity; most have been uprooted, defrauded, or dispossessed of their lands, and none have escaped one or another form of collective degradation by a powerful majority.^{cxxxii}

Could a nation that claimed the rule of law and the knowledge of God have perpetrated such atrocities against its citizens and those it conquered and ruled? It was an outrageous treatment and the bishops wanted the citizens of the United States to be aware of such historical records: "Our history is littered with the debris of broken promises and treaties, as well as lynchings and massacres that almost destroyed the Indians, humiliated the Hispanics, and crushed the blacks." But the stunning aspect of this tragic history is that the oppressed racial minorities have survived and increased despite all the repression. This phenomenon will certainly benefit the Third Millennium Church. "Et Tu Brute!" - "And you Brutus, too!"

Many other statements - official and unofficial - private and secret - collective and individual - have been issued in the United States, condemning the evil of racism in whatever quarter it was found. But all said and done, one wonders what the same Church and its leaders have done to curb the evil of racism within the Church's communities. The truth is that many colluded with the oppressors and did little or nothing practically to address the issue. Haunted by the evils of their past neglect many Church leaders have started to confess their "sins" -Mea culpa! They also are calling on the members of their flock to join in the crusade for reparation and reconciliation. The bishops have not failed to remind Catholics of the United States that they the people, have also colluded with the oppressors by not recognizing their brothers and sisters in the faith, simply because they are of other racial groups.

Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice.^{cxxxiii}

In spite of past mistakes, it is not too late to make amends, ask for forgiveness, and effect reconciliation. The consequences of failure are definitely enormous. Worldwide, the Church today is not just European and American; it is also African, Asian, Indian, and Oceanic. It is western, eastern, northern, and southern, black and also brown, white and also red and yellow.

In the United States, one third of the Catholics are Hispanic. Two million black Catholics make Catholicism one of the largest denominations among black Americans today. Both the Hispanic and black Catholic groups are strong, vibrant, and colorful components of the Church in the United States. Unfortunately the large number of this segment of the Church of Christ has been estranged by racism. And unfortunately, too, racism is still present in the American society and as in the past it remains at the root of most controversies between whites and blacks, minorities and the majority. Most conspicuously racism has reared its head higher in most incidents of the burning of the black Churches, in the opposition of the white majority to affirmative action, and in the introduction of many harsh immigration laws. The bishops deplored the deteriorating situation of racism apparent in the growing sentiment that too much is being given to racial minorities by way of affirmative action programs or allocations to redress long-standing imbalances in minority representation and government-funded programs for the disadvantaged. "At times, protestations claiming that all persons should be treated equally reflect the desire to maintain a status quo that favors one race and social group at the expense of the poor and nonwhite."^{cxxxiv} Only stiff opposition to evil and a strong and unequivocal stand on the concrete issue of restitution might lead to justice.

Racism obscures the evils of the past and denies the burdens that history has placed upon the shoulders of our black, Hispanic, native Americans, and Asian brothers and sisters. An honest look at the past makes plain the need for restitution whatever possible - makes evident the justice of restoration and redistribution.^{cxxxv}

It is not surprising that **Bishop Curtis J. Guillory** of Galveston-Houston, head of the National Catholic Conference of Bishops of the United States who approved the study, "**Keep Your Hand on the Plow**,"^{cxxxvi} wrote in the introduction: "As evangelization among African-Americans is studied and discussed, this document reminds us not to forget that racism, which has plagued African-Americans, is still alive and at the root of poverty, poor

education, sickness and violence." Racism is no doubt at the root of violence in the United States. The Pastoral Message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops of 1994 - **Confronting A Culture of Violence**^{cxxxvii} - **A Catholic Framework for Action** - addressed the issue of violence precipitated by racism. The document recommended the provision of exceptional leadership in the African American and Hispanic Catholic Ministries, which the bishops believe would bring together diverse groups across racial and ethnic lines to work against racism and violence and provide opportunities for young people. "As Church, we must continue our commitment to examine our own policies and practices to eliminate any form of abuse within our own Church community wherever it may exist." As for Bishop Curtis Guillory, "The God of justice is glorified when people act justly. African-Americans have called the Church to seriously examine racism and have reminded the Church of the suffering that injustices inflict." It is only a determined people with an indomitable faith in the Church of Christ who would not lose heart in their struggle to remain members of the Catholic faith in the face of persecution and contradictions. It was proper that Bishop Guillory's introduction described the history of African-American Catholics as one of "great self-determination and steadfast activism."

They kept their hands on the plow when dark shadows of racism clouded the field. They kept moving forward, planting seeds everywhere. They established religious orders, formed the first lay religious organization and called forth vocations at the same time as they built Churches and schools. They kept plunging forward, confronting the contradictions that existed within the institution. For only a people who know what they want to plant can look forward to a fruitful future. This document records the fruits of their labors."^{cxxxviii}

Unlike the apartheid South Africa, where most of the Black population vowed never to do anything with European Christian Church, the Blacks of America never adopted such a policy. The *Dutch Reformed Church* of South Africa, referred to as the *Whore of Babylon* by Africans, was known to have wreaked havoc on the black people of South Africa even more than the operators of the apartheid regime did. As race or color strictly restricted religious affiliation, it was not surprising that most blacks abhorred the Western brand of Christianity. It was not possible for most Africans to embrace the religion of their oppressors. Their common feelings could be summarized in the expression attributed to a South African priest, **William Guba**, who in a funeral oration in a South African township declared: "Should I find **Boers** in heaven, I will turn back." It

was a clear protest against an unjust religious, political, and social system operated by government, Church and people who claimed to be Christians. It was completely unacceptable to Africans, especially those who had lived under oppressive system of colonialism and racial discrimination.

Bishop Curtis Guillory of Galveston-Houston was not alone in decrying racism in the American Catholic Church and pointing to its continued existence. Although it was more blatant in the 1960s, **Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton of Detroit** has no doubt that subtle forms of racism still exist in the U.S. Catholic Church. The bishop, who was invited by a local chapter of the International Catholic peace movement **Pax Christi**^{cxix} to speak on racism, talked about the evil from a personal standpoint, describing the development of his own awareness and understanding of racism. He said he grew up in a white culture in a very segregated Detroit and in his youth he never had contact with African-American or black people. In a sense he grew up afraid of black people.

Gumbleton recalled the misery of a lone black student who attended the Detroit seminary where he was also enrolled. The student dropped out, and looking back, Gumbleton realized that the system tried to strip the young black seminarian of his ethnic heritage and to transform him into something he was not. "I didn't know it at the time but I realized it much later we made it almost impossible for him to succeed," he said. The treatment black families who tried to move into Detroit suburb of Dearborn was appalling. "When black families tried to move into the town, they were harassed round the clock by police until they left." The bishop confessed he did not think twice about what was happening there. "Looking back, I ask myself where was my social conscience? Where was the Church? I look back and am embarrassed and ashamed to admit that at that time I had no social awareness at all," the bishop lamented.

According to the repentant bishop Gumbleton, his eyes were really opened in 1967, when he became pastor of a small black parish in northeast Detroit surrounded by four white parishes. "I never realized how harassed black people really were until my parishioners shared their stories," he said. "What I discovered was even worse, in a sense, was the extreme racism within the Catholic Church." Priests in neighboring parishes would not offer communion to black Catholics, Gumbleton said, and Catholic schools would not accept black students from the parish. For him "that is institutional racism, telling black people that they're not good enough to belong to a white parish. That is a clear example of racism on the part of the Detroit Archdiocese. And that has happened consistently throughout the years in the Catholic Church." The former apartheid government in South Africa and the Nazi government in Germany are obvious examples of structural social injustice, but other examples of social

injustice are more subtle, the bishop observed. Bishop Gumbleton recommended some urgent measures that must be taken by both government and Church in the United States to overcome the social sin of racism. One measure is the *affirmative action program*. Even though affirmative action has run into difficulties, part of continuing racism, not a few critics scorn at most of the haphazard *rescue mission* activities of the Church meant to help the poor blacks and Native Indians.

As racism has been identified to be at the root of *poverty* and in fact at the root of many other evils associated with backwardness, the Church should come out with meaningful programs that would effectively redress the past injuries. Such programs should not end up with a few *Church collections for the poor*, in the nature of food and clothing. Often donors are not properly motivated in supposedly "charitable programs." Sometimes donated stuffs are part of items donors and "Good Samaritans" do not need any more. The Red Cross and some Church charitable organizations become the best avenues for getting rid of old items their owners are no more in need of when people knock at their doors. This type of charity on the part of the Church is surely not part of the restitution programs to redress the injustices of the past. More radical measures must go beyond pulpit appeals for collections for the poor or serving some soup and cookies to the hungry.

In 1965, Selma, Alabama became the center of a black voter-registration drive led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. The need for a federal voting-rights law for blacks was dramatized by a massive, nonviolent protest march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital, on March 25-28. Among the few white supporters in the sea of black faces, **Father Sherrill Smith** of the Archdiocese of San Antonio was the only priest permitted to join the march. But his presence made a big difference. He was the only representative of a Church that had yet to condemn racial segregation and inequality actively. Discussing the reality of racism and why he felt he had to join the black march, Father Smith bared his soul: "From my youth, I was a typical Northerner. I brushed shoulders with Negroes daily, but I never really saw them. It was in Georgia that I saw for the first time the terrible gulf between the Negro and the white man. It was like another country." As far as that Roman clergyman was concerned it was really time to show solidarity with the persecuted Blacks and let the unconcerned world look into their plight:

Of course, as a priest I represent the Church, and I've felt great anguish about the silence of the Church in the South. We've made enough high-sounding statements, and it just seemed to me that the time had come

when we should see eyeball to eyeball. As a man, I've felt this very keenly. All I knew was that I just had to put my feet on this highway, and I just had to walk.^{cxl}

"Racism: A Tarnished Reflection of Ourselves," is the title of the pastoral letter that **Bishop James Griffin of Columbus, Ohio** addressed to parents, religious leaders, government officials, community leaders, business leaders, teachers and all people of good will in the United States. Addressing the personal roots of racism, Griffin proposed a series of questions that people can ask themselves as a "kind of moral mirror" in which to see prejudices. Blatant forms of racist practices can be readily known and condemned. It is the subtle forms that elude the people's perception. Racism flows from personal attitudes and actions into the human world around us. It becomes a social evil. Like Bishop Gumbleton, Griffin has no doubts that as far as racism is concerned all the social institutions and structures are affected - families, schools, public institutions, governmental programs, large corporations, small businesses, and of course, Church communities. The sin of racism is devastating and Bishop Griffin calls on his countrymen and women particularly Catholics of the United States, to consider the implications of the sin for the Church of Christ.

As a Church, we must examine and confront the subtle forms of racism of which we are guilty. The Catholic Church in the United States is an overwhelmingly white Church. As the bishops' Committee on Black Catholics stated, "History reveals that racism has played a powerful role in discouraging African Americans from the Catholic Church as a spiritual home... We must face the challenge of liberating ourselves from the bonds of racism. Racism, as a sin, harms not only the victim but the sinner too."^{cxli}

Bishop Griffin recommended personal conversion and pastoral charity among other activities that the Church must embrace to address the sin of racism. On the part of government and other agencies involved in the sin of racism, the bishop recommended conversion from prejudice, which must be linked to sharing of power and influence with minority people. "We must name and confess our prejudices in order to be freed from them." Surely through such confession of sin both the oppressed and the oppressor would be liberated. On this crucial point, the Gospel is unequivocal for "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." [John 8:32]

"The still vexing question of Catholic racism" was taken up by **John T. McGreevy**, an assistant professor of history at Harvard University in his book "**Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North.**"^{cxliii} McGreevy confirms most of the stories of Bishop Gumbleton of Detroit that white Catholic parishes and Catholics of the North were resistant to African American presence in their neighborhoods. The enormous Catholic physical plant, which dwarfed anything comparably built by other Church denominations - the convents, the rectory, the Church, the gymnasium, and the school - in practice excluded black people's presence and thus perpetuated institutional racism. For McGreevy, perhaps Catholics are not more racist than others, but "the culture was thoroughly racist and these Catholics were thoroughly racist as well."

Faced by the image of Catholicism dented by racism one would like to know what Rome thought about all this. That has for long remained a perplexing question that has troubled most Africans, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The same question has been repeated with regard to the Holocaust. Where was the Catholic Church when millions of Jews were murdered? What was the position of the Church in the face of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis, including the majority who professed the Christian faith in Europe? What did the leaders of the Church say? What did the Catholic Church do to save the lives of those who became victims? Whether the defenders of the Church thought the "neutrality" of the Church in the conflict was the best or that the Church did something significant to condemn evil, more than a few critics - believers and Jews - regret the Church's role during the Holocaust. Few people would accuse the Church of colluding with the aggressors, but the Church's *inaction* will continue to put her in a defensive position before her accusers. Perhaps one could argue like this when it comes to racism in the Catholic Church.

McGreevy's response to the question of Rome's stand on racism throws more light on speculation or skepticism. "In a way, the Vatican is acting as the liberal in this race dialogue. They're prodding the American Catholic Church cautiously. They're getting some complaints from African American Catholics about the way they're being treated." The Vatican has specifically told the American Church and its bishops that integration should be pursued until racial distinction is meaningless. As with the Vatican's response to the complaints of blacks in South Africa during the mayhem of the apartheid policy, one cannot expect a strong reaction from the bishops. The bishops would be required to also act *cautiously* and perhaps engage in dialogue with the oppressors. Some of the bishops must have ignored the Vatican's directives, as they too tacitly

supported racism in their Churches. They apparently could not condemn what they practiced or they were afraid of the people. It should not surprise any concerned Christian that most of the world famous U.S. media-savvy evangelists and moralists - past and present - like **Archbishop Fulton Sheen, Billy Graham, Oral Roberts** - cautiously avoided *racism* in their numerous and well documented spiritual and evangelistic discourses. Bishop Sheen in 1952, was known to have drawn more than 50 million viewers to his "Life Is Worth Living" TV-Show. The trend has not changed much. Modern preachers and most Church leaders have continued to avoid any condemnation of the grave forms of injustice found in the Church.

From McGreevy's research, we are however able to note that the Vatican took into account each bishop's stand on racism in the American Catholic Church. Although the bishops appointed in the 1940s and 1950s tended to be more liberal on race than their predecessors, according to McGreevy, "There was one piece of evidence in a 1947 letter which states that the apostolic delegate in Washington was very much aware of people's racial views when he forwarded the names for bishop appointments."^{cxliii} Earlier on the message returned to the Vatican from the bishops ran like this: "Well, you don't understand the situation here. This is a big problem, we can't solve it, so don't try and tell us what to do." In spite of the fact that **de facto segregation** was entrenched in public institutions in the Southern states and many civil rights activists - black and white - were opposed to it, there wasn't much evidence, as McGreevy pointed out, that Catholics were protesting. The bishops before the 1960s were quite comfortable with U.S. segregation policies.

Some of the Catholic bishops must have more or less changed along with the culture, but McGreevy points out one exception, in the person of **Archbishop Joseph Rummel in Louisiana**. According to reports, a couple of times in the 1950s, when parishioners refused to take communion from black priests, Archbishop Rummel came down heavily on those parishes, publicly denouncing them. How did black Catholics respond to the ill treatment they received from those with whom they shared the faith? Why didn't they break away or stop any association with Catholics and their Church? Surely, many did. In recent times black Catholic priests and brothers like Stallings and Rowe have broken away to found their own version of African-American Catholic Church. Who would blame them? Still in spite of all contradictions many blacks have remained with their Catholic communities. Perhaps theirs is a stunning demonstration of heroic faith as McGreevy also sees it: "I think it's a heroic story, really. These are people who could have left the Church, but many or most of them stayed and fought."^{cxliv} Those who left joined Protestant

denominations and where it was not possible for them to join any of the European Christian Churches, founded their own Independent Churches. Black Catholics who stayed must have been encouraged by the actions of Catholic leaders like Archbishop Rummel and many white priests, nuns, and ordinary Catholics who condemned racism as well as marched along the streets with blacks who fought for their civil rights.

As most others who denounced racism in their writings or speeches have pointed out, what brought Catholic racism to the attention of Catholic leaders most vividly, as McGreevy notes too, was the type of hostility black Catholics encountered when they moved into a heavily Catholic neighborhood. They also encountered hostility, when they sent their children to school, or when they went to Church. Blacks wondered why they should suffer such hostility and what was happening to the Church of Christ. Black resistance to persecution, together with their unflinching faith in the Catholic Church no doubt contributed in forcing the institutional Church to think about racial justice and Christian love. It has also led to much open confession to the sin of racism. Such "**confessions,**" accompanied by genuine concrete actions to amend the damages of the past sins, might help restore the damaged image of the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches that failed to condemn the evil of racism or colluded with the perpetrators.

Headlines like "**Bishops seek forgiveness,**" "**Religious Denominations Confess to Sin of Racism**" are not rare these days. They point to the possibility of healing of the wounds of racism. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa has taken a stunning initiative to put the Christian concept of forgiveness into action. It is the right step in the right direction if the Church of Christ - Catholic and Protestant - wishes to command reasonable following among the black population and other ethnic groups that have suffered untold hardship and discrimination from those they thought were their brothers and sisters in the Christian faith. As the Southern States of America were the scene of the most vicious forms of racism, it is not surprising that the leaders of four major religious denominations in South Carolina recently issued a statement confessing to the sin of racism and asked for forgiveness.

Those who signed the statement were Bishop David A. Donges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; Bishop Dorsey F. Henderson Jr. of the Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina, Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey of the United Methodist Church, Bishop Edward Salmon Jr. of the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina, and Bishop David Thomson of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston. In their statement, the leaders of these major denominations asked Christ to "help us in our struggle to overcome the sin of racism, the powerful

prejudice which pits one race against the other to the damage of all. We go to each other confessing guilt and seeking forgiveness." The bishops said their statement was "a response to the incidents of institutional and personal racism experienced by the dialogue participants. Examples of institutional racism brought to the bishops included the low number of black people in local and statewide leadership positions in the Church and the past practice of designating pews and balconies for black worshippers. The bishops also held a public racial reconciliation service on January 18, 1998, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Greenville, South Carolina. Reports recall that in 1996 the 15.6 million-member Southern Baptist Convention approved a similar statement apologizing for racism in the United States' Church.

