

# PARTICIPATION OF A NATION IN CRISIS IN THE UNIVERSAL MISSION OF CHRIST

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At the outset, I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the privilege that I received in having been invited to speak before you during this celebration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith on a topic that is deeply enrooted in my being, namely, the participation of our nation, a nation in crisis, in the universal mission of Christ.

Whatever I shall share with you today is the fruit of several years of personal reflection on my own vocation and of participation in the search of my own congregation for our vocation in the world today. I claim no other authority in this paper than the thoughts and insights resulting from discussion, communal reflection and dialogue with those with whom I have had the privilege of studying the demands upon us Christians to live the universal mission of Christ.

I presume that we are all convinced of the prime value of the good news of Christ for every human person and of the urgency that we do our bit to bring over this good news to peoples living beyond our national boundaries. But I would like to clarify some ideas that I am using as my starting point in this paper. I would like to explain particularly what I mean by the universal mission of Christ and by our nation in crisis.

The universal mission of Christ is the total mandate that Christ gave to his apostles before he left our world to take his place "at the right hand of his Father". It is the mandate that results from the authority given to Christ by his Father in heaven and on earth, namely: "Go and make disciples of all nations." (Matt. 28:19). This mandate, in effect, coincides with

the covenant call reported in Genesis as given by God to Adam and Eve in other words, from the beginning of creation: "Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it..." (Gen. 1:28) and later to Abraham,

. . . leave your country, your kinsmen and your father's house and go to a country that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you and make your name so great it shall be used in blessings. (Gen. 12:1-2).

Whereas until some years ago we believed that this discipleship consists in giving or handing over the Christian message to a people or even as the implanting of the Cross of salvation, today we begin to understand better and better that God reveals himself and his plan to all peoples of all nations even as it has been the experience of peoples throughout the history of salvation which is recorded for us in Scripture. That is why, missiologists today speak of the mission of the Church as the participation in the task of all peoples to discern God's message to and God's plan for them in their own beliefs, their mores, their hierarchy of human values, their own native worship and ritual so as to bring them to the discovery of the dynamic presence of the risen Christ among them and among all men. We find it understandable therefore that to initiate discipleship of Christ or evangelization is to initiate a continuing dialogue between Christians and other peoples during which dialogue the process of purification of the beliefs and the values of the peoples as continuing Christ's message will take place, so that both the Christian messenger and the indigenous peoples will discover the presence of Christ in every human situation and in every human community.

The second clarification I need to make is my meaning of our nation in crisis. I am referring to the continuing realization of our people that our present institutions of government, business and economic enterprises, social relationships in the family or the conglomeration of families, kin and friends that is the society, our educational system, our religious and ecclesiastical institutions, have become ineffectual in bringing about the welfare of the larger sector of our population, whose welfare we mean when we speak of the common welfare. I also refer to the continuing unrest, up till now ineffective, against these institutions which hopes to provoke a new social order that will bring about effectively and dynamically the long overdue "liberty and justice for all."

My thesis is that within the setting of our national crisis and of our growing realization that every people and every nation must discover the latent good news of Christ in their own personal and national life, we Filipino Christians are called upon to participate in this universal mission of the Church.

### THE CALL TO PARTICIPATION

Note that I start from the fact that we are called upon to participate in Christ's universal mission. On this thesis hinges my conviction that Filipinos today will and do experience the call to move out of their country, their family and social group to peoples of other nations so as to render service in the latter's authentic search for Christ today. If Christ's good news and his abiding presence for peoples of other nations.

The realization of this value and of the urgency of the service to bring this value to others is the proper setting that Christ uses to invite the Christian to participate in his mission. But can this be an experience in our country today, when the need is for us to achieve our national identity and to consolidate our strengths so as to minimize the inhibiting effects of our weaknesses and our limitations as a people?

