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*IS NORTH AMERICA A MISSION FIELD?
WHAT DOES THE WORLD CHURCH SAY?*

**THE CHALLENGES OF
EVANGELIZATION IN AMERICA:
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS***

John B. Kauta

"Is North America a Mission Field? What Does the World Church Say?" These questions are directly related to evangelization, or mission. As a Ugandan Roman Catholic priest working in the United States for the past twenty-five years, I have witnessed first-hand the problems facing Christianity in America. My comments are not intended as a negative criticism, but rather to provide a particular insight to the problems impacting evangelization/mission in the United States. My plan is to raise questions in the minds of the readers, always being well aware of the complexities of religion, politics, and culture in this multi-faceted country.

The Christian Church is by definition a community of those who accept the Good News of Christ Jesus and seek together to build the King-

The use of "America" in this article is being applied to the United States of America. We recognize that other nations in North America, like Canada and Mexico, along with nations in Central and South America are also a part of the "Americas" as more precisely defined.

dom of God, while living within it. Thus, the Church is by nature is missionary.

Evangelization for Christians is trinitarian and ecclesial. Through it, people are in touch with the Trinity, the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.¹ Evangelization is a way of revealing God's saving grace through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.² It is a way of proclaiming that Jesus is Prophet and Savior³ - a proclamation of salvation, truth, and a new morality in Jesus.⁴

For Christians, evangelization – the promotion of the Gospel – attempts to transform cultures and peoples, affecting their personal and collective conscience and activities. Documents such as “Evangelii Nuntiandi”⁵ and “Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church”⁶ confirm this concept of evangelization.

Evangelization by word and deed and by example and witness is the objective of Christian Churches in imitation of Christ. The Lord Jesus himself asked his disciples to proclaim the Gospel, beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, extending to the ends of the earth, baptizing and proclaiming repentance.⁷ Their way of living was to be an effective means of transforming the world; they were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.⁸

The disciples obeyed their master. The Acts of the Apostles is filled with the stories of Paul and other missionaries of the early Church being prompted by the Holy Spirit⁹ to travel from Palestine to Asia Minor and Europe. In the process, sometimes at the risk of persecution, they planted churches and converted nations and cultures.

The model of the pioneer missionaries was an inspiration throughout the centuries for the Church to become global -- a Christendom -- with its many cultural and ethnic members contributing to her growth, focusing its attention on Christian expansionism. The Church became a territorial occupant of new lands, always challenging indigenous cultures. It was often customary for people to assume the religion of their leader -- *cuius regio, eius religio*. Unfortunately, in the course of history, politics and theological differences fractured, rather than unified, the Church.

Historical manuals, such as those authored by Kenneth Scott Latourette, Andrew F. Walls, and Philip Jenkins, document the success of the Church. As the Church membership and power was decreasing in Europe (referred to as “The North”), it was growing in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and other places (“The South”). Walbert Bühlmann demonstrates how the world Christian population has shifted over the past 100 years from The North to The South as a result of evangelization.¹⁰

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Years	1900	1970	1980	2000
The North	85%	57.4%	51%	39.8%
The South	15%	42.6%	49%	60.2%
Percentage of Christians	100%	100%	100%	100%

Jenkins draws our attention to the shift in the balance of Christians in the world. By the year 2050 he projects that only one Christian in five will be non-Latino and white, and that the center of gravity of Christianity will have shifted firmly to the southern hemisphere. Toby Lester in "Oh, Gods"¹¹ interviewed Jenkins and attributes this statement to him:

We need to take the new Christianity very seriously. It is not just Christianity plus drums. If we're not careful, fifty years from now we may find a largely secular North defining itself against a largely Christian South. This will have its implications.

Regretfully, the approach used by some evangelizers in Third World countries prior to the 1960s generally merited condemnation. Some of them were identified with colonialism, as is evident in current literature portraying the reaction of colonized peoples to Christianity. *Missions on Trial* by Bühlmann would be interesting reading. Force was used to convert people without any effort to inculturate the gospel. They forgot that Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us and that he came to give us an abundance of life.¹² Paul states that God became one of us to share his plan of salvation.¹³ People such as Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili were criticized as innovators. The intimate transformation of authentic cultural values of people was not successful; these values were not integrated into Christianity. There was no dialogue between the Gentiles and Christians.¹⁴

The American Christian Church was initially established as a result of persecution of some Christians and Christian religions in Europe. The new Christians recognized the need of evangelization in their new land. As a result, at one time America was considered a Christian country. Is there room for evangelization in America today? Are we still Christian? If so, how do we grow? How do we keep from shrinking, considering, for example, that only 41% of Catholics go to church regularly? Where are the other 59%? We dare presume that every Christian Church in North America senses the change in commitment and practice. If Christianity is to be viable in America, it is essential that evangelization take place in our country because of the many challenges affecting the practice of religion. This call for re-evangelization is no easy task, given the prevailing cultural, political, and religious atmosphere.

CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIANITY IN NORTH AMERICA

Pluralism

America is a melting pot of cultures and religions. With immigration, new religious movements from Africa, Asia, and Latin America have become competitors for the souls of the faithful. From Africa, we cite, for instance, The Celestial Church of Christ based in Nigeria, The International Central Gospel Church (Ghana), and The Zion Christian Church with its South African roots. From Asia hail Buddhism, El Shaddai (Philippines), Hinduism, Jainism, Shintoism, the Unification Church of Reverend Sung Myung Moon, to name but a few. The Brazilian Pentecostal (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God—IURD) and the Mexican Light of the World Church have been imported from Latin America. The proliferation of new religions presents a challenge to mainline Christian Churches.

How does Christianity deal with this confrontation of pluralism of religions? Shall Christianity consider them a threat to its very existence? How does one express the uniqueness of Christianity in relationship to religions which originated in Asia? Some Christian authors, such as John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, have questioned the uniqueness of Christianity and regard it just as any other religion—another path to God. Jacques Dupuis, a Catholic theologian, was called to task by the Vatican for his teachings on the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions. The 2000 document “Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church,” issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has been a subject of much discussion among Christian theologians. What is the correct response to the claim of Christianity of being the only channel of salvation?

Given that we advocate respect for different faiths and recognize that we are all “God’s People,” a theological and scriptural term of endearment endorsed by the Second Vatican Council, is it possible to justify evangelization of other denominations and religions in the United States of America?

Central to this question is the idea, on the one hand, of knowing the truth, claiming the truth, and wanting to share it with others, and yet, on the other hand, respecting others, especially those who do not want to be evangelized. This poses a quandary for those who wish to embrace evangelization. Theologians and theology students are faced with this dilemma.

In his article, “Christ Among the Religions,” Avery Dulles discussed the following models vis-a-vis pluralism: *coercion, convergence, pluralism*

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*and toleration.*¹⁵

Certainly coercion, which Avery Dulles believes has been predominant throughout history, is untenable. We cannot force people to accept our religion. The Crusades and other religious wars have taught us that bitter lesson.

Is the model of convergence acceptable? Is the religious impulse essentially the same in all peoples? Do all religions agree in essence and differ only superficially?

Will Christianity accept plurality, that is, that each religion reflects certain aspects of the Divine and that all religions are partially true but need to be supplemented and counterbalanced by the elements of truth found in each other?

Would Christian tolerance of other religions be misunderstood as a rejection of the uniqueness of Christianity?

Even though Christians believe it is their responsibility to evangelize members of other non-Christian religions, they must approach these individuals with sensitivity without diminishing the uniqueness of Christianity. A reflection on Karl Rahner's concepts of Anonymous Christianity and the Supernatural Existential might be helpful in acknowledging that God's salvific will cannot be contained by human thought and action, but rather that grace extends to nature and the historical dimensions of human beings.¹⁶

Freedom of Religion

The concept of freedom of religion, a basic tenet of American democracy, may have contributed to the decline of fervor among Christians. It is a basic Christian principle that all individuals must follow their conscience. This calls us to question, extreme as it may seem, whether evangelization is incompatible with liberty. We believe it is not. On one hand, freedom of religion may appear to inhibit the actions of evangelizers; on the other hand, it encourages evangelization. Therefore, the concept of freedom of religion does not prohibit Christians from being proactive in their efforts to recruit converts.

Cultural values

The increasing cultural secularization in America is related to a change in the American value system which has occurred in the last half century, often undermining the call to the gospel. Secular values presented by our culture compete directly with the teachings of Christ.

A caveat: Christian ministries and churches are increasingly threat-

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ened with a loss of their tax-exempt status if they dare question changes in our cultural values. What an affront to evangelization! It is necessary to focus our attention on some of the value systems which have affected our country and which may have impacted our boldness in proclaiming the gospel -- evangelization. America indeed has become a mission territory.

The power and the wealth of America tempts Americans to believe that America is entitled to control the world. When America as a world power exerts its force in the world, however, it can marginalize other cultures and polarize people, setting them at odds with the Christian ideal of American leadership as a humble servant. Issues such as the Iraq War or America's enduring identity as the world superpower conflict with Christian ideals of world peace and are contrary to the democratic ideal, particularly when America perpetuates an "I am right -- you are wrong" philosophy.

At this point in time, evangelization is most crucial. Christ claimed that the Spirit of God was on him and that he was sent to liberate the oppressed.¹⁷ The gospels speak of humble service.¹⁸ Christians should not lord it over others. The image of the child in Isaiah¹⁹ leading a lion by the hand can be a paradigm for evangelizing the American mentality in regard to its attitude towards the less powerful nations.