It is not only the black minorities of the United States who have received apologies from the ministers of religion on behalf of their flocks and the people of God for the sins of racism and past injustices. Native Americans, the original owners of the land who became exiles in their own land received a passionate apology from the Catholic bishop of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, **Robert J. Carlson** at a mass in the St Joseph Cathedral marking the Native American Day, October 14, 1997. During the mass, Bishop Carlson spoke of reconciliation and forgiveness. He said, "In order to begin the effort of reconciliation, I feel it is important today on behalf of all the Catholic missionaries who walked in this land, that first if there is any hurt, any misunderstanding, any broken promises, I, now as the leader of the Catholic Christian people would apologize. I seek the forgiveness of all those who have been hurt and that each of us at the sign of peace today in the same sense of reconciliation would seek apology and forgiveness so there would be healing and growth." The bishop continued: "I offer this apology first for myself for any sin of racism that might be within me. Extending the apology and seeking your forgiveness, I do it also for the Church that I lead. I pray that as we live together you would accept the apology that I might live blessed by your gift of forgiveness. Wouldn't it be a wonderful and different world if all peoples could do that. The Native American Day celebration was sponsored by the Native American Council for the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The council, which is made up of men and women, Indians and whites from across the diocese, works to promote a better understanding between the cultures.

Apologies for past unjust actions of the Church in the United States are welcomed by both well-meaning Catholics, Protestants, and as well as the races that have been injured. These people look forward to more concrete actions to remedy the sins of the past deprivations and discriminations against minorities particularly the blacks who have borne the bitterest brunt of the sins of racism.

The Pope apologized for the past actions of the Church in 1994 - for the sins of the **Inquisition** - and in 1996 to **women** - and, in an encyclical on ecumenism, to **other Christians**. Recently Pope Paul II set up a commission to study the role of the Catholic Church in the **Holocaust**. The Catholic Church hierarchy in the Vatican was not totally indifferent to the agony of the persecuted members of its Church. John McGreevy, the author of "*Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North*" recalled that the Roman Church was happy with Archbishop Rummel in Louisiana who publicly denounced racism in his Church in the 1950s. "When it happened, the Vatican put it on the front page of its newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, saying it was wonderful, a brave action - which is a marker of how they were thinking in Rome," said McGreevy.

Healing the wounds of Racism: How Are the Christian Churches Contributing?

It is not easy to open wounds. It is very painful. But if you don't open them, they will fester. If you open them, you cleanse them, pour balm on them so that they heal. [Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa, Chairman *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*]

Believers and non-believers do not need to pore into old scriptural manuscripts and Church documents to discover the central mission of the Church - to proclaim liberty to the captive, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. [Luke 4:18] While very few followers of Christ would argue whether this quotation from the Gospel constitutes the core of Liberation Theology and the Christian message, the fundamental question facing great numbers of Christian Churches and sects that profess Christian fellowship is whether and how far they are carrying on their job of discipleship according to the mind of the Divine Master. The Church should promote unity, love, and justice among all peoples. Bill Clinton, the United States president, in an address to more than 100 leaders of the major religious denominations and organizations who attended the fourth annual ecumenical prayer breakfast at the White House urged his countrymen to *help create a sense of reconciliation that will help Americans to move forward together.*

"Truth, The Road to Reconciliation." These words, boldly written, catch the eyes of any visitor as well as South Africans who find themselves in the Community Hall where Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his group of peacemakers conduct the business of the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission**. It refers anyone who cares to that Gospel passage, reminding the followers of Christ that "only the truth shall set the people free." [John 8:32] The blacks of South Africa have stunned their bitter enemies, as well as Christians and non-Christians all over the world, by the practical steps they have taken toward reconciliation and forgiveness. It is a lesson and a great challenge to those Christians who still allow the sins of racism and other forms of oppression to becloud their faith. To these people, it is not too late to amend. Instead of taking to revenge after years of persecution by the white minority regime, Africans have been seeking peace and reconciliation.

By this singular act of Christian love and forgiveness Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has

been accused by many critics of stretching Christianity's New Law of Love too much: *You have heard the commandment: You shall love your countrymen, but hate your enemy. My command to you is love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust* [Mt. 5:43]. The drama, which has continued to unfold since the Black majority rule began in South Africa, finds its support and life in the declared objective of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, namely "**Healing The Wounds Of Our Past.**"

It is an urgent project. It is a difficult task. But it has to be done. As Desmond Tutu tells the stunned world, "**It is not easy to open wounds. It is very painful. But if you don't open them, they will fester. If you open them, you cleanse them, pour balm on them so that they heal.**"^{cxiv} It has become one of the most incredible stories of our modern times. In the Post Apartheid South Africa, the white perpetrators of the most outrageous atrocities against Blacks of South Africa in modern history were granted amnesty instead of reprisals and mass executions after bitter years of repression and injustice. The victors did not cry out for revenge, for *tit for tat* - not even compensations or confession and acknowledgment of guilt leading to remorse of conscience. All that the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* demanded was simple truth of the story of acts of transgressions meant to elicit emotions that could help forget the past.

In their hour of need for liberation from the forces that have hindered their progress, blacks in America have sought a *Moses* in the manner of *Nelson Mandela*. This great African son and leader, in spite of the long and bitter years of torture and imprisonment, eschewed retaliation and bitterness to embrace those who persecuted him and kept him in a dungeon for more than 18 years. Mandela is a rare personality that the modern world may still match. In his name and in the name of the forgiving blacks of South Africa, Desmond Tutu has been appealing to the whites of South Africa to come forward for a final reconciliation and friendship after the bitter wars of hatred and atrocities.

American Blacks struggling against racism have need of messiahs and heroes - **Mandela** and **Desmond Tutu**, whose leadership role in both pre and post apartheid South Africa has earned them many laurels in both Church and state. The many sons of Africa have much to offer our world, still plagued by war, hatred, violence, and injustice of incredible and unimaginable intensity. Martin Luther King Jr. was a rare leader of the black Americans. But he is no more. There is need for other messianic figures in the stature of Martin Luther King Jr. and Desmond Tutu to bring about a reconciliation between blacks and

whites in the United States. Like in South Africa, the initiative may have to come from the blacks. This is the correct Christian attitude. The past can easily be forgotten, if only leaders soften their hearts and convince their followers that such peaceful ventures will always produce the best results. As far as Christians in both camps are concerned only confession of sin and forgiveness can restore the dented image of Christ Church damaged by many years of hypocrisy, hatred, and deceit.

CHAPTER SIX

Missionary Enterprise in the Western Church and The Dilemma of the Third World Church

- To be a Missioner is to go where you are needed but not wanted, and to stay until you are wanted but not needed. (Bishop James E. Walsh, Maryknoll Missionary)

- The more the West is becoming estranged from its Christian roots, the more it is becoming missionary territory, taking the form of many different "areopagi." (Pope John Paul II - "On the Coming of the Third Millennium.")

The concept of **mission** and the **missionary** has continued to change as the need for **re-evangelization or re-Christianization** of the great majority of the first recipients of the Gospel message in Europe and America becomes more urgent. The call by the leaders of the Mainline Christian Churches - Catholic and Protestant - for **new evangelization** confirms that all is not well with Christianity in its former strongholds. The "missionary" in the modern Church is not only a pastor, a nun, an evangelist preacher, or a lay worker from Europe and America, engaged in the conversion of the pagan nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America or other distant peoples - described as heathens and idol-worshippers inhabiting remote islands and impenetrable jungles in strange parts of the earth. The missionary is found today in every part of the world within the six continents - Asia, Africa, North and South America, Europe and Oceania. They are found in the inner and outer cities, in the remote and accessible parts of human habitation.

The work of the modern missionary is more complex than it used to be in the past. In the past "Repent, and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ," was a simple

formula, and like any novelty, most of the converts who were touched by the preacher's charisma and methods of approach accepted the message. Surely like the first crowd who listened to the Apostles and Paul, there were some who ignored the missionaries or persecuted the evangelizers. Today, in most cases, the subjects of the new evangelization are mostly those who have already heard the message but failed to bear good fruit. On account of various societal factors there are too many who have remained ignorant of the gospel message because nobody has reached out to them. New methods of evangelization are in vogue because new circumstances have rendered the old methods obsolete. We have examined evangelization in one of the chapters of this work. In this Chapter we shall examine the identity of the missionary and the type of work he is confronted with at the threshold of the third millennium. We shall also examine the role of the Third World Church in the Church of the new millennium.

The concept of "Mission" as a program of "winning souls" for Christ and for a particular Church denomination - Catholic or Protestant - may have little place in the third millennium Church. The promotion of the particular interests of a given Church, its belief systems, and its dogma ruined the unity of Christ's Church, which, Christ, its head prayed for - "that they may be one." The emphasis of the missionaries and the various Churches they represented on the spread of sectarian faith to the detriment of conversion to God, is no doubt part of the bitter fruits of the "empty Churches" among the first recipients of the gospel message. Bitterness created by controversies over articles of creed has made ecumenism an untenable goal during the 2000 years of the history of the Church. This factor alone has made it expedient for the modern Church, and hence the Church of the third millennium, to reconsider new approaches to mission.

The early missionaries, mostly from the Western world, knew, of course, that "mission" meant more than "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." One important implication of "making disciples of all nations" is well illustrated by James' teaching on faith and works. "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:14-17]

The concept of "mission" continues to expand. Father Raymond J. Finch, the Superior General of the **Maryknoll**^{cxlvi} missionaries, tells the benefactors of Maryknoll: "Not everyone, of course, is called to go overseas. But all Christians

are called to help their brothers and sisters - at home and abroad - hear the Good News and build a world of justice and peace." As Father Finch informs his audience, Maryknollers are missionaries. In days gone by, most people thought of missionaries as an elite group delegated to do the Catholic Church's mission work. However, recent popes and Church leaders remind us that all followers of Christ are called to mission by virtue of their baptism. "All followers of Jesus, you as well as the missionaries who are serving in Asia, Africa, and Latin America." Although the new area of mission territories has expanded to include Europe and America, the same can be said of the scope of the mission activities.

Mission and the Missionary Today

As the concept, goal, and scope of *mission* expands so also the concept of the *missionary*. The missionary is not only the Western Father, Brother, or Western Lay person called to serve in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Missionaries from these former "mission territories" of the world are called to serve the Mother Churches everywhere - in Europe and America and other places where, in the words of Bishop James Walsh, to minister in those areas of the world "*where you are needed, but not wanted.*" How prophetic are the bishop's words. In some hostile countries where the early Western missionaries went to evangelize, they were not wanted, but their services were desperately needed by the people. The hostile environment in which they worked, the martyrdom some suffered, the persecution that the Churches they established suffered are concrete evidence that the missionaries were not wanted in those places. But in most places where the missionaries were welcomed, the seeds they planted germinated and have yielded a rich harvest.

The Irish, Belgian, Portuguese, Spanish, and French missionaries can boast of success in their areas of operation in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The Catholic Irish and the Belgian missionaries can be proud of the flourishing Churches they established in various parts of Africa. If it was not for their indomitable efforts, most of the African countries that can boast of a good percentage of Christians would have been under Muslim domination. Nigeria is typical example. Other Christian missionaries, representing various Protestant denominations, were equally instrumental to the establishment of the Christian Church in Africa. When these missionaries were *no more needed but still wanted*, they retired to their countries in Europe and North America. The Churches they established, and the local clergy they trained have been able to continue the good work they began. Today the Catholic Church in Nigeria and the Congo can boast of having the largest number of Catholic priests in Africa

and largest number of seminaries and seminarians in the Catholic world. Everyone prays that such trend will continue.

Today one can say without contradiction that the Western missionaries are not needed in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. But there is need to qualify this statement. If the concept of "mission" is limited to the conversion of souls, announcing the Gospel, and celebrating the sacraments, surely the Western missionaries have been outnumbered by the native clergy, the hundreds and thousands of evangelists who are heavily engaged in these areas of the Christian Apostolate. The local Protestant Churches of the evangelical denominations that outnumber the Catholic Church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are not in short of ministers. It is the Catholic Church that may still be in need of foreign missionaries in some parts of Africa. Even though this need is obvious, there is little possibility that the Western Churches are in the position to satisfy the need, taking into account the shortage of priests in Europe and North America. The West has run short of manpower and indeed needs help from anywhere. With the significant decline in priestly and religious vocations and the closure of houses of formation, no one thinks that the Western Church - Catholic or Protestant - is in the position to supply missionaries to overseas missions as in the past.

But they are still wanted. Africa, Asia, and Latin America have benefited immensely in particular areas of the "mission" and will continue to appreciate help from their former Mother Churches in Europe and America. James E. Walsh - who was named bishop of Kongmoon in China in 1927, imprisoned by the communists in 1958, released in 1970, and died in 1981 at the age of 90 - is one of Maryknoll's most famous and loved missionaries. In his 1930 book, "**A Description of a Missioner**," Walsh wrote: "*To be a missioner is to go where you are needed but not wanted, and to stay until you are wanted but not needed.*" As for the scope and goal of any mission activity, these have expanded in the present times and must also continue to diversify in the future. This phenomenon is well illustrated by the following activities of Maryknoll missionaries: "On the north shore of Lake Titicaca in Peru, Brother Joseph Bruener **visits the elderly and infirm, leaving a few eggs with one and a pound of sugar with another.** In the steamy jungles of Irian Jaya, Father Vincent Cole proclaims **God's word** to Asmat villagers. On the eastern most tip of the South American continent, in a place called Jo◊o Pessoa, Brazil, Lay Missioner Kathleen Bond **defends the rights of landless farmers.** And not far from the Serengeti Plain in Musoma, Tanzania, Maryknoll Sister Rosalie Lacorte, among other things, **teaches young women gardening and dressmaking.**" This is a comprehensive picture of evangelization and

missionizing in the modern world - in **word** and **deed**. Most of the people who are in need fall into these and in many other categories. They are found everywhere - in the developed, developing, and underdeveloped world. The spiritually bankrupt atheist and the "fallen Christian," the sick and the elderly in the hospitals and old people's homes, the abandoned street kids in many major cities of the developed world, the "rejected" members of the modern society - the dangerous street gangsters, the homosexuals, the prostitutes, drug and alcohol addicts - are in terrible need of care by the Church through the missionaries. Indeed, as the "owner of the vineyard" said, "the work is great, but the laborers are few."

Africa and the rest of the Third World countries will continue to appreciate what the Western missionary can offer in the areas of education and development, and in the training of the young indigenous clergy. In return, Africa, Latin America and Asia may equally be in the position to reciprocate such gestures. While African priests and nuns minister to their needy populations, there is no doubt that their services are equally needed in some areas of Europe and the Americas that once served Africa. Are these young African missionaries welcome to Europe and America to reciprocate the gestures of the Western missionaries who helped Africa climb to lofty heights in mission and discipleship in the Church of Christ? How has the concept of "mission" and "missionary" changed in the last few decades? Could missionaries from Africa, Latin America, and Asia serve in the developed world? Are their services needed? Are there new problems non-European missionaries could face in their new mission lands that the old missionaries did not encounter as they went about "making disciples of all nations"? These are issues we have to examine further in this chapter of our work.

Missionary Enterprise in the Western Church

A serious and disturbing controversy has erupted in the Western Catholic Church over the nature of **mission** and identity of the **missionary** who is not a Westerner, and particularly one who comes from Africa, Asia, or Latin America. Since this discussion has far-reaching consequences for the future of the Christian Church and indeed, the third millennium Church, it is necessary to give it enough space and time in this work. We will examine the issue from the Catholic perspective. There is no doubt that our conclusions apply to the Protestant Churches in Europe, North America, Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

When the Western missionaries went to evangelize Africa little dust was raised about their presence among the people they came to serve. Cultural

differences were enormous. The most distressing was the language barrier - the main vehicle of communication and evangelization. Most of the missionaries had no interest in learning any of the African languages, which Europeans mistakenly refer to as "dialects." Today, it is presumed these same Europeans know the difference between a language and a dialect. Moreover, on the part of the missionaries - and most unfortunately, too, - the African languages were thought "barbaric" and therefore inappropriate for liturgical expression. Controversies over language and culture in Africa and other Third World countries were no different from those that erupted between the German missionaries and the Slavic tribes. The German clerics opposed Cyril and Methodius, who, as missionaries among the Slavic tribes, used the Slavic language in evangelization and the liturgy. According to these German clerics, the use of "barbaric" local languages should not be tolerated. They found support for their stand in the Scriptures. For them, it was inappropriate that masses should be celebrated in a barbaric language, while man with reference to the inscription on the cross could only do this in **Hebrew, Greek, or Latin.**^{cxlvii} The Second Vatican Council has contributed much to the survival of what remains of the Catholic Church in Africa today. The popes and the Second Vatican Council were emphatic in their support of *inculturation*, which includes the use of the local language in the liturgy. As early as 800 A.D. **Pope John VIII** had given directives on the question of using **local language** in the liturgy. He opposed the German clerics who thought that the local Slavic language was unsuitable for the liturgy: "He who created the languages created them all to His praise and the glory of His name."^{cxlviii}

In spite of clear instructions for missionaries ministering outside their own countries in the distant "mission lands," there was sufficient evidence that most of them paid little or no attention to the teaching authority of the Church that they were representing. As local interpreters were readily available not much effort was spent in learning the language of the people. Just as the missionaries remained ignorant of the language of the people they went to evangelize, they likewise knew little or nothing about the customs and traditions. This lack of knowledge of the language of the people, customs, and traditions indeed contributed much to the limited success in most places where the missionaries labored. Few converts were won. Very few young men and women cared to embrace the priesthood and the religious life. But in some areas where the missionaries registered successes - in some regions south of the Sahara where Muslims had not completely taken over - the African converts to Christianity did not worry about the missionaries' ignorance of their culture. In

the tradition of African friendship and hospitality these Africans welcomed the missionaries and worked together with them to consolidate the Christian faith.