My answer is the very fact that there are Filipino men and women who respond to this call proves the reality of such a vocation. This experience should not surprise us, neither should we find this anomalous, for as the Vatican II document *Ad Gentes* (The Missionary Activity of the Church) states:

**The members of the Church are impelled to carry on such missionary activity by reason of the love with which they love God and by which they desire to share with all men the spiritual goods of both this life and the life to come. (Ch. 1:7)**

Since our society has experienced the proclamation of the good news, since we have accepted it and have since grown into a society attempting these past four hundred years to live from and by that good news, our society has become like the well-prepared ground for the sowing of the seed that is the call to share in Christ's mission. However, I grant that our society is not uniformly penetrated by the gospel of Christ. It is only normal therefore that the call of Christ for this participation will be experienced by Christians in such communities, rather than in others, where Christianity has penetrated more or less effectively. Without discounting the probability and even the

fact that in the less developed Christian communities Christ can call some of the members to this vocation, what I want to stress is that for these latter communities, the main and the urgent task is their internal development both as human and as Christian communities. *Ad Gentes* supports this contention when it says:

**Since the particular church is bound to represent the universal Church as perfectly as possible, let it realize that it has been sent to those also who are living in the same territory with it, and who do not yet believe in Christ. (Ch. III:20)**

Over and above the call experienced by individual persons to participate in Christ's mission is the call experienced by human groups within the society or by the society as a whole. In the Philippines, these three dimensions of the missionary vocation fall within our experience. In 1965, when we celebrated the fourth centennial of the Christianization of our country, the Philippine hierarchy verbalized the experience of such a call in our society when they created the Foreign Mission Society of the Philippines. His Eminence Julio R. Cardinal Rosales, speaking for the Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines, declared:

**Desirous to fulfill our divine commission to "preach the Gospel to every creature", we, the Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines, herewith declare our firm determination to share the light of the Faith with our less fortunate neighbors. It is our conviction that we as a Christian Nation have reached a mature stage in our four centuries of development and that we are prepared to assume the responsibilities of such maturity. We, therefore, proclaim officially our intention to undertake a national effort to orient our people to the Missions. To achieve this end and to express in the concrete our gratitude to God for the gift of our Faith we organize the Foreign Mission Society of the Philippines.**

While I cannot subscribe to the expression of this proclamation in its entirety, particularly to its undertones of condescension towards the non-Christian peoples, I cannot but feel happy about the declaration of the official Church in our country of a legitimate Christian experience. This Foreign Mission Society of the Philippines as well as the missionary and the religious missionary congregations in our country provide us with the organized possibilities for effective participation in the universal mission of the Church and of Christ.

### PARTICIPATION OF A NATION IN CRISIS

One apprehension that our people have whenever someone is called upon to volunteer for the foreign missions is the consequent dearth of people who can work effectively for the development and the Christianization of our country. But we need not be anxious that a mass exodus of capable Christians from our country will take place. The call to share in the universal mission of Christ will never lead to a mass exodus. In God's own plan of salvation, this is not meant to be. The call of the Christian is basically that of service oriented towards his local Christian community. Every people must grow to full Christian maturity so that the members of every Christian community can initiate their own contact with Christ and with the Father within their own culture, their own human institutions and their own situations. From among them therefore should arise Christian ministers and leaders who will initiate this contact. But because no one person or one human community can be its own healer or its own exclusive architect of human relations and social services, God wills all Christians of all times and from all countries to assist in the bringing about of God's Kingdom among peoples in other countries. From this standpoint, we can perceive a double aspect of the Christian task, namely that of internal development of the community and of external development. By this I mean that the task of the Christian can be either to contribute his share in the building of his own Christian community or in the building of the Christian community of other peoples who eventually become his own people, too. However, the greater majority of Christians will be called for service in their own local community. Only a minority will be called upon for service outside their own local communities.

Even from a psychological aspect, this call will be the experience of a minority. The call to be a missionary is the call to a specific way of life and to a specific form of service. Persons who are called to this life are those who possess certain psychological capacities and personality characteristics that will insure integration with peoples of other cultures and other nationalities as the prerequisites to effective service. I do not wish to be misunderstood at this point, I do not imply by any means that the missionary is necessarily superior to other human persons. I am trying to bring home the point that today, more than in the not too distant past, the demands on a foreigner who desires to render service in another country are such that he must possess specific psychological capacities to be

