

REPORT
ON
THE INTERNATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS
(December 2-7, 1979)*

The International Mission Congress, held in Manila, attracted six cardinals, headed by Cardinal Agnelo Rossi, Prefect of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Evangelization, and 200 delegates and observers from all parts of the world. It began Sunday, December 2, in the morning at the Manila Metropolitan Cathedral with Cardinal Rossi as main celebrant and Bishop Mariano G. Gaviola, Secretary-General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) as preacher, and ended Friday, December 7, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the Redemptorist Church at Baclaran, Parañaque, Metro Manila. The International Mission Congress was the first to be held in Asia. It came at a time when the center of gravity is slowly shifting to the Third World" (Bishop Patrick D'Souza of Varanasi, India).

1. Celebration

Official delegates to the Congress were National Directors of Pontifical Mission Aid Societies of various countries, Chairmen of the Episcopal Commission on Missions for various episcopal conferences and Presidents and secretaries-general of episcopal conferences affiliated with the FABC. They were joined by other Philippine Bishops and theologians who served as resource persons.

The purpose of this Congress as spelled out by Bishop Gaudencio Rosales was:

- to discuss contemporary orientations in the Church's "Theology of Mission" with the hope of clarifying and deepening the theological foundation of the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies; or, as Fr. C. G. Arévalo stated, "put into a synthetic vision what 'new' thinking on mission has been done in the past 15 years;"
- to renew the motivation for the Church's primary task which is evangelization;
- to lay down renewed guidelines for policies and planning for the immediate future of the Church's missionary effort.

*This report was submitted to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines by the Committee on the IMC.

In the afternoon of the first day the Congress started work with the keynote address of Bishop Patrick D'Souza.

Every evening at the close of the day's activities a liturgical celebration was held at the St. Vincent de Paul Church in San Marcelino across the Congress site (Adamson University and St. Theresa's College). Perhaps these celebrations were the real highlights of the Congress together with the celebration at the Cathedral and at the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Baclaran. The Mass for China, the "Indian mode" Mass — the most colorful of the major celebrations —, for the Mass for the Peoples of Asia, the Mass with our Lady of Antipolo, and the final Misa ng Bayan Pilipino were particularly meaningful.

After the masses, public conferences were held at the St. Theresa's auditorium. Bishop Patrick D'Souza spoke on "Important Tasks of Evangelization Today," Stephen Cardinal Kim of Seoul, Korea spoke on "Jesus' Evangelization to the Poor," Vicente Cardinal Enrique y Tarazona spoke (in Spanish) on "The Holy Spirit and Mission."

The main officers of the Congress, outside Cardinal Rossi were Bishop Gaudencio B. Rosales as convenor and director, and Fr. C. G. Arevalo, S.J., in charge of the Theological Conference. The work of Sister Thelma Peña, D.C., Msgr. Ted J. Buhain Msgr. Francisco Tantoco and Sister Constancio Pacis, C.F.I.C., was invaluable.

The core of the Congress — the theological conference — was a series of general sessions, including a "round table discussion," and nine different workshops organized around the Congress theme, "The Good News of God's Kingdom to the Peoples of Asia."

The nine workshops during the four-day Congress were: 1) the theology of mission, especially for Asia; 2) local churches, cultures and communities; 3) inter-religious dialogue and collaboration; 4) Mission and the task of human development, liberation, and the promotion of justice; 5) basic Christian Communities and local ministries; 6) prayer, missionary spirituality and formation; 7) co-responsible evangelization; 8) mission and education (formal and non-formal); 9) media and evangelization.

2. Key Ideas

A decisive turning point in the mission history of the Third World has been reached, declared the delegates. "There is no return to the past, neither to past mission theories, nor to past mission methods, nor to past mission goals."

"It is our belief, confirmed by the exchanges of this Congress," they declared, "that with God's grace this re-evangelization and renewal of our local churches is a promise and earnest of a new age of mission. Through it the Holy Spirit, we are convinced, is readying them for a true renewal of mission in Asia and throughout the world."

Mission, the delegates pointed out, no longer refers to foreign missionaries and funding alone, but to the responsibility of every Catholic to be a credible witness to the faith in all aspects of his or her life.

"Mission," Congress delegates emphasized, is no longer, can no longer be, a one-way movement from the "older Churches" to the "younger Churches," from the Churches of the old Christendom to the Churches in the colonial lands. Every local Church is a missionary Church, responsible for its mission and co-responsible for the mission of all its sister Churches. "Every local Church, according to its possibilities, must share whatever its gifts are, for the needs of the other Churches for mission throughout mankind, for the life of the world."

Henceforth every local Church is missionary, and the flow of "mission" is no longer from Europe and North America to the "missions," mainly from the local (young) Churches to their own surroundings. The flow of personnel, ideas, theology (e.g., the theology of liberation), liturgical initiatives, is two-way: the coming-to-be of a truly World Church. (Incidentally, this same theme was developed by noted theologian Karl Rahner, S.J., in a public address earlier this year, namely that with Vatican II the Church was henceforth to become **THE WORLD CHURCH**. This may prove the most significant moment in Church history since the transition to Greco-Western culture, the transition to actualization of a truly World Church, with its diversity of cultures and peoples). One of the theologians present (from abroad) remarked at the end of the Congress: Henceforth the diversity of cultures in the Church is an accepted programme; no one can deny that the task of mission now is inculturation. The unanimity on this is evident and inescapable.