Even though most of the missionaries followed the colonial trails while penetrating the African hinterland and could have been mistaken for the colonial conquerors, few incidents of persecution of the missionaries, outside of rejection by the Muslims within their own strongholds, were recorded. Rather there are records of happy memories of early missionaries' encounters with friendly African traditional rulers and chiefs who personally requested the missionaries to visit and settle among the African people who had embraced the Christian religion. Most of the African kings and traditional rulers who did not even convert to Christianity were happy to welcome the missionaries in their areas of influence, donated vast areas of land for their Churches and living quarters and at the same time offered them the required protection. Hospitality is a sacred reality in the African culture and the missionary - the accredited man of God - received it in abundance.

It would be a sad chapter in the history of the missionary enterprise, particularly in Africa, if European missionaries - retired or still in active service - would not testify to African friendship and hospitality. African youths who listened to their voices and call to join the priesthood and religious life bear testimony to the great work of the Spirit and the efforts of the early missionary enterprise in Africa. The missionaries saw the need for a native clergy who would continue the work after the missionaries had returned to their fatherlands. But for the African, all the missionaries who labored or are still laboring in Africa are all citizens of Africa. In fact most of them are buried in the African soil; indeed thus are among the numerous great African ancestors who must be revered for their heroic contributions to the development of Africa.

Africans pray that their children should never die before their parents. When the reverse happens, it is seen as a calamity. It is also the parents' wish that their children should excel their parents in wealth and honor. The children should acquire a higher economic, social, religious, and cultural status in life to be able to give their dead parents the most befitting burial. This is the greatest wish of the parents before they die and it is incumbent on the eldest son - the new father of the family - to see that all the burial ceremonies are carried out and that the extended family maintained its unity. It is also the revered duty of the children to take care of the aged parents until their death. They must live in their natural homes - never in a retirement community or old people's home - till they die and join their ancestors in the land of the dead. Tradition requires Africans to reciprocate good gestures not only to parents and closest relations, but also to

distant friends and benefactors who have helped them in life to achieve an enviable status. They believe that the benefactor must get a share of the fortune. In this case the motivating force is that of showing appreciation by repaying however possible what one has generously received from someone who has influenced his life in the most positive way.

If this African tradition makes any sense to any foreigner, it will be greatly appreciated in light of the present debate about the presence of **African missionaries** in Europe and America. There are confirmed reports that African missionaries are not welcomed in Europe and the United States. **They are needed, but not wanted.** The present debates are centered on some of the arguments presented by some members of the clergy, particularly in the United States, who do not favor what they describe as the *importation of foreign priests* as one of the measures being adopted by some bishops to resolve the problem of the shortage of priests in the United States. In an article in the **National Catholic Reporter**^{cxlix} of November 1997, one of the United States's leading liberal theologians, Father Richard McBrien, who teaches theology at Notre Dame University, initiated the debate on the nature of *mission* and the identity of the *missionary* at the threshold of the new millennium. His article, titled, "**Importing priests to U.S. a poor solution,**" has provoked a series of negative reactions from his countrymen and women, from Africans - clergy and laypersons - as well as from missionaries who served in Africa and other foreign nations and from many who are still in active service in the "missions."

According to this renowned liberal U.S. Catholic theologian, his reaction and opposition to recruiting foreign priests to serve in the United States was prompted by a story in the *New York Times*^{cl} regarding a plan by the Archbishop of Chicago, Francis George, to "borrow" priests and seminarians from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa over a period of 10 years, for five-year tours of duty. The *Times* had earlier reported that the plan had evoked a negative reaction within the archdiocese, especially from its pastors. The primary source of the Chicago priests' objection to the Archbishop's plans, according to reports, was based on the argument that they were not duly consulted by the Archbishop before the plans were published. Reports also indicated that the Archbishop of Chicago himself admitted that his plan to recruit foreign priests to serve in the Archdiocese of Chicago had "raised a lot of hackles," and he had subsequently withdrawn it.

While many concerned Catholics everywhere might feel sad about this controversy taking place, some might not be worried about the said lack of consultation between the archbishop and his clergy. What is disturbing to most

sympathetic observers is the motive behind the rejection of recruiting foreign missionaries to serve in the United States. McBrien's contention is clear:

- The "importation" of foreign priests to the United States is a false solution to the priest shortage in America.
- The shortage cannot be corrected until the Church's leadership makes the kind of institutional changes that have been recommended by pastoral experts and social scientists who have studied the problem most closely and by thousands of active parish priests as well.
- These changes would include, before all else, the elimination of lifelong celibacy as a condition of ordination to the diocesan priesthood. "No single factor," the eminent theologian insists, "is more responsible for the reduced number of vocations and for the thousands of priestly resignations over the past few decades than clerical celibacy."

McBrien advises the U. S. bishops to address the root causes of the decline in vocations rather than adopting stopgap solutions: recruiting priests from foreign countries, without apparent regard for those countries' own pastoral needs and for the readiness of the recruited priests to serve effectively in a culture that cherishes both the right to criticize those in authority and the principle of human equality of women and men alike.^{cli} Among other reasons McBrien offered for the rejection of the "imported priests" are those both *cultural* and *pastoral*. He does not think foreign priests particularly those from Africa, could understand or appreciate American culture sufficiently to perform effectively as priests or religious. Indeed, all foreign missionaries in the United States must study the implications of McBrien's arguments. His questions, assertions, and skepticisms have tremendous implications for any foreign priest who has any intention of ministering to the flock of Christ in this part of the world. The Notre Dame theologian asks: "Will they understand the changing roles of women and of lay people in the Church? How will they relate to American youth?" These questions arose because, according to McBrien, "many priests, religious and laity in the Archdiocese of Chicago have been asking how priests from other cultures will be able to serve the pastoral needs of American Catholics."

Secondly he does not think that "any good could come out of Nazareth." How could these priests from poor areas of the world come to minister in the United States? But he forgets that "God chooses the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chooses the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chooses the lowly and the despised of the world, those who count for nothing, so that no human being might boast before God." [I Cor. 27-30] For

McBrien, apart from heavily Catholic countries such as Poland and Ireland, the countries that U.S. dioceses, including Chicago, are drawing from are in far greater need of priests than the Americans. Perhaps McBrien is not aware that Ireland can no longer be described as a "heavily Catholic country." Indeed, Ireland's big seminaries that once produced the Holy Ghost and St Patrick's missionaries as well as other houses of religious formation that produced priests and nuns who ministered in various parts of the world closed down many years ago. The percentage of Sunday worshippers in Ireland may be as high as that in the United States and elsewhere in Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, when Poland was "liberated" from the communist yolk and full freedom of religious worship was restored, Poland can no longer be described as a "heavily Catholic country."

But the third and most important factor that disturbed McBrien and reinforced his opposition to the "importation of foreign priest into the United States" is the "motivation" of the "imported priests." He wrote: "Another question, raised only privately within clerical circles, concerns the motivation of some of the imported priests. A free ticket to the United States, guaranteed room and board and an income and standard of living that far exceed those of their own countries constitute a temptation difficult for many to resist." This shameful and wicked innuendo presumes that the foreign missionary in the United States is there for the pleasures of life and cash and not for any spiritual work - the winning of souls for Christ.

"Export" and "Import" of Missionaries

Becoming a monk is a possible route to education in Europe or the USA...They are exporting nuns to Europe, for heaven's sake! Some orders send members to Europe to work in hospitals or monasteries for a few years and some hard cash... Of course, the poor economy of Africa is a big reason why novitiates are full. Affluence and materialism are a deadly atmosphere for monasticism anywhere...(Terrence Kardong, Assumption Abbey Newsletter)

The above statement from an American religious priest and some others from the pastor-theologian, McBrien should worry African bishops, religious superiors, priests, and nuns. These statements should be brought to the attention of Vatican authorities particularly the Prefect for the Evangelization of Peoples. There is little doubt that such statements are distressing and will strain the relationship between the Western Church and the Church in the developing world. The phenomenon of "Search for Greener Pastures" has never been part of the religious experience of African priests and religious. It is an outrageous statement that a monk and in fact, any European and American - ordained minister, or a lay person - could say that "*Becoming a monk is a possible route to education in Europe or the USA.*" It is even a worse shameful notion that Africans *export* ministers of religion to Europe and America for the purpose of cash. The usual motivating force for most African youths who yearn to visit Europe and America has been for the purpose of studies. Indeed, one does not need to embrace any religious vocation in order to qualify for a visit to a developed country. In any case where a priest or a religious must have to study outside the home country, usually the decision lies with the bishops or the religious superiors.

Richard McBrien is not the first U.S. cleric to introduce the international language of commerce into the universal Church's mission's vocabulary. Father Terrence Kardong, a U.S. monk of the Assumption Abbey in Richardson, South Dakota has expressed similar bizarre views that the concept of mission and the missionary must change with the Africans, and perhaps, too, with other non-European clerics. After few weeks' visit to the six Nigerian monasteries, Father Kardong was impressed by the progress of the Church in that African country. He observed that most houses of formation, including the monasteries in

Nigeria, were full of young people who want to embrace the priesthood and religious life. But he did not trust the motives of the monks, nuns, and their superiors. Hence these conclusions, which naturally have embarrassed his hosts in Nigeria, as well as the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy who read his articles. Father Kardong writes:

This is a relatively poor country, though nobody is starving. Becoming a monk is a possible route to education in Europe or the USA.^{clii} ... "The workshop completed, I began my round of visits to the Nigerian monasteries. There are six of them, all around Enugu. That's because the Ibos live here and they are the big Catholic tribe. So this is where people join monasteries. In fact, this is one of the most fertile Catholic areas in the world. They are exporting nuns to Europe, for heaven's sake! Some orders send members to Europe to work in hospitals or monasteries for a few years, and some hard cash. Nigeria is rich in people, but poor in money.^{cliii}

Outside the first and the last statements, namely - "This is a relatively poor country, though nobody is starving...Nigeria is rich in people, but poor in money." - the rest are wicked and unfortunate. Indeed they can only come from a pagan heart. Indeed Nigerians prefer human beings to wealth. The Igbo people of Nigeria say that, "Onye ji mmadu ka onye ji ego." (One, who is blessed with brothers and sisters, friends and relations, and large extended families, is greater than the wealthiest person on earth.) Again, the same Igbo people name their kids "Nwa-ka-ego" (A child is greater than money or wealth.) But the Igbo and Nigerians in general, who are "poor in money" no matter their financial situation, will not exchange their children for money. They will not hand over their children even for adoption.

If some foreign priests are being attracted to Europe and the United States on account of Western comforts and lifestyles, Nigerian priests, nuns, and missionaries ministering in various areas of the Apostolate are the exception. Hundreds of Nigerian nuns working in various parts of Europe and United States come to work outside their fatherland at the invitation of the Church authorities who are in need of their services. The same can be said about Nigerian missionaries who have been sent by their superiors to minister in the areas where their services are needed. Nigerian priests studying for higher degrees in various Church or non-Church related disciplines are in Europe and United States for the same purpose as their counterparts are in the developed or underdeveloped world. Even when they acquire American citizenship, it is

obvious to them and their hosts that the Nigerian missionaries outside their country are simply Nigerian citizens. At death, for example, no Igbo of Nigeria can be buried outside his home community in Africa. There are no exceptions. Igbo priests who incardinate into foreign dioceses, like all Igbos living and working outside their fatherland, know that their sojourn overseas is not for life. They are missionaries in foreign lands.

Fathers McBrien, Kardong, and similarly prejudiced clerics who often do not check the consequences of their theological, journalistic, and sensational essays before running to the press, have indeed bitten off more than they can chew. Unable to bear the heat generated by his article "**The Red Dust of Africa**,"^{cliv} the author had no other choice than to throw in the towel. Replying to an aggrieved Nigerian priest^{clv} who challenged his distorted and prejudiced views on Nigeria and the African Church, Kardong struggled to end the debate by confessing his "sins." He wrote: "I have decided not to publish your critique in our newsletter. I will, however, inform our readers that you have serious criticisms of my article, and that they can obtain them directly from you. As a last attempt for communication, I would like to think that you and I at least agree on the following propositions:

- That Nigerians are a great people. That was obvious to me all through my visit.
- Much of their current socio-economic trouble is a result of western colonialism and the shenanigans of current western capitalism. But not all.
- The Nigerian Church is thriving and full of faith. Most likely it will have to reconvert Europe and U.S.A. someday.
- The United States has a serious problem with secularism and materialism. These are harming the Church in this country and all over the west.
- Nigerian monks and nuns are fully equal in their observances to religious life anywhere. In fact, they are the cutting edge of world monasticism.
- I can see that I failed to convey these ideas in my travelogue. That's too bad, since I did come away from Nigeria impressed.

Africa is not evil. Even in face of deteriorating political, social, and economic situation; there are no signs that her citizens are committing mass suicide. The African renaissance is not a myth. Since his own publication appeared in the *National Catholic Reporter* of Nov. 14, 1997, McBrien has not been able to sustain the flood of attack from many embarrassed American clerics and lay persons - black and white - including retired missionaries who served Christ's

faithful in distant lands. McBrien's reply to his critics did not appear to show any remorse. He defended himself:

The November column elicited a vigorous reaction from some readers, including a few foreign priests. Some of the criticisms, however, seemed to go a bit far. The column was portrayed as having an "anti-immigrant" bias, evidently by those that had not read any of my previous columns critical of the recent wave of anti-immigrant politics in the United States. (On a personal note, three of my grandparents were immigrants. And because I had pointed out that many recruited priests come from Africa, the specter of racism was even evoked^{clvi}

Even though he denied it, there is little doubt that the decision of the Syracuse bishop to drop McBrien's column from the diocesan paper cannot be dissociated from the controversy generated by his article on foreign priests. But no concerned Catholic could be pacified by McBrien's self-defense. The first question the aggrieved Catholics are asking McBrien and those who harbor such racist and anti-immigrant feelings is whether the so-called foreign missionary is a **"missionary" or "imported goods?"** Does the renowned theologian think *nothing good can come out of Nazareth?* Why is he worried about what he calls **"guaranteed room and board and an income and standard of living that far exceed those of their own countries?"** Is a laborer not worthy of his pay any more? What was the motivation of the missionaries who went to Africa, for example? **Cash or souls?** Why should cash feature prominently in the modern missionary Apostolate and not souls? There are too many bullets for McBrien and he must be very sore. Answering his critics with "rejoinders" and "explanations" cannot repair the damage done. It is indeed a shameful situation and many Catholics are not amused, not least African missionaries.

A "Missionary" or "Imported Goods?"

Father Cosmas Nwosu, a Nigerian and a priest of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, was among those who expressed dismay at the provocative rattling of McBrien and the expressions the American theologian used to describe his fellow priests laboring in the Lord's vineyard. For Father Cosmas, McBrien's objection "is a thinly-disguised form of xenophobia. Only that can explain the blanket contention that priests from different cultures will be unable to function in American culture."^{clvii} Father Nwosu did not deny that Americans are rich and their priests, too. But he finds it ridiculous that McBrien and the apprehensive priests of Chicago would insinuate that material gain is the motivational factor

for missionary enterprise in the United States. It is simply intellectual dishonesty to assert that priests are drawn to the United States by money, not by the call to serve where they are needed in the Lord's vineyard. What is happening to the foreign missionaries in the United States or in Europe is not new. That some misinterpret or refuse to acknowledge their motives is nothing new for Father Nwosu either. The list of missionaries - past and most recent - whose motivation for mission has been misconstrued by their tormentors are many:

From the martyred Edmund Campion and his Jesuit confreres in Elizabethan England...to the six Jesuits murdered recently in El Salvador, the motivations of these and innumerable unsung missionary priests, religious, lay men and women have been impugned and misconstrued. Their inquisitors saw them as papist anarchists, ultramontane traitors, Vatican spies, CIA agents, capitalist ideologues, Marxist foot soldiers, nihilists, etc. Each, in his or her own time and place, futilely tried to make the persecutors understand that they were responding to what they perceived as a divine call.^{clviii}

The motive behind the "rejection" of the "imported priests" is not far-fetched. It has deep roots in **racism** and **anti-immigration policies** of Western governments. There are thousands of empty parishes all over the United States and other countries of Europe. The Church authorities are ready to close more parishes or assign the existing "priestless" parishes to married deacons and secularized nuns who now burgeon as parish administrators. It is not an unusual scene in the United States to see a "tolerated foreign priest" functioning as a deacon's or a nun's pastor associate or curate. Instead of sending for missionaries from India and Africa, Church leaders like Francis George of Chicago would be ready to cancel their plans to seek for help outside their dioceses on account of opposition from their priests. Many other bishops are ready to affirm without fear of contradiction that their dioceses are not in need of priests (at least those from Africa) when, in fact, most of their parishioners bemoan the misfortune of "priestless Sundays."

Frustrated parishioners in the German parish of St Verena in Volkerhausen, a small town in southwest Germany that wanted what every Catholic parish wants - a Sunday eucharistic celebration - went on to seek *married priests* to celebrate Sunday mass for them. They were desperately seeking a solution to the "priestless Sunday" syndrome in German parishes. Because the only functioning pastor around was overburdened, the people feared that they might see the day

when the Eucharist would become unavailable. They were looking for a solution to the problem of priest shortage when they stumbled across a text in the Canon law in the 1983 revised Code, which states that the censure against a suspended priest is lifted "whenever it is necessary to take care of the faithful who are in danger of death" or "whenever a member of the faithful requests a sacrament - for any just cause whatsoever." Whatever was the outcome of that bizarre and makeshift solution to a serious Church problem, one could think of another easier solution to the problem of *"priestless Sunday."* Why not recruit priests from other parts of the world who could at least celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday for Christ's faithful in search of Catholic priests who could satisfy their spiritual needs?

Chicago Catholic, Tim Unsworth, in an open letter to Archbishop George just after the Archbishop's appointment to replace Cardinal Bernardine, did not fail to point out a few of the problems the new Archbishop, now Cardinal George, was to face in Chicago. In the letter titled *"Dear Archbishop George: Sit where the people sit and let God happen,"* Tim wrote among other things: "You will have painful problems of race relations and cultural divisions before you. Let those take precedence over Catholic conformity. . . A close observer of the Chicago Church told me that if you spoke out strongly against poverty and racism, your priests would go to the wall for you."