able to render effective service which capacities need not be required of him who works within his own local community. The foreign missionary is expected to possess the capacity and the readiness to integrate with a community of another culture. He must possess the dynamic attitudes of readiness to learn, to listen, to take second place rather than the limelight, to wait until such a time when he will be called upon to render a service rather than to give in to his eagerness to initiate a service that is alien to the community's way of life or a service for which the people are not ready. The vocation to be a foreign missionary presupposes a person's capacity to render one or another service with efficiency and effectively, not in a spirit of competition with the members of the community where he is sent, but as a complementary function. Missionary service presupposes, too, that the living out of a collaboration in the universal mission of Christ can assume the form of service towards the humanization of a community, hence, a service of human and community development. But the missionary performs his service from this starting point that he wants to live out Christ's good news in this service. The missionary is, first and last, always and at all times, a messenger of the good news of Christ. His service of human or community development is the channel or the diving board for effective evangelization. When we consider the highly developed countries where the gospel has not yet been effectively proclaimed, as in Japan or Nationalist China, then we can understand that the missionary need not be a development worker because what he will be asked for is effective evangelization.

While it is true that we need all our capable and generous Christians to help resolve our own crisis situation, we have to consider that even in the secular sphere of our national life, we are daily confronted with the urgency that we cannot live our life as a people in isolation from the rest of the world. The political philosophy of isolationism has become ridiculous today. International relations are called for in the political, scientific, trade, financial, military and professional spheres of human existence. No country, in fact, was thoroughly or absolutely isolated from outside relations and influences, not even the People's Republic of China, much less the Latin American countries. To live as a nation today is to live in relation with other nations. To the extent that one nation refuses to open itself to this situation to that extent is its progress stunted and its destiny stifled. It is interesting to note that this tendency to isolationism is the experience of underdeveloped nations for

whom, more than for others, the impact of international relation can spell either progress or disaster. Hence, if in the secular spheres of human and national existence, international relations are part and parcel of becoming man and of becoming community, it is not surprising then, that in the theological reality, the unfolding of the history of salvation, the totality of the Christian vocation is expressed in its universal dimensions.

**Missionary activity is closely bound up even with human nature itself and its aspirations. For by manifesting Christ, the Church reveals to men the real truth about their condition and their whole calling, since Christ is the source and model of that redeemed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity and a peaceful spirit, to which they all aspire. Christ and the Church, which bears witness to Him by preaching the Gospel, transcend every peculiarity of race or nation and therefore cannot be considered foreign anywhere to anybody. (Ad Gentes, Ch. I:8).**

To be fully human and to be fully Christian is to be in relationships with other Christians and other human persons of whatever nationality or creed. To become fully a nation, is to come into relationships with other nations and other human groups. Our Christian vocation calls on us, not only to live and to let live, but to be persons to persons and human community to human communities. It is both significant and undeniable that the fate of our world is often decided on the international chessboards by a handful of persons who, unless they try to be persons to each other, in mutual acceptance of diversities and of differences, can only project their mistrust of each other and their selfish interests and thus bring about international catastrophes. Through all these human relationships, the perception of Christ's gospel message is pivotal.

But must the Filipino play a role in the universal mission of the Church? And why not? is my response. We play a role in the field of international relations. We have and will continue to have diplomatic missions, participation in international experiences for our professionals, our agricultural workers, our scientists, our economists, our financiers, our labor groups. Why not in the task of the Church? One service that the Filipino renders today on the plane of international relations is his ease in bridging the gap between two hemispheres. We can only make up our minds to exploit our value in this role because I can foresee that within a short span of time, our younger generation who will be tomorrow's leaders and profes-

sionals and missionaries will find more difficulty in integration with different nationalities because they possess a sharper national identity. The more we sharpen national identities, the more we heighten cultural differences, the more we are prone to cultural shocks and the less easily we can benefit from trans-cultural experiences. The Filipino of today who is called upon to participate either in international relations or experiences or in the universal mission of Christ and his Church, comes equipped with the capacity for integration into other cultures and other nationalities because it is not too long ago that we had, as a nation, to integrate into the other cultures that tried to penetrate our culture. Although we may regret that we are neither thoroughly Asian nor, thank God, thoroughly Western, we have a facility for becoming a world citizen. On the other hand, we can identify with the countries and the peoples of the Third World, because we ourselves are undergoing the struggle for national maturity and for world recognition as a nation in the world of nations. For this reason, the Filipino foreign missionary cannot be the one who wishes to escape the service of his countrymen in their struggle to reform our existing order or in the establishment of a new social order. Rather, he is the one who has identified himself with the pains and the humiliations of all underdeveloped peoples, conscious of the reality that all men are brothers to each other and that Christ is present among us to make this brotherhood blossom under the Fatherhood of God.