Moreover, the Mission Congress affirmed, "The Spirit of the Lord calls each people and each culture to its own fresh and creative response to the Gospel. Each local Church has its own vocation in the one history of salvation, in the one Church of Christ. In each local Church each people's history, each people's culture, meanings and values, each people's traditions are taken up, not diminished nor destroyed, but celebrated and renewed, purified if need be, and fulfilled in the life of the Spirit."

Two dimensions of Asian life heavily influenced the thinking of the delegates: the degrading poverty and oppression that dominate the lives of most Asians, and the fact that Catholics constitute only one percent of the total population. Such a minority position, unique throughout the world, inspires a deep humility.

The assembly of representative Catholic clergy, religious and laity involved in mission work/aid from some 40 countries and every continent, recounted the various tasks of re-evangelization and renewal which the future demands:

- the continued building up of the local Church as the focus of evangelization with dialogue as the essential mode, through a more resolute, more creative and yet truly discerning and responsible inculturation;
- inter-religious dialogue undertaken in all seriousness;
- solidarity and sharing with the poor and the advocacy of human rights;
- the creation of "grassroots ecclesial communities" with structures of genuine co-responsibility and ministries of charism and service;
- the fostering and evangelizing education in schools and by non-formal education modes, and through an adequate media-ministry.

From the evaluation sheets that were handed in by the participants in the Congress the IMC seems to have met and even surpassed the expectations. In his concluding message, the Papal Envoy Agnelo Cardinal Rossi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples expressed himself in the following terms: "This Congress has been a proof of unity, Christian fraternity and loving fidelity to the Church. And through it a most important step in the history of civilization has undoubtedly been taken here in Manila. Just as in the case of Latin America, so also Asia is emerging in the Catholic Church as an active missionary force."

One of the most salient features of the Congress was the collaboration of some religious orders and congregations of men and women, and at least 3 secular institutes. It was really a joint effort of many different groups and people.

There was another less known aspect of the Congress; between 20 to 70 parishioners and students kept vigil before the Blessed Sacrament at Adamson University chapel all during the working hours of the Congress, and contemplative communities of men and women throughout Asia kept 24 hour prayer-vigils from the beginning to the end of the Congress.

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3. The Closing

The Congress ended on December 7 with the "Mission-mandate" given to 63 Filipino priests, sisters and laypeople "going on mission" abroad in 1980. They came from 12 congregations of women, (39 sisters) 5 congregations of men (17 priests and 4 brothers) and 3 laypersons.

The mission-sending ceremony took place during the "Misa ng Bayang Pilipino" celebrated at 10 a.m. at the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Baclaran. The main celebrant was Jaime L. Cardinal Sin. The new missionaries were given their mission cross symbolizing the beginning of their work, the start of their task to bring the Good News of the Kingdom to the peoples of the whole world. "Go therefore," they were told, "proclaim the good News, make disciples of all nations."

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4. Excerpts from the Final Message

We have presented above a summary of the main ideas developed during the Congress. It seems worthwhile to copy here some paragraphs from the Congress' Message itself.

"It is with immense joy and hope, despite what seems like the gathering darkness of our time, that we foresee the dawning of this "new age of mission." We do this, not in any spirit of triumphalism or vain glory. Rather we believe in the perennial youthfulness the Spirit gives to the Church. For by His action and charisms He constantly quickens God's holy people to new life and new initiatives. Our task is to follow where He leads us, to discern His guidance amidst the many movements of our age, and to second it with all the courage and fidelity at our command.

This task of renewal of our local churches in the Gospel and by the power of the Spirit, we must admit, still has a long way to traverse. The discussions of this Congress have made us see with even greater evidence how much remains to be done in all the crucial areas of evangelization we tried to take up in our reflection. In our consensus papers we have developed this agenda more fully.

It suffices for the present to indicate here the continued building up of the local church as the focus of the task of evangelization today, with dialogue as its essential mode, through a more resolute, more creative and yet truly discerning and responsible inculturation; through inter-religious dialogue undertaken in all seriousness; through solidarity and sharing with the poor and the advocacy of human rights; through the creation of "grassroots ecclesial communities" with structures of genuine corresponsibility and ministries of charism and service; through the fostering of evangelizing education in schools and by non-formal education modes, and through and adequate media-ministry.

A more thorough-going renewal is called for catechesis, in the knowledge and study of the Scriptures, in our methods of formation for ministries, in the fostering of family life within contemporary society, in forms and processes of our institutional structures, in the life-style of our clergy and other leaders, in the hierarchy of values we set for ourselves and our communities, and the like.

This congress has reawakened our awareness of what mission today and in the future, especially in Asia, demands of us. It has shown us more clearly what ongoing efforts and labors it will ask of us for many years to come. For we have reached a decisive turning point in the mission history of the Third World. There is no return to the past, neither to the mission theories, nor to past mission methods, nor to past mission goals.

We commit ourselves to these tasks of re-evangelization and renewal, and to the new tasks of mission which the future demands of us, with a resoluteness born of our confidence in the promise of Jesus who told us that He would be with us all days until the end of time . . .

We close this Congress, which has been for all of us a source of joy and grace, on the eve of the Feast of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, patroness of this archdiocese and patroness of this entire land. We recall with gratitude the role She played in the evangelization of this Christian people, and in faith and devotion that is theirs today: in almost every home her image is found, in almost every corner of this nation her shrines are placed. We turn to her during this Advent season, asking her to pray that the Good News her Son brought to the world may reach more and more hearts, and that the fulfillment of His prayer that all men may be one might be more fully realized in our time."