Father Nwosu, did not fail to uncover McBrien's motives on objecting to foreign priests coming to minister in the United States. He had no doubt that the concept of mission and missionary has changed because the unwanted people have appeared on the scene:

The objection is not really to the idea of 'imported priests,' but to the *kind* of priest - likely a person of color from a Third World culture - being imported...The bottom line to all the questions and hackles being raised in Chicago is: 'Can the poor of the Third World preach to us?' It is a question that echoes another that was asked some two thousand years ago: From Nazareth? Can anything good come out of that place?" Missionaries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the United States? Come on! You've got to be kidding me!^{clix}

There is no indication that the majority of Western Catholics - Europeans and Americans alike - would not want Africans or non-Europeans to minister to them. Perhaps a few racists. From both the clergy and lay Catholics the reactions against McBrien's article indicate bitterness and disappointment. For some it is still part of the tragedy which Christ's Church has continued to

witness in its 2000 years of history. From Ames, Iowa Jacek Soroka wrote the following:

- The humble but firm words of Fr. Cosmas K. Okechukwu Nwosu ("Is he a missionary or 'imported goods'?") expressed also my latest disappointment toward Richard McBrien and his article. There is nothing else to add to the truthful opinion of Fr. Cosmas except two things from my own experience. The title of "imports" that Fr. McBrien applies to priests from Africa, Asia or Latin America also applies to all American missionaries working worldwide and often finding themselves in a more complicated cultural environment. The second is that judging something or someone (in this case the Archbishop of Chicago) by denigrating missionaries from the countries mentioned above is not our Christian way of doing things! Thank you, Fr. Cosmas. I am glad you are a missionary in the United States!^{clx}

The second letter came from Father John M. Raab, from Los Angeles

- I am writing in response to Richard McBrien's March 20th column headlined "*U.S. Church needs reform, not recruits.*" The increasing role of the laity in ministry and Church is one of the benefits of the shortage of priests in Europe and North America. Another benefit is the growing number of strangers in our midst in the form of foreign priests and religious working in our American parishes and institutions, and the subtle way they are helping us become much more Catholic. Their presence goads our consciences in several directions. First, they visibly represent the fact that the gospel of Christ is no longer a European-North American monopoly. Second, they remind us of the fact we are part of a body that reaches beyond our cultural boundaries. We cannot define "priest" solely in terms of the parish priest who can speak our English and easily understand our kids. After all the West has given the foreign missions, it is fitting that Africa, Asia and Latin America should share their own blessings with us in the form of missionary priests and religious who they can send out with some pride now that they are mature enough to do so. For us to say no thank you would be very rude. If there is any fear that foreign missionaries might not make the grade, look again at what the Josephites have been able to do with young Nigerian priests in the cities of the South. Or the Los Angeles Archdiocese with the qualified foreign-born candidates already ordained or still being recruited for seminary.^{clxi}

Should foreign priests serving Christ's faithful in the United States be dismayed, pack their belongings, and go home? Should they think that all American clerics and lay people are against their presence in the Lord's vineyard? It would be very dangerous to generalize. The truth is that there are many American priests and lay people who appreciate the presence of foreign priests and nuns - black and white - in their parishes, hospitals, rehabilitation homes, penitentiaries, and many institutions of learning. Another letter from a fellow priest - A Dominican priest from Chicago Rev. Robert Goedert - demonstrates solidarity with brother missionaries from Africa and other Third World countries.

- Thanks for your great article in *NCR* 16th January 1998. It was brilliant and devastating to the argument of McBrien and others. Particularly, it exposed the hypocrisy and dishonesty of their position that the Church should be more concerned about celibacy etc than the Eucharist. I still have not seen an American Catholic who is being deprived of the Eucharist because of the "shortage of priests." I'm amazed that *NCR* had the journalistic integrity to print your article. Since we now have many Nigerian Dominicans, I feel especially close to you and to all the "missionary" priests who have come to the U.S. to help us. I made a copy of your article to give to my brothers to pass onto Cardinal Francis George. I think he will appreciate your thoughts

"**A deserved beating**" was the title of another reaction to the Father Nwosu's rejoinder to McBrien's article on "imported priests". It came from Father Ray Ryland San Diego:

- Father Richard McBrien's column about imported priests (*NCR*, Nov. 14, 1997) deserves the beating it received in Father Okechukwu' Nwosuh's charitable response (*NCR*, Jan 9). It has been my privilege to become acquainted with a dozen or so African priests serving temporarily in this country while doing graduate study at various universities. If they are at all typical of the missionaries Archbishop Francis George is inviting, I can readily understand why Fr. McBrien finds them distasteful. The reason is that all the priests I have known were loyal, enthusiastic, faithful Catholics. They neither have nor want any part in McBrien's shrinking world of dissent. The "culture" Fr. McBrien alleges they can't understand is his culture of cafeteria Catholicism. God forbid that they should ever "understand" it in terms of sharing.^{"clxii}

I am sure that clerics like McBrien and Terrence Kardong would like to re-write their articles and tender unreserved apologies to the Church of Christ they have injured through their unbridled xenophobia. Whether they do or not, it is obvious that most others who think like them will be slow now in making their feelings public, at least in writing. I am sure that old prejudices against blacks - their institutions, race, and personnel - extended to the Church in modern times will have grave consequences for the Church in the first, second, or third world nations. The situation will deteriorate if the competent authorities withhold their reactions to insinuations that African priests and nuns cannot minister to their brothers and sisters with whom they share the same Catholic and Apostolic faith in the developed world. The ridiculous impression that missionaries from other parts of the Christian world, outside Europe and America, are out for cash and western material comfort and not for souls, must be condemned in unequivocal terms. If certain Africans and others from the so-called Third World countries are in Europe and America in search of greener pastures, definitely **African clerics and religious, including monks and nuns** from other parts of the world, are overseas in **search of souls**. Most of them have been *invited* to carry on the work of God. "For no one takes this honor upon himself..." In fact there are many lost souls, unbaptized persons, pagans, and abandoned persons looking for Good Samaritans in developed and underdeveloped worlds.

There was no insinuation that **Ireland**, which produced most of the missionaries in the old Catholic world, was the richest nation in Europe. The opposite is true. There was no gossip that the Irish young men and women who became Catholic priests and nuns and missionized in various parts of the world were attracted to the priesthood or religious life on account of the poor Irish economy and *potato famine* that ravaged Ireland and forced the people to immigrate to America and other parts of the world in search of greener pastures. What has put strange ideas into the minds of some mischievous people even "within clerical circles" in the United States to cast aspersions on the praiseworthy results of God's work in the poorer nations of the Christian world is no doubt born out of a morbid aversion for anything that is not of their own kind. This mentality must be a source of concern to all well-meaning Christians. But the outcome of the present *debates* will no doubt affect the future of missionary enterprise in the modern times, as the Church of Christ prepares to celebrate the 2000 years of Christian history.

Africa and the Future of the Catholic Church

Most well informed African bishops, priests, and nuns are often flabbergasted when they hear statements even from high Church circles in Europe and America insinuating that the future of the Church lies in Africa. Africans know that most Westerners who sing African praises do not in the least mean what they are saying. The truth is that the Western Church and its leaders ridicule any suggestion that the leadership of the Church - particularly the Catholic Church - can shift from anywhere in Europe and America to Africa. It is a mad dream. At least in the Catholic Church Africans know that they are relegated to the status of second-class citizenship. Peter Seewald is aware of this reality when in the interview with the Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith - Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger- he questioned the Vatican Prelate closely on the position of Africa in the Catholic Church. Seewald introduced the topic this way: "*Africa. Black Catholics still feel that Rome treats them in a step-motherly fashion and struggle for recognition...*" Does the Cardinal's response to the journalist's question pacify Africans?

After the African synod and also after the numerous meetings we have had with African bishops, I don't have the sense that Africa feels badly treated by Rome. As a matter of fact, all the Africans are proud to belong to something so grand as the Catholic Church. They are also proud of the fact that they belong to her on an equal footing, that an African bishop and cardinal is the same as an Italian, or Spanish, or American one.^{clxiii}

Africans themselves are not deceived nor are they consoled. If by any stroke of "fortune" the center of Christianity shifts to Africa, no one - Africans and their European praise-singers - will be left in the illusion that it is the Catholic Church that captures the heart of the Africans. Indeed, it is the Pentecostal Churches, that stand to gain and not any other Church. Even where there are chances that African clerics could rise to any position of prominence in the Catholic hierarchy they must be ready to cross insurmountable hurdles. African prelates who entertain any ambition to greatness in the Catholic Church will be disappointed. Whatever their human and spiritual virtues, theological, intellectual, and bureaucratic excellence, they may not forget that their skin color and their race will exclude them from any high office in which voting and not appointment is the sole criterion for selection. One example, which reinforces the dilemma of the black leadership and the black missionary enterprise in the Western Church, may bring the present lesson home to the Africans.

The theological and pastoral contributions of African bishops are not given much consideration in Rome. But the African traditional respect for authority as well as obedience to law wins much adulation from Rome. That is where the African self-esteem in the Roman Church ends. As long as Africans are poor and much dependent on foreign aid from Rome and other donor countries like Germany, their leaders are no threat to the authority of the Roman Church. The well-informed cardinal points out where African bishops and their Church win the admiration of Rome:

Among many (African bishops) there is also fidelity to Rome that really comes from the heart, a love for papacy and a joy in being Catholic. When we discuss questions or theological controversies, the Africans always tell us that when someone really goes too far, then it's European, not the African theologian...One cannot say that an anti-Roman mood dominates African theology.^{clxiv}

African bishops are known to be very submissive to Roman authority. Here they are ridiculed by their Western counterparts and are thought to be too conservative. They are known to be more *Roman than the Pope*, and locally, too, they are known as "the sympathizer at the funeral who cries more than the bereaved." Their submission to Rome makes them deny that some current theological, moral, and disciplinary issues that are widely discussed all over the Catholic and non-Catholic world - clerical celibacy, ordination of women, ecumenical dialog, and the papal primacy - are relevant in the African Church. Because Africa does not count as an important member of the Roman Church her prelates are not usually consulted when important decisions concerning the faith of millions of African Catholics and their Church are taken. Western bishops ridicule their African counterparts who defend vigorously most of the controversial Church laws and regulations, which the makers have never observed even an iota! It is therefore a paradox that Africans - non full-members of the Catholic Church, should constitute themselves the defenders of a dwindling faith - indeed a crumbling Church.

A Black Pope - an Anti Christ!

As we have pointed out above Africans should not be deceived into believing that they have any honorable place in the Catholic hierarchy. The handwriting is on the wall. The speculation that "the next Pope" will be an African has been in the air since 1978 after the death of Pope John Paul I. Why an African Pope and not the usual Italian Popes or another European? Why not an American Pope?

Europeans are saying that the future of the Catholic Church is in Africa. Vocations to the priesthood and religious life are booming. The Churches in Africa are full while in the West the Churches are empty. There are many other frivolous reasons given by the African praise-singers why the "next Pope" should be a black, an African, or at least someone from one of the Third World countries.

Asia did not qualify on account of the continent's low number of Catholics. **Latin America** stands a good chance. At the 1978 Conclave that elected Albino Luciani the 262nd Pope of the Catholic Church, the nearest Third World cardinal who attracted the votes of the Western princes of the Catholic Church was the Brazilian Archbishop of Fortaleza, **Aloisio Lorscheider**, described as a man with glittering intellectual gifts who also knew much about the problems of the poor.^{clxv} Even though that name sounded more German than Hispanic, Lorscheider was not elected pope. Perhaps the third world should still wait for another turn, with or without the aid of the Holy Spirit. The next Third World candidate who stood some chance of becoming the first black pope in history was **Cardinal Bernadine Gantini**, the African cardinal from Benin, a poor west African country sharing a border with Nigeria. Gantini was then fifty-six years old. In view of his relative youth, it was said that there was very little chance of his election. The ideal age was felt to be somewhere in the late sixties. But there was one other and most important factor that nullified Gantini's "papability." David Yallop did not fail to point it out in his book *In God's Name*: He told the world why Cardinal Gantini could not be elected Pope of the Catholic Church: "Gantini was black. Racism is not confined to one side of the Tiber."^{clxvi} African prelates who believe that they belong to the Roman Church "on equal footing" with their Western counterparts should think twice, as the African aphorism puts it: "let them use their tongue to count their teeth." A Vatican spokesman confirms Yallop's apprehensions. The idea that a cardinal from Africa might one day take his place on the papal throne is inconceivable. Surely, everyone, at least in the college of cardinals could imagine the Roman prelates electing an African or some one from a non-European country. But comes the stumbling block, as Cardinal Ratzinger tells all African praise-singers:

To what extent European Christians would swallow that is another question. For despite all the declarations of racial equality and all the condemnations against racial discrimination, there is still a certain European self-consciousness that comes to the surface at critical moments.^{clxvii}

Perhaps an African might get a chance of becoming a Pope, as the Cardinal seems to imply: "But the cardinals, I think, will simply ask 'who is the most suited,' and the question of his skin color and his origin will not play any role."^{clxviii} "Who is most suited?" No one should be deceived by such rhetoric. It is not the ordinary European Catholics who will be first to scoff at the idea of an African Pope. The Roman prelates will be first to discredit an African; for the Scriptures confirm it: "One's real enemies are those of his household." (Matthew 10:36)

The next chance that Africans had to ascend the papacy was at the Conclave that elected the Polish Pope, John Paul II. This time the drama took on another shape. In 1978 the great crowd of Catholics and other pilgrims had gathered at Saint Peter's Square for the final results of the *Conclave*, the election of a new pope. Two sessions of the *Conclave* had failed to elect a new pope. The *black smoke*, which emitted from the Vatican chimney, indicated lack of success in the election. Perhaps a new pope would emerge from St Peter's balcony at the end of the next session. And there the sign appeared - a thick *white smoke*. There was rejoicing and people were surging toward the main entrance of the huge Church as if the new pope would emerge from there.

Then came the announcement from the papal attendant: "*Habemus Papam!* (We have a Pope). He is **Cardinal Karolus Wojtyla.**" There was an anxious moment as people guessed at the *nationality* of the new pope. At one corner among a group, I stood by and could hear the argument: "Who is this Wojtyla? It is a strange name. He cannot be an Italian. Not a Latino. He must be an African. An African Pope? Impossible! But that name is strange. Yes, and unfamiliar! The new Pope must be African!" The debate about the identity of the new Pope continued for sometime in the crowd. For better or for worse the worries of those who thought the new pope was an African (at least from the strangeness of the name) disappeared when the profile of the new pope from Poland was read out by the papal chamberlain and a few minutes later, Cardinal Wojtyla who took the name Pope John Paul II, appeared on the balcony and addressed the people.^{clxix} An African Pope? Not yet! Africa must exercise patience. They may have their turn, sometime in a remote future!

Speculation about the identity of the next pope as the health of Pope John Paul II deteriorates has again continued. *United States news and World Report* is among the numerous news agencies covering the papal succession rumors. Rather than examining potential contenders for the papal throne, which Vatican watchers say is a useless enterprise, *US News* instead examined the probable profile of the next pope: **multilingual, non-European, in his mid-60s, and**

with curial experience. One *US News* article which delved into the rumors surrounding the Holy Father's health including hints of Parkinson's disease, also speculated on the possibility of the next pope coming from the Third World - Africa or Latin America. It would seem that the Third World candidacy is a possibility as according to the profile of the next pope Europeans have been excluded. Who can read the mind of the Holy Spirit? But no one should be deceived by the wishful thinking of the Western press. David Yallop's observations providing insight into what usually goes on behind the scenes of the conclaves as the Princes of the Catholic Church assemble to elect a new pope may not easily be dismissed as mere rhetoric. He was writing about the August 1978 Conclave that elected Albino Luciani, Pope John Paul I, who succeeded Pope Paul VI.

In theory there are no canvassing, lobbying, or pressure groups. In practice there is all of this and much more. In theory the cardinals gather in secret conclave and wait for the Holy Spirit to inspire them. As the hot August days went by, phone calls, secret meetings, and pre-election promises ensured that the Holy Spirit was being given considerable worldly assistance.^{clxx}

Whatever the case may be, the Third World has not been ruled out as the possible producer of the next pope at the next conclave. Does Africa stand a chance? No! It is a dream. A well-known United States Catholic prelate who was recently interviewed by journalists about the identity and nationality of the next pope dashed the hopes of Africans and their praise-singers to the rocks. Not only did the prelate refuse to address the repeated suggestions from the journalists that Africa should be offered the chance to produce the next pope, his conclusion was that Africa was out of the question. Perhaps he was afraid of the reaction of Africans in the crowd if he categorically ruled Africa out. Surely he should have given his reasons. To the shock of most of the journalists, after ignoring Africa, he named the Italian cardinal whom he said was the best candidate for the 21st century Roman Church. His reasons for choosing the named Italian were both ridiculous and hypocritical. Those who analyzed the reasons for his choice were sad and disappointed. But for Africa it is another hard lesson. Nothing good can come out of Nazareth. Africa, the poor and forgotten continent riddled with political and economic problems, should not dream of coming to the top to rule the world's most sophisticated and contentious bureaucracy. Africa should be seen and not heard.

Rhetoric and controversies aside, it is not possible that an African should govern an institution that does not acknowledge black people as full members of the Catholic Church. How long will African Catholics remain strangers in the Church in which they thought they had equal standing with their counterparts in the Catholic world? What does an African find attractive in the Catholic Church that an "Independent African Church" cannot offer? While adaptation or inculturation has become an accepted fact in Post-Vatican II liturgical reforms, the "African expression of Christianity" in the Catholic worship is still not appreciated by the Roman authorities. Like a fetish object, most Westerners think that Africans are corrupting Catholic worship by their method of inculturation. Peter Seewalds points to what most Westerners think are non-European elements in African worship. The conclusion is that as long as Africans do not look and act like Europeans, they cannot claim full membership:

On the continent itself, the Church has problems with the incorporation of African rites and cultural characteristics. Should the playing of drums or dancing, for example, be allowed at Mass? Or how should bigamy be dealt with? Some confess: "I am a good Catholic, and my three wives are well." At the same time, a competition has obviously begun with Islam, which is becoming attractive for Africans because they believe it offers a better chance for integrating their traditions.^{clxxi}

For an average European Christian all African men are polygamists and the marital status is the yardstick for measuring true Catholics and all who would attain salvation at the last judgment. The poor knowledge of African cultural values and the inability of the Western world to appreciate them do not augur well with the Catholic Church in Africa. There is no doubt that the mass exodus of African Catholics from the Catholic Church as well as the proliferation of the evangelist Churches is a result of the cold Western perception of the African expression of Christianity. The trend is unlikely to change in the future.