Today, more than at any other time in our national history, our experience of being called upon to share in the universal mission of Christ is most enriching and most fulfilling. During this crisis situation, the Christian Filipino who seeks to respond to a foreign missionary vocation will be taken to task by our people. He will be confronted by the various needs of our people and by the various possibilities of equally fulfilling and equally valuable services that he can render to one people. In this conflict, he will find the opportunity to discern what his true vocation is, what his place in the history of man and of Christianity is and his strength will lie in the fact that by responding to Christ's call he is living a mystery of love and of hope by which he submits to a reality greater than himself which rules the destiny of persons and of nations. He can find comfort in the thought that there will be no mass



exodus among our countrymen for missionary service brings neither economic security nor comfort to the missionary.

If we can speak of the psychology of a nation, I can say that much that it is good for ourselves as a nation in crisis today is to know that we are not alone in this world. That while we need the help of other nations to become ourselves, other peoples, too, can benefit from our services to help them become themselves. It is decidedly valuable for us to know that we are helping to realize the fulness of Christianity, the coming of God's kingdom, a task not meant for the distant future, but for today. God's Kingdom will not come by itself in the remote future unless it comes today. The reality that we are all one family under God's fatherhood cannot be postponed until all nations will have achieved fulness of maturity and self-reliance. We are a people dependent on one another for our maturation and for our total Christianization. Just as in the development of the human personality it is wholesome to face the reality that we have strengths and capabilities which give us the ease in initiating relationships, in the same way it is equally wholesome for us to know that we have to accept our limitations and weaknesses so that we can graciously accept help when help be needed. In this tension of being capable and of having limitations and in its resolution, the human person matures and becomes his true self. Being-community for the human person is necessarily constitutive of himself.

For the Christian Filipino, therefore, the experience of participating in the work of the universal Church is as valuable as working for our own country. For the Filipino is to strive not only to consolidate his forces towards the achievement of national identity, but equally important for him is to awaken to the realization that to be Filipino is to belong to an international world, and to be Christian is to be a brother to all men.

### CONCLUSION

During this commemoration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, we find the appropriate occasion to seriously reflect on our responsibility to participate in the universal mission of our Church. I find no better impetus among our

people to live this participation, than to give full support and encouragement to those of us who will be and are called to spend our lives in the service of Christ outside our country and among peoples of other nations. We can only be fully Church when we can say in truth that we share in the apostolic mandate to make disciples of all nations. While we do this, we shall be enriched by our experience of solidarity with other nations, for it is a valid human experience that we can be conscious of another nation and another people when we have relationships with individual persons of that country and that nation.

**In order that this missionary zeal may flourish among those in their own homeland, it is very fitting that the young churches should participate as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the Church, and send their own missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world, even though they themselves are suffering from a shortage of clergy. For their communion with the universal Church will be somehow brought to perfection when they themselves take an active part in missionary zeal towards other nations. (Ad Gentes, Ch. III:20)**

To become a foreign missionary is to answer a call: God calls whom he chooses. In the last analysis, it is God who calls for it is God who saves. But we can create the climate that will enhance the blossoming of this call. One thing we can be assured of that in our country today. Let us give then our support and our encouragement, while seeing to it that they do not alienate themselves from our people and from our Christian community. Let us offer them a worthy preparation for this service so that when they go out as the ambassadors of our Church and of our country, their effectivity will be found in their readiness to love as Christ loved, to the point of laying down their lives for their friends in their country of adoption.

“Missions” is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the gospel are sent out by the Church and go forth into the whole world to carry out the task of preaching the gospel and planting the Church among the peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. (*Ad Gentes*, no. 6)