Even if the governance of the Roman Catholic Church is imposed by the Holy Spirit, the African prelate would be unwise to accept the office of the Supreme Pontiff, the Bishop of Rome, and the successor of Peter. Even the most hardworking, saintly, intelligent of all popes has received the bitterest criticisms and attacks from the members of the flocks for whom they had labored. The African is most unsuitable for this "great office" of the Supreme Pontiff of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Worse still, the Western Church leaders and their followers will not accept a **black pope**. Many will desert the Catholic

Church. Many visionaries and conservative Catholics in Europe and America already see a black pope as the predicted **anti-Christ** - one of the signs of the final disintegration and end of the Church! As an African proverb puts it: "It is only the unwise who sees blindness hovering around and grabs it." In other words, it is a foolish man who sees danger approaching and fails to run away. Again, "Ukpala okpoko buru, nti chiri ya," which simply means, "A word is enough for the wise."

Role of the African Church in the Universal Church

As far as Catholicism is concerned, Africans know that they have no status to compete with Westerners who own the Church. Africans know that they are lagging behind in development and leadership. They know, too, that they are latecomers to Catholic Christianity. Outside the ancient North African Church of St Augustine and the North African desert monks, modern Africa occupies second-class status in the modern Roman Church. The Westerners who suggest that the future of the (Catholic) Church lies in Africa are always quick to contradict themselves and point out the absurdity of their wishful thinking. "**Africa The Future of the Church?**" was the cover page title of the Vatican Church magazine - *Inside The Vatican*.^{clxxii} Cindy Wooden, CNS, was reporting Pope John Paul II's March 21 - 23 1998 visit to Nigeria to beatify the Nigerian monk, Father Michael Cyprian Iwene Tansi. Cindy Wooden reviewed some of the progress the Nigerian Church has experienced over the past 100 years. The cover pictures of the magazine, showing beautiful faces of hundreds of young men in their immaculate cassocks and center page pictures showing the faces of happy well fed Nigerian nuns in the variegated colors and styles of their different religious habits, are enough evidence that Nigeria ranks first in the number of young men and women aspiring to the priesthood and religious life. The major and minor seminaries as well as the convents and monasteries are full of young people eager to embrace religious vocation. The bishops of Nigeria are also doing their best to see that the best candidates are selected. After their ordination and profession the Nigerian bishops and religious superiors are ready to leave these young priests and nuns at the disposal of the universal Church. Does such good news of a boom in priestly and religious vocations in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, place Africa in an enviable position of leadership in the Church of the future?

Not in the least! African observers - Western Church leaders, clerics, and lay persons, including journalists - are quick to dismiss any hopes that salvation could come from Africa, that "any good could come from Nazareth." Cindy Wooden introduces the readers of *Inside the Vatican* magazine to her report on

the papal visit to Nigeria: "Our cover this month shows a group of solemn, handsome African priests. It was taken during the Pope's March 21-23 trip to Nigeria. And the question we pose on the cover is a serious one: Is Africa the future of the Church?" No reader would guess the answer wrongly. The answer is summed up in the reaction of those in Rome as Cindy informs her readers:

In Rome there are some who say that the future of the Church in the "consumerized" West is bleak and that John Paul has visited Africa so often (13 times) because he wants to strengthen a young and growing Church where vocations are plentiful and the faith is sincere and profound. But there are also some who warn that this "continent of hope" faces so many problems, threats and temptations that Church in Africa in coming decades may face martyrdom, not triumph.^{clxxiii}

"The future of the Catholic Church is not Africa." The Catholic hierarchy and the king-makers do not think so. Africans themselves have no reason to hope that they would be made kings. At least most of those who make the policies are well informed. Journalists, for their part, do not fail to offer the reasons everybody is ready to accept. Cindy Wooden^{clxxiv} summarizes:

- Traditional Africa is being rapidly urbanized, integrated into the global political and financial system, and "secularized" (increasingly under American rather than French influence, it appears). To what extent can the Church in Africa continue to grow and prosper?
- Militant Islam is pressing southward into black Africa from the Sahara. Does the entire continent risk becoming Muslim?
- Political instability and ethnic tensions are contributing to civil strife, even genocide. In such chaos, can the Church thrive?

These are serious issues - and there are many more, that the Catholic Church leadership in Africa and in Rome must examine at the threshold of the third millennium. But one thing is clear. It is unlikely that the hope of the Church lies in Africa. The reasons are clear - "Rich Africa, poor Africa - rich in human vitality and natural resources, poor in money and technological infrastructure. From this continent of contradictions, of great joy and great suffering."^{clxxv}

Indeed evil and good don't dwell together. But for the future of the Church in Africa, the West has a great share. The West can contribute to the survival of the Christian faith in Africa. The West, too, can hasten its demise.

Militant Islam is part of the political instability in Africa. If the West remains aloof to the ravages of Islam on the Church of Christ in Africa, it may not be long before the entire continent of Africa is taken over by the religion founded by the Prophet Muhammad. African Christians have fought for decades against the overwhelming force of militant Islam, but without much success. What happened to the flourishing Roman Church of St. Augustine may also contribute to the demise of Christianity in modern Africa.

Secondly, African Christians - both leaders and followers - in order to fight and defend their Church on the face of aggression from other quarters must be convinced that they are fighting for a useful cause. If the West gives African Christians the impression that Christianity is nothing but a secularized institution being served by secularized Western clerics, then Africans may not hesitate to abandon the faith. If the makers of Church laws are the gross breakers of the laws, what can Africans do to restore sanity? Africans have neither the resources nor any leadership status to confront the Western leaders of Christ's Church. Africans have little to emulate from Western Christians and their leaders. Hundreds of years of divisions, controversies, and rancor do not present the Christian Church to Africans as an institution for which they could shed blood to save it from total collapse. Challenges against constituted authority, lack of discipline among Western clergy - including various types of scandals in high Church places - contradict most of the principles on which the Christian faith rests. The Western Church has never been a role model for the African Church. Most Africans are indeed dismayed at what is happening to the Christian faith in the west. African Christians are shocked that the Mainline Church authorities do not seem to have learned much from their past mistakes. Instead of facing up to the modern challenges of evangelization in the secularized world - conversion to Christ - much time and resources are still wasted on theological, doctrinal, and moral polemics.

Most importantly African Church leaders have great lessons to learn from the West. According to the Western experts, prosperity has an adverse effect on priestly and religious vocations. Most Westerners are *not* excited about the orchestrated vocation boom in Africa. Some believe that vocations in Africa will freeze in the way they did in Europe and America. Most of the giant seminaries, monasteries, and convents will close down when Africa begins to breathe the air of prosperity and secularization. The so-called vocation boom is found only in some tiny areas of Africa - in Southern Nigeria and in the Congo (formerly Zaire) - among a few ethnic groups. It is not a phenomenon that can be extended to the entire African continent. This is ridiculous. But the important point the African Catholic bishops and vocations directors should examine is

whether the so-called vocation boom is closely tied to the poor African economy. If so they must cease to build more seminaries, which just as in Europe and America will be deserted when Africa, after overcoming its economic and political upheavals, qualifies for entrance into the first, "secularized," and "consumerized" (Western) world. It is, however, *not* true that the poor African economy is a contributive factor to the increase in vocations in those parts of Africa that are blessed with priestly and religious vocations. The cultural differences between the West and Africa are many. As Father Cosmas Nwosu^{clxxvi} rightly points out, Africa, unlike Europe and America, still has the structures that support and catalyze that spur vocations - strong extended family systems, large numbers of children, strong community ties, strong awareness of the sacred and religion in public schools, to mention just a few. But whatever the case may be, it will not be out of place for African bishops and religious superiors to take a second look at the usefulness of the large seminaries, monasteries, and convents being set up in Africa.

This last suggestion is even of utmost importance if the products of such institutions - African missionaries are rejected by the Mother Churches in Europe and America. Those already ministering overseas are being described as *imported goods*. If goods do not serve any useful purpose or find no markets, it is wise for the manufacturers to reconsider the prospects of their business. It would be a fatal error if the Western Christian Church failed to help the African bishops tap the resources of the vocations still available in some parts of Africa. It is known that old prejudices do not die easily. But as for the Church of the third millennium, a radical change in mentality is urgently needed by all professing the Christian faith everywhere. The missionary, whatever the color of his skin, or the tongue he speaks, has a vital role to play in the Church of the next century.

African Missionaries in Diaspora

African missionaries are desperately needed in Europe and America to serve their African kinsmen and women who live and work in these places. Most of them have been so caught up, for example, in the web of liturgical confusion in the Church and other Church controversies that some have abandoned the Mainline Churches completely or have joined the Pentecostal Churches that open their door to all worshippers - black and white. The unattractive, arid Catholic mass conducted by the Western pastor "in a hurry" is no match for a life-giving Pentecostal prayer meeting. While the African Catholic would not like a Sunday mass that lasts for hours, likewise he is bored by an insipid Sunday mass that lasts 30 minutes. Africans like lively liturgy. There is no doubt that most of the "lost" African Christians could be found and brought back to the Church if their own priests from Africa could minister to them. The Church has much to gain by requesting from African bishops, missionaries to Europe and America to minister to Africans in Diaspora.

Africa cannot yet claim to have a sufficient number of priests and nuns to provide for her domestic needs. As some people like McBrien may argue, it can be true that the countries from which American or European dioceses are drawing priests may actually be much more in need. Incontestable as this type of reasoning may be, it may not be forgotten that the Vatican document *Ad gentes* called on developing countries to "send missionaries to proclaim the gospel all over the world, even though they are suffering from a shortage of clergy." Doing so surely links the local Church with the Church universal. Exchange of missionaries may not be a bad idea. One of the largest Catholic parish communities in West Africa is in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. The Dominican missionaries administer this flourishing Catholic Community. The Fathers of the **Oblates of the Immaculate Heart of Mary** are running one of the largest Catholic parishes in the Catholic diocese of Orlu, Nigeria. An American women religious congregation with its Mother House in New York - The sisters of the **Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate**, has recently opened their novitiate in the diocese of Okigwe, Nigeria - one of Africa's richest dioceses in terms of priests, monks, and nuns. There are many more missionary societies in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. Of all the regions of Africa, Southern Nigerian dioceses are no more in urgent need of foreign missionaries. But these missionaries are still wanted. No one is chasing them away. Few of the foreigners speak any of the Nigerian languages. Still they are tolerated.

Nigeria, Zaire, and some other African countries with a substantial number of priests and religious are happy to send out missionaries, especially to those parts of Africa where the Muslim religion has not succeeded in wiping Christianity from existence. The need for Nigerian missionaries has continued to grow. It is a service the Nigerian Church is proud to accomplish. Nigerian missionary priests and nuns are working in the West African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Guinea. In the Eastern, Central, and Southern African regions, Nigerian missionaries are found in Gabon, Central African Republic, Congo, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zambia, and Namibia. Outside Africa, Nigerian missionaries are ministering in Germany, Italy, France, England, Malta, and the United States.

Outside of the diocesan priests, many congregations of male and female religious are engaged in various types of mission Apostolate within and outside Africa - for example, The Holy Ghost Fathers (The Spiritans). The Spiritan International School of Theology is a renowned Catholic educational institution located at Attakwu, Enugu, Nigeria. It serves other missionary societies - the Claretians, the Vincentians, and the Society for African Missions for the training of their seminarians. The Missionary Society of St. Paul, with its headquarters at Gwagwalada, near Abuja, Nigeria, has continued to send missionaries to various parts of the world, including the United States. The congregations of female religious from Nigeria engaged in various types of mission are too many to count. Their growth is a happy development not only for the African Church, but also for the universal Church of Christ. As Father Nwosu points out, if the Western Catholics, including the Americans, would allow the wind from their cities to blow their vision beyond their dioceses, they would see places around them where many missionary priests and nuns from developing countries are already laboring quite faithfully and successfully. "This is a phenomenon that has been variously called 'return missions,' 'missions from south to north,' and 'mission in six continents.' Whatever the term, they are clearly signs of the times."

Attention Foreign Missionaries! Beware of Obstacles

"Nun gehet hin, meine lieben Bruder and bringen den heidnisher Europaern das Christentum."^{1c1xxvii} ("Now, go, my dear brothers and bring back Christianity to the European pagans.")

This was a text that appeared under a cartoon in a German Church magazine, addressing black African missionaries to help in the work of *re-evangelization* or *new evangelization* among the *de-Christianized* European nations. The writer of the article that followed the cartoon and the injunction "to go and re-evangelize Europe" was not joking. Africans who received much from the Mother Churches in Europe will only be happy and willing for the "return mission" if only they are invited, and accepted and their services appreciated. In spite of their poverty and political and social problems, the Third World missionaries are already responding to the call for mission. A new concept of "mission" and the "missionary" has evolved in the modern Church. Mission exists everywhere and the Church is in mission wherever human misery prevails, wherever the gospel has not been established, or where it has been established but did not take root - in the cities and ghettos, in industrialized nations, in developed and developing nations. Instead of closing down old parishes - a consequence of the "empty Church" syndrome - or closing down Christian schools and institutions on account of unavailability of personnel, missionaries should be recruited from anywhere they can be found to serve the needy. The universal Church of Christ for whatever reason will have failed in her primary assignment from the Lord, if this aspect of the Church's work is not taken care of as the Christian Church prepares to celebrate the new millennium.

Any foreign missionary, particularly Africans who are working in Europe and America may not overlook the objections of priests like McBrien who think that foreign missionaries would not perform well in the West. While the missionary should not expect an easy ride to victory in his difficult task of bringing the message of salvation to the needy, it may not be out of place to be forearmed. Obstacles facing the modern missionaries are in most part different from those their counterparts faced in the past. Today in Europe and America, opposition to the foreign missionaries' activities comes from two camps - the priest and the people. Lengthy liturgies and homilies weary the people and the pastor. The foreign missionary must reckon with the "established tradition" in the Western Church that the Sunday homily must not last more than 8 minutes and the mass not more than 40 minutes!

The foreign missionary, no matter his enthusiasm to convert the whole world, must, like his hosts, learn to pick and choose the materials for the homily. To succeed in his missionary enterprise, he may have to speak in *politically correct language*. He will definitely get into trouble if he ignores the rules. While sex dominates television and the press in the United States, it is *anathema* to mention it in the homily. An African missionary priest was

severely rebuked by his pastor-boss for preaching **chastity, condemning fornication, adultery and other prevalent immoral acts** in society in the Church and also for "embarrassing his congregation" by speaking out loudly against **abortion**. One other African priest got into serious trouble when he forgot that he was not in Africa! Agonized that at every mass he celebrated every Tom, Dick, and Harry received Holy Communion when less than 1% of the parishioners ever visited the confessional for the past one year and half he had been in that parish, he decided to tell them that the Body of Christ was not for every one! The African priest was cautioned by the pastor and told that he was not in that parish to teach Americans morality!

Missionizing in a foreign land, in a culture different from that of the missionary, has never been an easy task in the history of the missionary enterprise. In modern times many factors complicate the problems of the missionary in the modern world, especially in the so-called developed countries. These are part and parcel of the challenges facing the Third Millennium Church. But whether foreign missionaries would function effectively in "new mission lands" in Europe and America, where their services are desperately needed, the following conditions laid down by McBrien under which the foreign missionaries could operate in the United States, must be noted by all aspiring foreign missionaries to the United States. "Should foreign priests be welcome in the United States, even though this is not a mission country?" he asks. They could. But *voilà* the conditions!

Of course, if they are doing graduate studies in an American university, or if they are becoming U.S. citizens, or if they have come, like so many foreign priests before them, to serve the special pastoral needs of immigrants from their own countries.^{clxxviii}

Outside these three categories of "missionaries," McBrien does not support the presence of foreign missionaries in the United States. He thinks it is wrong to recruit foreign priests simply to serve as supplement to the diocesan presbyterate, to be assigned wherever the need exists for a priest with the sacramental powers conferred in ordination. As far as he is concerned the work of a foreign missionary in the United States is greater than many people imagine. Can foreign missionaries face up to the challenges? "Priesthood is more than a sacramental ministry. It is a leadership ministry that requires the capacity to collaborate with other parish ministers, most of whom are women. For many foreign priests, that may be the greatest challenge they face in the United States."^{clxxix} To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

By rejecting missionaries from the Third World, particularly from Africa, the Western Catholic Church is setting a scandalous precedent in the history of missionary enterprise. The consequences of this blatant racism will definitely be grave for the Church of the future. By preferring deacons, lay administrators to the available African and other Third World missionaries, the Western Church leaders and their advisers are simply telling these missionaries that they are not wanted in the Western Churches. The publicized story of the Archdiocese of Chicago and many other stories have more lessons for the African Church as well as for the Universal Church. No one should be surprised that the priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago objected to the plans of Cardinal Francis George of Chicago to recruit foreign priests to help alleviate the problems created by shortage of priests in that Archdiocese. The New York Times report that the priests of the Archdiocese rejected the Cardinal's plan because they were not duly consulted by the Cardinal was a later development and indeed a pretext. There were signs before the appointment of the new Archbishop of Chicago that foreign priests were not wanted in the Archdiocese as the following correspondence from the office of the Chancellor, Archdiocese of Chicago demonstrates. I had applied for a place in the Archdiocese of Chicago for a student-priest from Nigeria and the following replies from the *Vice Chancellor, Reverend Emmett J. Gavin, O.Carm* may not leave any one in doubt as to the attitude of the priests toward African priests.

March 19, 1997

From the office of Chancellor, Archdiocese of Chicago

Dear Father Ndiokwere:

Thank you for your recent letter inquiring about the possibility of placing priests from your diocese in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Your suggestion and that of your bishop that some arrangement be worked out between the Diocese of Orlu and the Archdiocese of Chicago for the placement of Nigerian priests in this Archdiocese is an interesting possibility but not one that I can respond to immediately. It will require some discussion here before any decision can be made about our interest in such a potential arrangement.

In the interim, however, I must advise you that the priest that you are expecting early in April cannot be accommodated in this Archdiocese. At the moment, I cannot offer him a position in a parish. As I am sure you can appreciate, priests

from many countries come to Chicago regularly and we are often asked to find a placement for them in a parish while they pursue studies here. We do our best to accommodate those requests, but at the moment we are not in a position to be of assistance in that regard.

Thank you again for your letter and I will respond more fully to your other proposal in not too distant future.

Wishing you all the blessings of the coming Easter season,

I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Reverend Emmett J. Gavin, O.Carm. (Vice
Chancellor)

(The second letter)

April 7, 1997

From the office of Chancellor, Archdiocese of Chicago

Dear Father Ndiokwere:

I am writing in further reply to your letter of March 8, 1997. When I last contacted you to indicate that we would not be able to provide a placement for the priest that is arriving from your diocese this April, I indicated that I would get back to you with more information about your proposal that some mutual arrangement be worked out between your diocese and the Archdiocese of Chicago regarding the placement of extern priests.

The Archdiocese of Chicago receives many applications each year from priests from other parts of the world who would like to minister here and/or attend one of our universities while residing in one of our parishes. We are able to place several such applications in various parishes of the Archdiocese each year and we welcome their presence and ministry. These cases are decided, however, on a case by case basis. We continue to believe that such an approach is the appropriate course of action to follow in the future as well.

Therefore, while appreciating the offer of your Ordinary to enter into an arrangement for the placement of priests in this diocese on some regular basis, we would prefer to continue to handle all such applications in a case by case basis. If there are individual priests in the future who wish to apply to come to the Archdiocese of Chicago for the purpose of study or sabbatical, we would be pleased to try to assist them in finding a suitable parish placement as a resident extern during their stay.

Under our current procedures, however, it is not possible at this time to accept a priest for full-time parish work without a prior opportunity to meet him and interview him for available openings. Clearly, in those cases, our requirement of prior interview is prohibitive in terms of placing priests from distant lands who would have to travel here for the purpose of being considered for an opening. There is no guarantee that a placement would result from such an effort and the time and expense of coming here simply for the purpose of an interview would be prohibitive. We cannot, therefore, entertain applications for full-time parish assignments from foreign priests who are not already in residence in proximity to this Archdiocese.

Wishing you all the blessings of this Easter season, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Reverend Emmett J. Gavin, O. Carm (Vice Chancellor)

My reply

April 12, 1997

Dear Reverend Emmett J. Gavin

Thank you for your two letters. I am surprised that it took you much energy and paper to tell a simply truth, namely, you do not want African priests in your diocese. It is very strange that to be allowed to help out in a parish while he studies in the United States an African student-priest must first of all make a long journey from Africa to the United States for an interview. This is surely a ridiculous and cumbersome undertaking and I do not promise you that I would advice any priest to attend your interviews, as I am sure he will fail!

It is sad to note that a priest of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church should be made to look like a stranger and unwanted among his brother priests and Christians. If your policies are as aggressive, discriminating, and stringent as you indicate, I am afraid they are indeed harmful to the Catholic faith, not only in Chicago or in the United States, but also in Africa, and elsewhere in the Christian world.

I remember that the missionaries that came to Africa were never scrutinized or interviewed before they set out in their mission to evangelize Africa and the non-European world. Even though some of them performed below expectations, nevertheless, they were well received and were well treated during their sojourn and mission.

Instead of replying negatively and wasting words you could have simply said, "We don't want you Africans here." Indeed I had expected a more positive reply from you, expressing great joy in having a priest in your archdiocese who is willing to help out in one of your parishes while doing his studies. I doubt whether an Ordinary of a diocese would write this way. The temporary absence of an Ordinary in the Archdiocese must have offered you an opportunity to expose yourself in this light.

Perhaps my letter did upset you. I am sorry. I have no option than to abide by the biblical injunction: "Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words -

go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town." (Mt. 10:14)

Wishing you God's guidance in your work, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ

Father Nathaniel Ndiokwere

Before the arrival of the Vice Chancellor's second letter, I was informed by an African student priest in one of Chicago's Universities that two priests from Eastern European countries had been admitted in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Both priests spoke little English.

There are many reports by African student-priests and missionaries in Europe and the United States which confirm that many European and American Catholic dioceses do not, as a matter of policy welcome Africans. Even though it is obvious that "priestless Sunday" is a familiar phenomenon in Europe and the United States, many bishops and their priests prefer "**Communion Service**," administered by deacons and parish administrators, to the services of African priests. In this case, Europe and America are surely more than 50 years behind Africa. The days of the "**Catechist Sunday Service**" are back in the First World Catholic Church! There is no doubt that the situation will continue to deteriorate.

According to figures in the 1998 U.S. Official Catholic Directory, one-fourth of all U.S. diocesan priests are now retired, sick or otherwise absent from active duty. Directory figures show the number of U.S. parishes without a resident pastor has now grown to 2,460, or more than 13% of all parishes. In the past 15 years the total of active diocesan priests dropped 20.8%, from 30,133 to 23,857. Reports confirm parishioners' anxiety. When dioceses develop plans for fewer priests, people often ask why priests from religious orders cannot be called in to fill the gap. Unfortunately religious priests are not in the position to fill all the gaps. From 1983 to 1998 the total number of U.S. religious order priests dropped from 22,514 to 15,547 - a decline of more than 30% and 35% of U.S. men religious are now said to be 70 years old or older.

Religious clergy continue to supplement diocesan clergy in parish ministries, but because of diminishing numbers and aging members, many religious orders have had to cut back on parishes served and priests available for such services. The same picture is seen in Canada and various European

dioceses. There are not a few concerned Catholics who ask whether missionaries from other parts of the world should not be invited to fill these gaps created by the retired, sick or otherwise inactive clergy in the Western Church. Which is better for the Church, the people, and the needy dioceses, to shut down the parishes, or to seek help from other places?

It is an established fact that African priests though *needed* in the Western dioceses, in Europe and the United States, are not *wanted*. There are too many stories, letters, and documents lending support to this allegation. It is sad indeed, to expose some of the far-reaching consequences of this failure to put into practice Christ's new law of love. Modern African Christianity has continued to bear many scars of aggressive attacks from some European and North American educated Africans, who after their studies overseas have become influential political leaders in their countries. These are among many Africans who report one type of discrimination or another as they endeavored to practice their Christian faith in Europe and America. Some have alleged they were not welcomed in the white Churches. Others maintain that white Christians refused to sit together with blacks in Church. Their painful experiences in the house of worship have sooner reflected on their aversion to the European brand of Christianity. For the black Church in Africa, it has been painful experiences facing confrontations from Africans who studied and earned degrees from European and American universities. With their experiences of discrimination and racism in the Christian Church, most of these Africans are hostile to Christianity. Back to their countries, they have taken up high positions in government and private sectors and most have vowed to fight the Church. They have always claimed that white Christians and their ministers never practiced what they preached in Church and to the Africans they once went to evangelize. Most of the Christian Churches and their ministers in Europe and America have been accused of racism and discriminatory attitudes toward black people and other minority groups.

Such allegations have also served as a pretext for most Africans in Europe and America to abandon the Christian religion, while not a few have embraced the Muslim religion and have continued to promote Islam rather than the Christian religion. To fight Christianity and what it stands for, not a few of these African politicians and influential members of governments have embarked on the closure of Church schools and institutions. There is no doubt that the notorious education minister who initiated the closure of Catholic schools and the government take-over of such schools in Nigeria in the early 1970s was a product of one of the most prestigious universities in the United States. Born and raised Catholic, he later during his studies in the United States

became an atheist and hated the Christian religion.

Reports from his fellow students - black and white - confirmed that the treatment of blacks in the United States, as well as the attitude of the Christian Church to slavery and colonialism had much negative impact on the religious faith of that education minister and many African Christians. Such experiences have provoked their aversion to Christian religion. The hypocritical attitudes of Christians and ministers of religion toward the oppressed, the poor, the marginalized, and the minorities disenchanted most Africans of their hopes and faith in the Christian Church as the refuge and the hope of the oppressed. They have always thought the best way to protest their displeasure with the Church was by persecuting the Christian Church in their land. Who has ever thought that the poor African students in Europe and America would one day become influential leaders of their countries?

Stories of racial discrimination in the Christian Churches of Europe and America have shocked Africans in Mother Africa. The extension of color bar to the Christian Churches has added to the religious indifferentism among African youths, and this has further aggravated their aversion to white man's culture and way of life. Confirmed reports, too, that those Christian missionaries who worked in various parts of Africa and later retired or returned to their fatherlands are equally guilty of the sin of racism and discrimination have continued to worsen the situation of the Church in the black continent. Few of the erstwhile missionaries are reported to show interest in the plight of the Africans, either in Mother Africa, or in the Diaspora. Could the Christian charity they once preached to the Africans not be a good guide for those missionaries to play good host to the sons and daughters of the African parishioners who welcomed and treated them well during their missionary enterprise in Africa? The impact of such negative reports and attitudes are bound to spell doom for Christianity in Africa. African priests and religious, who are poorly treated overseas by Christians, particularly by their fellow priests and other Church leaders are unlikely to forget their experiences. These, too, nurse ill-feelings against the Christian Churches and their leaders who do not treat African priests and religious well overseas. Perhaps it is not late for the leaders of the Christian Churches in the West to realize the global consequences of their racial and discriminatory attitudes to foreigners in their land.

For the Christian Church to survive, particularly in the Third World countries, her leaders in the West may no longer ignore the global consequences of the shameful attitudes - past and present - of Christians and Church ministers toward other races, who share the same faith with them. Africans and the other Third World Christians must be assured that in times of crisis they have

sufficient reason to defend the Christian faith in their lands. Christianity at the threshold of the third millennium must be able to show that it is the Church of the future for those people who accepted the Christian faith and culture in place of the other cultural traditions and world religions. Failure in this task will no doubt confirm the Christian Church as the minority Church in the foreseeable future.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Church That Will Survive - The Church of the Future

The challenges facing all the Churches - old and new - at the threshold of the new millennium are enormous. The competition for influence and power is fierce. The struggle for independence by the new Churches and religious movements makes the ideals of ecumenism unattainable in any foreseeable future. The ecumenical dialogue that has been going on among some Christian Churches for the past 30 years has only succeeded in scratching the surface of the problems and differences existing among the various Churches and denominations since the beginnings of the Christian era. There is no doubt, therefore, that each Church going its own way will have to fight a good fight to win the race for popularity and membership. Some may make it to the end, while others will fall by the wayside.

In this chapter we shall consider the challenges facing the Mainline Christian Churches - Catholic and Protestant - to see the prospects of their survival in the 21st century. As we have indicated elsewhere, survival in this context is not measured by the number of physical structures identified with any particular Church. Some of the Churches may survive *in name* only. Crippled by many endemic spiritual, disciplinary, and pastoral problems a once-influential Church may end up in the next millennium as a ceremonial Church - a **minority Church**, unable to command a sizeable followership. A formerly insignificant religious "sect" may, after all, turn out to be the **majority Church** that succeeds in winning the hearts of the people. Those people who are asking whether the ship of the Catholic Church, for example, will still be sailing at all in the future - and whether it is still worthwhile to get on board - should not be surprised at the response great Church leaders give to such questions and expressions of pessimism on the future of the Church. Which Church? This will

be a further question. The Church in question may not be any of the Mainline Christian Churches and the captain of the ship may have an unexpected identity. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger - the Vatican Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith - does not seem to have any illusions about the outcome of events in the Third Millennium Church. His views on "**The Church at the End of the Millennium**" as well as its fate in the new millennium were expressed in his book "**Salt of the Earth.**" The Christian faith will not be a dead issue in the new age. It will rather take a new and even stronger form.

Perhaps the time has come to say farewell to the idea of traditionally Catholic cultures. Maybe we are facing a new and different kind of epoch in the Church's history, where Christianity will again be characterized more by the mustard seed, where it will exist in small, seemingly insignificant groups that nonetheless live an intensive struggle against evil and bring the good into the world – that let God in.^{clxxx}

The concept of the "first wife," the "ceremonial wife," in the polygamous traditional African community, illustrates our point well here. In a typical African community, marriage not blessed with children is a calamity. A second wife provides a solution if she begets the indispensable male child. In most cases the "miracle" works and this second wife becomes the center of lavished love, care, and admiration. She becomes the hope and future of the family, the extended family, and the entire community, restoring life to a formerly devastated family. The first wife - the unfruitful wife is, however, never discarded. She remains the mother of the entire family and in most cases continues to take care of the new wife and her children. In most official occasions, she and the husband - the head of the family –represent the family. While he travels with the first wife and pays her all due respect, his heart remains always with the second wife, who often stays in the village with her children. This second wife is the "real" wife, the cornerstone of the family fabric, while the unfruitful wife remains the "ceremonial wife."

The mystical body and bride of Christ is well-known imagery of the Church. Christ is the head of his Church and we are the members. Any member that does not bear fruit must be cut off. If all the Christian Churches represent the members of the mystical body, then only those members who bear fruit must be recognized. As the childbearing mother is the center of the groom's love, so also is the Church that bears fruit. It remains the center of all the religious excitement. How do the Mainline Churches stand as fruit-bearing Churches at

the end of this age? How many will pass the litmus test? Obviously observers can judge by the way any of these Churches are able to wrestle with their present problems. The Cardinal reiterates:

I see that there is once more a great deal of activity of this kind. I don't want to cite any individual examples here. There are certainly no mass conversions to Christianity, no reversal of the historical paradigm, no about-face. But there are powerful ways in which faith is present, inspiring people again and giving them dynamism and joy. In other words, there is a presence of faith that means something for the world.^{clxxxi}

The Mainline Churches may no more be the center of "a great deal of activity." Large numbers of "fallen Christians" are rediscovering their faith in a revolutionary fashion. Unless the mainline Churches, including the Catholic Church, put their houses in order, there is little doubt that they will remain ceremonial Churches, the minority Church. We illustrate with the Catholic Church.

The Future of the Catholic Church

Beset with many problems, the authorities in Rome have depended much on the Provincial Bishops' Synods to grapple with the serious issues of evangelization and some distressing theological and cultural problems associated with the local Churches in the world of Catholicism. These synods have recently been held or are yet to be summoned in all the six continents - Africa, Asia, North and South America, Europe, and Oceania. While some progress has been reported at these synods, there are many eminent Church leaders, theologians, and lay people who believe that these synods are in no position to resolve some of the more serious issues requiring extraordinary attention from the entire group of bishops gathered together at an Ecumenical Council. There has been a consistent call for the **Third Vatican Council**. Many observers maintain that it must be the first agenda of the Catholic Church in the next millennium, if the Catholic Church hopes to maintain its old stature among the other Churches.

To the ears of some **Catholic conservatives** - clerics and lay persons alike another ecumenical council, in the grandeur of the Second Vatican Council convoked by Pope John XXIII in 1962, sounds evil. As far as these Catholics are concerned, a Third Vatican Council would be another ominous sign of the total collapse of the Catholic faith. For them it was the Second Vatican Council that should be held responsible for all the current problems of

the Catholic Church over the past 30 years. The reforms of the Second Vatican Council, for them, have done the Catholic Church more harm than good. On the other hand, **liberal Catholics** - clerics as well as lay persons - think that the Third Vatican Council is long overdue. The council should be urgently summoned to bring to fruition the unfinished job of the Second Vatican Council. The "unfinished job" should include "more reforms," "clarifications of cloudy issues," and "implementation" of some of the already concluded debates on some of the hot topics - theological and disciplinary matters that have been of much concern to theologians, bishops, priests, and Christ's faithful in the Catholic world. The "hot topics" that reformers and liberals think must be examined by the world's Catholic bishops - together with the Supreme Pontiff - gathered in an Ecumenical Council include the **clerical celibacy, ordination of women to the priesthood, the issue of birth control, ecumenical dialogue with other Christian Churches, liturgical reforms, and the primacy of the Pope.** There are some other minor issues concerning liturgical reforms and the celebration of the sacraments.

The celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation is of special concern to many bishops, priests, and the laity. If there is any celebration of the sacraments that should need reforms, a good number of Catholics believe that the traditional form of the confession of sins in the Catholic Church has become obsolete. In the West - Europe and North America - the confessional has remained one of the coldest corners of the Church. Fewer than 2 percent of European and American Catholics go to confession. More than 90 percent of young people know little or nothing about auricular confession. Except for a few pre-Vatican II Catholic parents - who still visit the Catholic confessional on a regular basis to confess their sins to a majority of pastors who do not believe that what they are doing makes any sense in their priestly life, - auricular confession has been virtually abandoned in Europe and North America. "General absolution" - once or twice a year - has replaced the auricular confession in the West. It is no surprise that John Quinn, the retired United States archbishop, thought that the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation, among the other issues he raised, needed to be reformed.

Even though the Vatican believes that the provincial conferences of the Catholic bishops are competent to handle some of these issues, there are many observers who think that further deliberations by the world's Catholic bishops is necessary. "Declarations" by the world's Catholic bishops together with the Supreme Pontiff might put to rest most of these contentious theological, moral, and disciplinary matters that have continued to mitigate against progress in the Catholic Church. The fact that most bishops and their priests are carrying out

their own reforms - which do not conform with the current Roman practice - is enough reason to think of a more effective way to restore order in a confused state of affairs in the Catholic Church.

While conservatives and liberals may have their honored ideas about the tasks of the Third Vatican Council, a goodly number of Catholics - both clerics and lay persons strongly believe that a Third Vatican Council, like the Second Vatican Council, may be another "blessing" for the Catholic Church in the third millennium. "Honesty," they believe, "is the best policy." There is need to address the raised issues and to make definitive statements about them. Both conservatives and liberals will therefore be able to relax as the bishops of the Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, endeavor to put to rest all speculations and junk theological and moral disputations. Catholics all over the world - from the first to the last recipients of the Gospel - know that their choice to embrace Christianity or Catholicism was a matter of faith. "Not all can accept this word, but only those to whom that is granted." (Matthew 19.11)

Those who are calling for the Third Vatican Council may not be ignored. All is not well with the Catholic Church and to ignore this reality is a worse disaster. The Third Millennium Church cannot afford to remain aloof to its problems. Experts in the various fields of endeavor can offer useful services and after exhaustive debates by the representatives of the people and Princes of the Catholic Church, it is left to the faithful to accept the teachings of the Catholic Church or to abandon their faith. Most Catholics are not asking for more confusing reforms. They want clarifications on the contentious doctrinal, disciplinary, and moral issues that have generated much heat in the Catholic Church over the past 30 years.

There has been much confusion in both the liberal and conservative Catholic camps and often it has not been easy for the faithful to separate the official teachings of the Church from those of the liberal theologians. On the other hand, it has not been easy for many to separate God's commandments from most of the "man-made" laws. What the majority of the faithful need is the clear and unequivocal stand of the Church, which must be accepted by all believers. We would like to examine a few of these "hot topics" which have received much attention in the press and in the theological and moral opinions of experts and ordinary Catholics. People's reactions to the much publicized views of theologians and Church leaders point to the possible outcome of the great debates at the highest level of Church Councils! Those agitators who think that their own findings and conclusions will be embraced by all and sundry - including the Third Vatican Council - may be advised to prepare for a rude shock. Whether or not the Third Vatican Council succeeds in pacifying many, it

will nonetheless benefit the Catholic Church of the third millennium if she 're-defined' and 're-affirmed' her positions on these contentious issues. The African aphorism would put the case concisely. It calls on the hunter chasing the birds in the bush "to name the one he is after so that the rest will be assured that their lives are not in danger." In other words, the facts must be laid bare without fear or favor. There should be no fear or intimidation. It does not matter whose horse is gored.

Clerical Celibacy

"Can one say, then, that you do not believe that one day the Catholic Church will have married priests?" (Peter Seewald) "At least not in the foreseeable future." (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger)

As far as many conservative Catholics - clerics and lay persons alike - are concerned, this over-flogged issue - clerical celibacy - should no longer be discussed. Any further debate on it is seen as a wasted effort. Has Rome not spoken? Has the Roman Catholic hierarchy not spoken through Archbishop Gilberto Agostino, Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy in 1990, at the synod of bishops in Rome that "Celibacy is not open to discussion?"^{clxxxii} Perhaps that declaration was not strong enough to close the debate. It may not be enough reason for priests to accept the challenge wholeheartedly, if they have not already done so. Some Catholics who sympathize with priests agitating for the lifting the ban on clerical celibacy think that there is no need crying over the spilled milk. Archbishop Agostino tackled the problem of clerical celibacy from another perspective. He pointed out that *education for celibacy* should now be the slogan. "Education for celibacy must be part of the complete and integral plan for the formation of future priests, but not as the most important element which is the attainment of perfect chastity"^{clxxxiii} The Roman spokesman of course admitted that the modern world poses certain problems. These should not be exaggerated. "When Jesus proposed chastity to his followers, he inspired in them a sense of faithfulness, and he was able to make them understand the value of what he was recommending - not just the difficulties as many educators do"^{clxxxiv}

In the same vein the Roman congregation for the evangelization of peoples, in the *Pastoral guide for diocesan priests in Churches dependent on*

the congregation for the evangelization of peoples, urges priests to be faithful to their obligations to "chastity in celibacy for the kingdom."^{clxxxv}

In today's often permissive society priests are called upon to reconfirm their vocation to perfect continence in celibacy through which they are consecrated to God in a new and distinguished way ... Chastity should not be considered a law that inhibits personal growth; rather its positive effects should be stressed.^{clxxxvi}

The Sacred congregation observes however, that at times celibacy contrasts with family or societal structures. "Even in these cases they (priests) should be faithful to their undertaking, explaining to their people, by word, but especially by their lives the true meaning of their choice." It is not only that "celibacy is not open to debate." Pope John Paul II has confirmed that in spite of the shortage of priests, married priestly candidates will not be ordained priests. This, he insists, is not the alternative solution to the problem of celibacy.

Some have questioned whether in such circumstances it might not be appropriate to consider the possibility of ordaining *Viri Probati*. However, this is not a solution that should be entertained. Other ways of dealing with the problem must be found.^{clxxxvii}

The Church has always affirmed unambiguously the choice of male celibates for the priesthood as is proper to the Roman rite. The Pope leaves no one in doubt about the position of the Church in this over-flogged issue:

By affirming unambiguously its commitments to priestly celibacy and by explaining its reasons, the synod in the name of the Church has made a great act of faith in the grace of the Holy Spirit who guides the Church.^{clxxxviii}

Instead of opening more windows to allow in fresh air into the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II thought that the number that has been left open was already too many. In his own "Intervention" at the end of the eight Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1990, the Pope did not fail to show his disapproval of giving this issue even a second thought.

So it is that the very life of the Church pointed the way for us to overcome the crisis of priestly identity. This crisis has its roots in the time

immediately after the Second Vatican Council. It was expressed in a wrong, sometimes deliberately harmful interpretation of the teaching of the council's Magisterium. These interpretations undoubtedly represent one of the main causes for large number of defections from the Church; defections which so seriously affected her pastoral ministry and reduced the number of priestly vocations, especially missionary vocations.^{clxxxix}

Is it possible that after exhaustive debates on this hot topic – clerical celibacy - at the Third Vatican Council, the Council Fathers would agree by two-thirds majority to lift the ban on the marriage of the Catholic clergy in the Western Church? If the leaders of the Catholic Church are able to arrive at a consensus that would be a great achievement for the Church. But the probability is that those opposed to the lifting of the ban on clerical celibacy will present overwhelming arguments that will end further debates. Already in small circles many honest clerics and lay persons, while maintaining that celibacy is an unjustified imposition on the priests of the Western Church, agree that optional celibacy or a complete lift on the ban would create more problems for both the priest and the Church than it would resolve. In the West they point at the alarming rate of *divorce* and disintegration of the *family*, problems of *birth control controversy* and *abortion*. How will the married priest in the Catholic Church battle with the problems of the modern family in the affluent and de-Christianized Western society? How would the Church cope with legal issues surrounding divorced clergy and family? A married African Catholic clergyman has a different type of problem to face. If he is unlucky to contract a childless marriage, the African priest may face a miserable life in African society. This may not augur well for the Church. In Africa the problem is not that of sexual gratification. It is that of contributing to the welfare of the extended family, the African community, the nerve center of life and well being of all by way of raising a family. To satisfy both camps - pro-celibate priesthood and anti-celibate priesthood - in the western Catholic Church the Council Fathers must devise some new arrangement. No one seems to be arriving at any middle-point solution nor is any one optimistic that any further debate on clerical celibacy would produce any satisfactory solution to the problem.

Whatever the case may be, there are still many concerned Catholics who wish that the Church authorities in Rome will come out with some solution to this problem. It has been long, as far back as 1990, when a Vatican spokesman - Archbishop Gilberto Agostino, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the clergy - made a strong statement on celibacy. From that statement, as we have seen above, there was no indication that the Church was in the mood of making

changes in the clerical celibacy. Sixteen years after Archbishop Agostino's statements, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, another Vatican spokesman and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in an interview with Peter Seewald,^{cx} made it once again clear that the Catholic Church will not change the rules "at least not in the foreseeable future." As far as Seewald was concerned, nothing enrages people more than the question of celibacy. Their concerns are expressed like these: "Even though it concerns directly only a tiny fraction of the people in the Church, why in fact should there be celibacy? Since it is certainly not a dogma, couldn't the question perhaps be negotiated one day in the direction of a free choice between a celibate and non-celibate form of life? If the figures about the breakdown of celibacy are correct, then celibacy collapsed de facto a long time ago. This fact alone makes it sensible for the Catholic Church to allow married priests." In his response to these questions, Cardinal Ratzinger made some clarifications about celibacy. Admitting that the Catholic Church has been experiencing violations of celibacy he sees a close relationship between this phenomenon and the increasing fragile nature of marriage as the basis of the modern society. In the legislation of Western nations, marriage is increasingly placed on the same level as other forms of unions and is thereby largely "dissolved" as a legal form. Lifting the ban on clerical celibacy, for the Catholic prelate would create more problems for the priests and the Church. "Put in practical terms, after the abolition of celibacy we would only have a different kind of problem with divorced priests. This is not unknown in the Protestant Churches. In this sense, we see, of course, that the lofty forms of human existence involve great risks."^{cx}

For the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the abolition of celibacy would not resolve the problem of the shortage of priests in the Catholic Church. It is faith that sustains the celibate life, which is confirmed by one's free consent and desire at ordination. It is not compulsory or imposed on Catholic priests. "The candidate for the priesthood has to recognize the faith as a force in his life, and he must know that he can live celibacy only in faith...I think that giving up this condition basically improves nothing; rather, it glosses over a crisis of faith."^{cx} The problems created by the unfaithfulness of the clergy to their vow of celibacy are not new in the church. In the Middle Ages similar factors led to the Reformation. Today the same tragic event indeed calls for reflection. No matter how the Church and the people are adversely affected, Ratzinger does not see any likely change in the rules of clerical celibacy in the foreseeable future. He agrees with the findings of the last synod of bishops and other Church leaders who have spoken on this matter. Agitators for lifting the ban on clerical celibacy may indeed lay aside their protest banners!

I think that, according to the findings of the last synod of bishops, it is the conviction of the great majority of bishops that the real question is the crisis of faith and that we won't get better and more priests by this "uncoupling," but will only gloss over a crisis of faith and falsely obtain solutions in a superficial way.^{cxciii}

Most lay Catholics, particularly those unsympathetic with priests agitating for the lifting of the ban on celibacy - have repeatedly pointed out that the clerical celibacy cannot be held entirely responsible for the shortage of priests in the Catholic Church. They are also quick to point out that taking wives would not resolve the problems of priests with other sexual problems. They are **homosexuals** and those that have other sexual aberrations and orientations. Most of the sexually related lawsuits against the clergy in Europe and North America are associated with male partners rather than with the opposite sex. The well-publicized Dallas sex-abuse priest's case is a good example. The Vatican had to intervene by issuing a decree to officially laicize Rudolph Kos, a former priest convicted of sexually abusing eleven boys. Kos, 53, was serving a life sentence for molesting the altar boys while a priest in the Diocese of Dallas, United States. Ten of the victims and the parents of the 11th who committed suicide were awarded a record \$119.6 million civil judgment against the diocese. The plaintiffs have reportedly settled for about \$30 million. Kos was convicted in a later criminal trial of sexual assault and indecency for molesting four boys more than 1,350 times between 1987 and 1992.

But whatever the case may be, it is obvious, as observers point out, that the current practice of the Roman Catholic Church in which some married priests are admitted through the "back door" into the Catholic priesthood to function as pastors complicates the problems of clerical celibacy. These are some of the pastors from the Anglican Church or various Protestant communities who feel dissatisfied with reforms in their own Churches. As they cross over to the Catholic Church, they are received with open arms, together with their wives and children. Some "fallen away" married Catholic priests, after receiving dispensation from the Holy See, are allowed into the Church to function as pastors, even after remaining for about 20 years outside the Catholic Church. In the West, many priests who have wandered away from the priesthood for as many as 10 years are received back with open arms by their bishops when these priests decide to return to active pastoral ministry. During their years of absence from the Church, some are known to have taken wives and divorced. Some priests who are chronic alcohol addicts and have not

functioned as active Catholic priests in their pastoral ministry for many years, are re-assigned after they return from years of rehabilitation. Only few recover from alcohol addiction. Some bishops and religious superiors instead of *laicizing* notorious priest sex-offenders and alcohol addicts, continue to transfer these priests from one parish to another. There is no doubt that many dioceses in Europe and North America have lost millions of dollars in the settlement of lawsuits brought against priest sex-offenders. In the face of such situations, it becomes difficult for seminary formators to preach celibacy to the young aspirants to the Catholic priesthood. This is not an issue that can easily be ignored in the Catholic Church today.

History and tradition have great lessons for both the wise and the speculative. It is not out of place to recall that Pope Paul VI wrote the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* against a majority view of the Commission that advised him. Furthermore, despite the bitter theological dissent that followed the encyclical, the body of the official teaching on this subject in the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II is stronger and larger than it has ever been in Church history. As far as the Pope is concerned, to see contraception as licit was tantamount to denying the existence of God.^{cxiv} As Frank Pavone rightly points out in his reflections on *Humanae Vitae* on the 30th Anniversary of the publication of the encyclical, the publication has been as much a lesson in ecclesiology as in moral theology: "It has been a clear signal for the modern age of what has always been true, namely that the Church does not derive her teaching from mere human analysis or the trends of the day, but from a Gospel that has been entrusted to us and for all from above."^{cxv}

Nobody should be deceived by the "clever" arguments and the so-called realistic suggestions people like Richard McBrien and many other American priests are presenting to the Church leaders in America and in the Vatican. Even if they succeed in getting one billion signatures from priests and lay Catholics in America and Europe, there is little hope that the problem of clerical celibacy will be resolved in any foreseeable future. Liberal Catholic theologians, who think that the real problem with the shortage of priests in Europe and America lies with clerical celibacy, may have to rewrite their thesis. Those who think, too, that the present crisis of the Catholic Church will be resolved by ordaining women priests may have to read, *"The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity"* by Thomas Reeves. The Episcopalian author wondered what the demand about reforms in the Catholic would achieve: "Everything liberal Catholics want, we Episcopalians have - and we're dying." He says. Ecumenism and a New Concept of a "United Church of Christ"

The first millennium was the millennium of Christian unity - there were schisms, but there was still the unity of East and West. The second millennium was the millennium of great divisions. The millennium of divisions will be followed by a millennium of unifications. Now, precisely at the end, we could rediscover a new unity through a great common reflection. ("Great Exceptions" - Salt of the Earth)

Not many Christians hope for an absolute unity of Christians within history. Not even the leaders of the Catholic Church in Rome. For the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, there are few signs that encourage such a hope for Church unity in any foreseeable future. Rather, there are many signs of disunity and further divisions. Fragmentation continues to occur at the very same time that efforts toward unity are taking place. There is a constant formation of new sects. Even ruptures within the Churches of the Reformation are widening. In the Catholic Church herself there are very deep ruptures, so much that one sometimes really has the feeling that two Churches are living side by side in one Church. There is little hope that the Churches can come quickly to "confessional unions." "One should be wary of utopian hopes. What is important is that all of us constantly recall the essentials, that everyone try, so to speak, to jump over his own shadow and to grasp the real core in faith. Much is already done if no further inner ruptures occur."^{cxcvi}

Does any further deliberation on ecumenism warrant an Ecumenical Council? Many Christians - Catholics and Protestants - both do not think it is "worth a dime." For a majority of the leaders of the Protestant Churches ecumenism, in the form its proponents have pursued it, is indeed a dead issue. Many Church leaders differ from one another in their concept of ecumenism. Most envisage an arrangement by which Churches, while retaining their independence, leadership, faith, and polity can still come together to discuss matters of common interest. The leaders of the multitude of Christian Churches do not believe that in order to work together with the other Churches, including the Catholic Church, they should lose their individual identities and be subsumed in a "United Church of Christ." They would accept a workable arrangement in which every Church could retain its primacies, authorities, and titles - Pope, Patriarch, Primate, Elder, Eminence, Prophet, Judge, and Evangelist. They see an Ecumenical gathering of all Churches in the pattern of the **Olympiad** where all nations under the sun are represented, irrespective of

political ideologies, differences in economic standing, population, color, or race. At the modern Olympic games, the most populous nations as well as tiny islands are recognized and are allowed to march with their respective national banners alongside the other nations of the world.

Nations that claim to be enjoying democratic systems of government are there as well as those thought to be languishing under dictatorship. Nations that operate theocracy - government of God - as well as those who describe their systems as "Redemptive" or "Revolutionary" are represented at the world event. Even governments divided at home or engaged in civil wars send their contingents to the Olympiad. Their political, religious, and cultural differences notwithstanding, the respective athletes are there to represent their countries at the august meeting. If they are lucky to win laurels, their divided people at home declare a truce and find reasons to celebrate their successes at the world event. At the Olympiad all nations gather for friendly athletic competition and in joyful celebration of friendship, peace, and solidarity.

The one common language all the participating athletes at the Olympic games speak is similar to that which architects, engineers, and scientists universally speak and understand - such as lines, drawings, symbols, and figures. Without the knowledge of all the human languages of the world, each athlete is able to follow the rules of the sports and participate according to his or her ability. Although many go to the Olympics to win medals for themselves and their nations, some are attracted to the Olympics not necessarily as a result of the medals and the fame these bring. They are there, too, to demonstrate their solidarity with the world body. Whether or not they win, it is enough that they have in some little way contributed to the awareness of other member nations that the world is a global village where friendship and solidarity can enrich social and cultural values.

The Unity of Christ's Church pursued from the perspective of the Olympiad may yield rewarding results for the third millennium Church. One can already see the union of all the Churches in the national and in the international religious crusades. Many years of division and bitterness among the various Churches and denominations can be healed. Speaking about the political and cultural significance of the great jubilee - the planned Meeting of all Churches Marking the Third Millennial Celebrations - a Vatican spokesman expressed the religious feelings of most concerned Christians all over the world: "The world itself must be changed into a place more attuned to humanity's deepest spiritual expectations, and the rainbow of peace and brotherhood must be set forth and shine over the third millennium." "A rainbow of peace and brotherhood" - this is certainly what the fathers of the modern Olympiad have

always desired to achieve through this quadrennial meeting of all nations of the world gathering for athletic events. It is something more than athletic competition. The Olympics creates the glory of universal participation in the promotion of peace and unity among the nations of the world.

All Churches can organize together a religious crusade for unity without undermining one another's autonomy and faith. In this revolutionary approach to a united body of the Christian Churches, there will be no **heretics, schismatics, separated brethren, Orthodox or Unorthodox**. Outside the variegated banners of the various Churches - the Mainline Churches, Catholic and Protestant, including hundreds of their off-shoots - depicting their denominational alignments, the outstanding banner that non-Christians would easily recognize is that pointing to the **Root and Head** of all the Churches - **Jesus, the Christ**. Thus would the wish of the **Head** of all the Churches be fulfilled in this extraordinary fashion, "so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21.) Again all doubts and distortions about the true identity of Christians will disappear: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." [John 13:35]

If all Christian Churches would eventually decide on a "United Church," under one leadership, creed, and polity, they would need to narrow the areas of difference that have kept them apart as bitter enemies for the past one thousand years. One of the true signs of Christian unity will be manifested when the most segregated communities on Sundays succeed in dismantling the ethnic and racial barriers that have thorn them apart for years. Any dream about Christian unity, a United Church of the future that does not begin from the grassroots is a farce.

Features of the Third Millennium Church

1. Conversion and Renewal

There is strong evidence that the Third Millennium Church will exhibit some outstanding characteristic or features that will for all practical purposes de-emphasize sectarianism or denominationalism. Brotherhood and faith in the Gospel message of Jesus will certainly predominate. Emphasis will be on conversion to Christ and acceptance of Christ's message of salvation as contained in the Gospels. Christian renewal, proclaimed by both the ordained and non-ordained ministers of the Gospel, will certainly make the old concept of proselytism obsolete. In the past various Christian denominations have waged fierce battles against one another. Their primary interest has been winning

membership to the Churches of their national interest to the detriment of winning souls for Christ.

In the Third Millennium Church, evangelization will emphasize a complete change of heart, true conversion to Christ, a new baptism, spiritual upliftment, and special experience of the Spirit in spiritual re-birth. A religious and spiritual movement in which peoples of all faiths, colors, and nationalities will join hands in prayer and lamentation over the evils Christians have committed against one another will experience a pride of place in the third millennium Church. Open confession of sins and public witnessing to works of the spirit will replace private confession of sins in a dark corner of a Church. The world is immersed in sin and the acknowledgement of such evils people and nations have perpetrated against one another will mark the beginning of a new order of religious and moral renewal. Wailing and open confession of sins will become an important program in any religious gathering. It will be reminiscent of the Old Testament call for conversion and renewal and a warning to many that have closed their hearts to reason: "Blow the trumpet in Zion. Proclaim a fast. Call an assembly. Gather the people. Notify the congregation. Assemble the elders, gather the children and the infants at breast. Let the bridegroom quit his room and the bride her chamber. Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord weep and say 'Spare, O Lord, your people, with the nations ruling over them! Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' [Joel: 2.15] Such a global call for conversion will be an unmistakable sign that all Churches and Christians are ready to abandon their old ways of division and rancor. It will mark the beginning of the healing of the wounds of a fragmented Church.

The call to repentance will not be directed only to the so-called wayward persons – the biblical "prostitutes" and "tax collectors." As in past times, the leaders and the ministers of the Lord have also transgressed His laws and therefore need repentance. They or their successors who for one reason or another have brought about dissention and splits in the Church of Christ have reasons to ask for forgiveness for their sins and the sins of their Churches. Those who have caused public scandals in their Churches may not ignore their offenses: "Gird yourselves and weep, O priests! Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth. O ministers of my God! The house of your God is deprived of offering and libation. Proclaim a fast and call an assembly. Gather the elders, all who dwell in the land into the house of the Lord, your God and cry to the Lord." [Joel 1:13] These are some of the manifestations of a new beginning after the disastrous end of an age. The universal call for renewal will not be addressed to only "prostitutes" and "tax collectors," to adulterers, men

and women who have broken their marriage vows, to drug and alcohol addicts, and criminals. Church ministers and Christians who have supported and promoted racism in their Churches are also called to confess their sins. Fanatics and religious bigots who have burned Churches or supported such atrocious acts will need open and public confession of sin.

The Third Millenium Church may not confine its activities within its identified place of worship or Church building. Stadiums, theaters, open fields could easily be turned into "Houses of Prayer" for all peoples of every religious conviction who come to seek Christ. Members of the Third Millenium Church will be people who "keep their promises" to live according to God's commandments: "Know this my dear brothers...Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looks like." (James 1: 19-25)

It is within a free atmosphere of Christian worship that souls are won for Christ. Souls are also won at the gateways, street corners, and open places. Souls are not won in Church offices by Church bureaucrats, parish secretaries, and bookkeepers who spend painless hours on computers and at the telephone waiting for calls from those who want to register for baptisms, marriages, and funerals. True religious practice will be an important ingredient of the Church. It must differ from "*Church-going*" or "*Going to Church,*" or "*Sabbath*" or any other simple *Sunday observance*. Sunday observance will not be the mark of a true Christian; "being a Christian" will be more meaningful. It will not be in the manner of the religious observances of the Scribes and Pharisees or religious rituals - keeping the tradition of the elders such as - purification coming from the marketplace, before eating, washing and hands etc (Mark 7:1-14). Rather than mere external observances, practice of true religion will receive more emphasis as people gather for worship: "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their afflictions and to keep oneself unstained by the world." [James 1:26]. "Orphans and widows" stand or represent the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the marginalized of society. It is obvious that *action*, and not the old arguments about the *true Church*, will receive deserved attention. The warning of an African Catholic bishop is timely. He was commenting on the attitudes of some Catholic priests who used to complain about activities of the evangelist Churches that through their new methods have continued to draw Christians from the Mainline Catholic and Protestant Churches.

Independent African Religious Movements or the Evangelist Churches are a challenge to all of us. It is no good criticizing or condemning them. We must provide healthy alternative ones for our people. The old preoccupation with trying to *win over* and "keep people" in our Church by mere appeals to cold intellectual arguments on the *true Church* vis-à-vis the *false Churches* are not of much lasting value to a people for whom religion is primarily emotional and utilitarian. For these people syllogisms and appeals to authority and tradition mean nothing. What matters to them is religious satisfaction.^{cxcvii}

The Third Millennium Church will be a soul-winning Church for Christ. Such a task can no more be accomplished from the pulpit, the sanctuary, or vicarages, but in the highways and hedges. Many Evangelist groups - **Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God Mission, The Promise Keepers, The Church of the Latter Day Saints**, and a host of others are already doing soul-winning at street corners, in public squares and parks, at football and soccer games where people gather in large numbers. Though Mainline Christian Churches have relied heavily on soul-winning for Christ from the pulpit, today that system does not yield much fruit, for membership has shrunk to a low record level in the last 30 years. In most cases only a few old people come to Sunday services and the younger people are not there. Here the Evangelist Churches have recorded success. One Evangelist Church minister in Nigeria wondered why a Catholic clergyman was complaining about the new Pentecostal Church movements, which were accused of winning over Catholics to the Evangelist Churches.

What on earth is the Reverend gentleman doing while the Evangelist Churches continue to win his members to their fold? Is it not his duty to strengthen their faith? If what he termed "mushroom", hand-clapping, band-beating, vision-seeing Churches could be daring enough to almost empty a Church, I would therefore appeal to the Catholic authorities in Nigeria to re-examine the ministerial priesthood.^{cxcviii}

A useful admonition! Indeed, days of soul-winning by simple persuasion or intimidation are gone. Threatening with hell fire and appeals to authorities "outside the bible," do not yield good results. The Evangelist Church minister's warning and admonitions to his fellow ministers of the Catholic faith cannot be ignored:

Priests should be warned to desist from self-defense action and from pointing accusing fingers at others for much depends on them as good soul-winners for Christ. Moreover, they should be taught that greater soul-winning is neither done from the Church pulpit, nor in the sanctuary, nor in the vicarages, but in the highways and hedges.^{cxcix}

2. A Healing and Liberating Church

The Third Millennium Church must also be a **healing Church**. From both physical and spiritual perspectives, the Christian Church that will survive in the new age must be able to address the problems of the people. While seeking for the conversion and healing of the whole person, there should be no dichotomy between their physical and spiritual well being. During His earthly ministry great crowds followed Jesus wherever He went. The Gospels testify to Jesus' care for the sick and the needy, the possessed and the hungry. "When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him." [Mark 1:32]

Although there are many healing Churches all over the world today and some healers are there for business purposes only, the activities of some of these modern healers may not be enough reason to rule out healing activities in the modern Christian Church. Faith was an indispensable ingredient in most of Jesus' healing. Jesus never performed any healing for show. Once when he was on his way to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead, the Gospels tells us that as he went, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman afflicted with hemorrhage for twelve years, who had spent her whole livelihood on doctors and was unable to be cured by anyone came behind him and touched the tassel of his cloak. Immediately her bleeding stopped. It was the woman's faith that saved her as Jesus made it clear. He said to her "Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace." [Luke 8:42] Through physical healing, many were converted to Jesus.

For the Africans, and indeed for some other peoples of the world, a Church that cannot heal is a dead Church. A Nigerian theologian, Luke Mbefo, in an article, "*Pressures on the Missionary Church*,"^{cc} thinks that the inability of the Mainline Churches in the past to respond to the health needs of the Africans pushes most Africans to seek elsewhere for solutions to their health problems. This phenomenon is, however, not limited to the Africans. It is most certain when the conventional health clinics and hospitals are failing to resolve the

health problems of the sick and the suffering. The option is to look for spiritual solutions.

Catholics betray instability in their belief. Compared with their contemporaries, who still continue the African Traditional Religion from which they were converted, Catholics betray equivocation and imbalance in crisis situations. Many still consult fortune-tellers when they want to embark on a project. The same is true when a well-thought project flops or there is sudden death or happening that would seem otherwise unaccounted for.^{cci}

For these people, power to heal belongs to God and it does not matter who exercises this power "in the name of God!" For them, too, all Churches are the same. None should claim supreme authority over the other. Indeed, there is need to resolve this crisis of faith. Luke Mbefo suggests a solution to this dilemma:

It could be that the indigenous African Churches that are now taking over from the Missionary Churches will be in a better position to meet the objections of the *foreignness* of Christianity canvassed for by their compatriots. They would then be missionaries to themselves. They are those who accepted the Church as God's will for them and equally accepted their native cultures as the providential matrix within which they have to bear Christian witness.^{ccii}

There is no doubt that the concept of a **healing Church** or **faith-healing** has become a universal phenomenon in modern times. Healing ministry is seen to be an integral part of the Church minister's function and his achievements depend much on his personal charisma. As a result of their spiritual predicaments, most Christians – black and white – encounter in life the need for a "Man of God" who can heal. Most of the Evangelist Churches have included healing sessions in their ministries. In the United States, the ministry of deliverance is an unmistakable function of the evangelist, and most of the evangelist Churches are patronized by Christians who have health problems and other personal predicaments. In order to succeed the minister must accept the reality of his clients' troubles and fears. He demonstrates in the most dramatic manner an ability to calm troubled minds. Like in Christ's ministry on earth, healing was not limited to restoration of physical disabilities - *making the lame walk, giving sight to the blind, making the dumb speak, and the deaf hear, or casting out demons*. Christ was aware that most of the people were truly in need

of a healing that went beyond physical well-being. So he beckoned them to "Come to me you are burdened and I will give you relief." (Matt.11:28). Christ's healing ministry embraced true liberation from any form of physical and spiritual bondage.

To make any meaningful impact on the masses, The Third Millenium Church must pursue with utmost vigor Christ's ministry of bringing healing to the many troubled minds of men and women all over the world - in the poorer and richer nations of the world, in the developed, developing, and underdeveloped worlds. There is bitterness among families and the closest neighbors, among communities of nations and ethnic groups. There are divisions among people of the modern world as there had been in the past. Even in the Houses of Prayer - Temples, Mosques, and Churches - divisions and bitterness have continued to show up in violent destruction of enemy's lives and properties. Scandalous and shameful wars have been waged and are still being waged in some places in the name of God. Any Church that ignores the important ministry of healing the embittered, troubled consciences of people who confess faith in God and His Christ may not exert any meaningful influence in the coming age. The Church of the coming age must be able to tackle boldly the ministry of reconciliation among the traditional bitter enemies - the oppressed and the oppressor. Challenging the oppressor must be one of the tasks of *confrontational evangelization*. It must succeed in eliciting repentance and an acknowledgment of evils perpetrated against the downtrodden. Compensation for the damages done to a great number of peoples in the past must form part of the reconciliation process. The evils of colonialism and neo-colonialism, racism, and discrimination must be addressed in no unmistakable terms of recrimination against those whose actions have in the past and present continued to bring misery to large groups of people and races.

This is what Pope Paul VI in **Evangelii Nuntiandi**^{cciii} referred to as a "Message touching life as a whole." The Pope made it clear that evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the increasing interplay of the Gospel and man's concrete life, personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development - a message especially energetic today about liberation. The Roman Pontiff makes references to some specific situations where the Church must show concrete concern for healing or liberation:

Peoples, as we know, are engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism. The Church has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children - the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization.^{cciv}

Unfortunately, many years after these papal instructions and recommendations the miserable situation of a large section of humankind has not changed much. On the contrary, the oppression, the exploitation, and the injustice have continued unabated. Bitterness continues to ravage many hearts all over the world. For them life is not just fair. Life is hard. You bet life is hard: poverty, devaluation of the currency, no transpiration, no running water, no electricity, no jobs or employment. The list goes on. But often life is not worth living for many. Perhaps the "beyond" may be better. The forces behind such frustrations, resignation, bitterness, and thoughts of the "beyond" have been there for long. They are not necessarily new. But it seems that both the old and new have come together to make an already complicated situation worse. Bitterness! Who could stand in the shoes of these poor and oppressed peoples and nations and not grieve? One would be bitter - from the abuses of colonialism to the present state of economic transfer (more money goes out of the poorer nations to service debt than comes in) to the particular circumstance of not having a job or having access to education or healthcare. There are so many things to be bitter about.

Let there however, be no mistake: it is not only oppressed peoples of the Third World who need healing or liberation from the evils that stand in their way to self-realization. Every human being carries one type of "resignation" or "bitterness." There are contradictions, disillusion, and false concepts of pleasure that lead most people who are thought to have gotten all that is good and can bring happiness to complain, too, that "the world is hard." In most cases it is not the poor who await an apocalyptic end of the world or a completely new beginning that will usher in a new era of authentic lifestyle that will lead to a happier end.

Never before has so much been coming to a close, so much beginning. Occasionally, one may have the impression that, yes, much is also developing in a positive direction but that, on the other hand, this world,

as it is, is a great madhouse. A world in which a society of pleasure and luxury exists next to growing poverty, a world of wars, of natural catastrophes that visit us more and more frequently, not to mention a world in which there are clear signs of cultural decline, in which there are losses in insight and wisdom. Never before have there been so many unstable people, so many addicts, so many broken relationships, troubled children, misery – and, paradoxically, the demoralization of an affluent society.^{ccv}

Why should any one be surprised that the suicide rate is so much high in the developed and industrialized world than in the poorer nations? Who would believe that some people spend thousands of dollars yearly as well as great number of sleepless nights as a result of overweight? The number of broken families and depressed neighborhoods has continued to rise in the developed world. There may be more miserable street kids, single mothers, and abandoned old people languishing in retirement or old people's homes in the developed world than anywhere in the developing and underdeveloped nations. Abandoned old parents are undoubtedly bitter. People discriminated against on account of color, religion, and race must be bitter. Here the Third Millennium Church has a great role to play - to heal the broken- hearted, the abandoned, the poor, the oppressed, the abused, and exploited masses of the people all over the world.

Evangelization must culminate in healing the wounds of misery brought about by selfishness and lack of love. The field of missionary activity has expanded. "Mission" is no more limited to distant "pagan and primitive" nations of the world. There are "pagans" in the modern world. Most are our next-door neighbors! They need conversion and healing. "Missionizing" does not concentrate on the soul, ignoring the needs of the body and avoiding those issues - political, economic, social, or cultural - that prevent people from achieving self-fulfillment. In the past, "first proclamation" was made to "those who were far off," but today renewed proclamation has been called for in a dechristianized world.

The Church of the Future

There is no doubt that by the wounds sustained from schisms, divisions, disunity, and scandals, the image of the Church of Christ looks dented at the end of the 20th century. None of the Mainline Churches - Catholic or Protestant - is free of worrisome problems about its future. Not even the burgeoning splinter Christian Churches and movements can boast of a brighter future. With the staggering number of Christians joining the Charismatic, Pentecostal, and

Evangelical movements, is there any basis to believe that through their newfound religious faith, the Church of Christ will witness a brighter future? The unmistakable characteristic of the true followers of Christ in the Third Millennium Church must be seen "in the way they love." They must shed the "old self" that was hypocritical and unchristian. The "old self" of the old Church is the unconverted, the pagan, the unrepentant sinner, promoter of disunity as well as the selfish Christian. The "old self" sees any non-member of his group as a bitter enemy that must be destroyed in "God's name." He fights a holy war to destroy his enemies and defend the "Church of Christ" and sings to the old tune "Onward Christian Soldiers," even when no one has commissioned him a soldier of Christ. The distinguishing mark of the Church of the Third Millennium must be borne by the true followers of Christ. It must have characteristics that others do not possess. "For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?" (Matthew 5:46)

The Third Millennium Church - the Church of the Future - must be the Church of the *majority* that will accommodate all races and people irrespective of skin color and language. It is the Church of the *young* and *old*. It is a Church that places emphasis on *conversion* rather than *doctrine*. By emphasizing what is *common* to all the Christian Churches, the Church of the future will be in the position to heal the wounds of division and acrimony that have separated the Christian Churches for more than 1000 years. The model of the **Church of Tomorrow - The Third Millennium Church** - is not difficult to imagine. "Anyone who looks at what is happening can find an astonishing diversity of Christian forms of life today, in which the Church of tomorrow is already very clearly among us."^{ccvi}

The world - ancient and modern - is full of surprises. There are many such surprises in the Scriptures. What will happen on the Day of Judgment? Who are the true Disciples of Christ and who are the false prophets "who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves?" Christ tells his listeners: "By their fruits you will know them." The parable of the *workers in the vineyard* may serve as a great lesson for both the Old and the New Christian Churches and their leaders: "On receiving their pay they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.' It is not only that. "Many who are first will be last, and the last first." Greater disappointment awaits both the impious and the hypocrite:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.' (Matthew 7:21-23)

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^{cciii} cf. Op. cit. p. 17

^{cciv} *ibid* p. 18

^{ccv} “*Salt of the Earth*” – *The Church at the End of the Millennium*, op. Cit.

^{ccvi} *ibid*.