Materialism

America's infatuation with materialism and self-centeredness breeds a consumer culture which has widespread implications for evangelization and the American culture. The appetite for instant gratification and the quest for happiness without regard for higher pursuits of life and liberty may have contributed to a culture of greed. Everyone is after gold—everyone is chasing the golden ring. Some multi-national corporations seem bent on profits at all cost. Simply said, they erode and debase western culture, and at the same time foster contempt for it in the wider world.²⁰ Cheap labor, child labor, exploitation, oppression, and classism are some glaring defects of globalization of corporations. The film "Hotel Rwanda" is an example of the consequences of firms in search of profits without regard for human life and dignity. Multi-national corporations need to take into consideration a moral measurement of the effect they have on the life and the dignity of all those affected by their decisions, especially the poor and the most vulnerable. The dignity of the human person and his inalienable rights be raised if business executives were to change their focus from the bottom line and their golden parachutes to one which includes the welfare of others.

The gospels are all about sharing and giving.²¹ Today, as a result of materialism, the gap between the rich and the poor is ever-widening. Here

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again, we see a polarity between peoples within our society, with some individuals becoming full of themselves and judging others by a material standard, forgetting the story of Dives (the Rich Man) and Lazarus.²² Is America guilty -- does it deserve rebuke by the prophet Amos, who condemned his people for indulging in wine and lamb and sleeping on beds made of gold? Religion in the mind of the prophets is taking care of the widows and the orphans.²³ Does America do this fully? Isn't this fertile ground for mission activity?

Does the theology of the "Option for the Poor" resonate the gospel values? For some, the basis for the justification of the exploitation of the poor is the Sermon on the Mount, which proclaims poverty as a blessing.²⁴ There is no room for religion as an *opiate of the people*, as Karl Marx once claimed.

World Debt/Aid

As part of the process of evangelizing American culture, Christians must encourage America to be involved in the reduction of Third World debt, AIDS/HIV, hunger, and poverty. American Christians must reach out in charity and justice to meet the needs of others. It is not only the American Catholic bishops who have called for solidarity between Africa and the United States.²⁵ The Joint Conference of the German Churches for Development Questions and other Christian leaders, both in America and Europe, continually toot the same horn.

It is overwhelming that, in the year 2004 alone, 2.4 million Africans died of AIDS. To date AIDS has claimed approximately 17 million deaths in Africa. It is inconceivable that there are 13 million orphans in Africa. Forty (40%) percent of the population is estimated to be below the age of 18.

America has the largest economy in the world. Can more of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) be earmarked for the poor of the world?

James Traub in his article "Freedom from Want" indicates that Africa is not receiving enough U.S. aid because -- in the words of President Clinton -- there is "no effective political constituency."²⁶ Apparently votes count. We should evangelize votes! Perhaps Christians can awaken a pro-African constituency here in America.

Where is the compassion of Jesus, Who looked at the crowds and had sympathy for them because "they were like sheep without a shepherd."²⁷ Jesus accompanied and cared for his people. He walked with them. We too must have sympathy and empathy -- vital virtues for evangelization and for Christian living. It is said that Thomas Aquinas once stated "ubi amor, ibi oculus" -- literally, where there is love, there is an eye.

Morality

Abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and the marginalization of those in our utilitarian society who are not seen as producers all point to a culture of death. We see this culture justified under such banners as freedom of the individual and quality of life. This so-called freedom is at odds with natural law and the gospels. The Greeks spoke of The Logos, Reason, as implanted in every human nature. Paul speaks of conscience—the law of nature.²⁸ It seems difficult to convince some people of the concept of natural law.

Ramon Sampedro received an Oscar nomination for his role in the best foreign film. "Mar Adentro" (The Sea Inside) depicts and defends a quadriplegic struggling to be granted the right to end his life. In the film "Million Dollar Baby," when Hillary Swank became injured and was paralyzed from the neck down, Clint Eastwood acceded to her wishes to end her life. Contrary to the gospel message, portions of our society accept killing as a means of solving a problem—capital punishment, euthanasia, abortion.

Iain Torrance, in "More Than Regent's Park?" alludes to a group of students at Harvard University listening to James Wilson lecturing on courage during the Holocaust years. Wilson was amazed to find that there was no consensus among the students that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were guilty of a moral horror. Some students had actually commented, "It all depends on your perspective." Torrance further laments that today reverence, restraint, humility, a sense of limits, and the ability to listen and respond to human distress are virtues not provided by the market.²⁹ On the contrary, the market encourages moral, legal and ethical relativity.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C., recently declared that commitment to human life and dignity and the pursuit of justice and peace are not competing causes. He affirmed that, even though not all issues have equal moral claims, Christians must preach the gospel of life in every circumstance to protect those whose lives are in danger of destruction.³⁰

Racism

Our society has a double standard for ethnic minorities. America proclaims herself as the land of freedom where there is justice for all; yet her culture seems to permit racism and mistreatment of the masses, a direct challenge to gospel values and to evangelization. How many Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.s., do we need to remind us that African-Ameri-

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cans represent 25% of the nation's poor? Some believe that African-Americans are simply lazy and lack intelligence and, consequently, are responsible for their own situation.

Terry Golway, in "Return of the Know-Nothings," poses the hypothesis: Is it possible to debate immigration policies without condemning the values of those who wish to come to America?³¹ His article refers to people's attitudes towards Hispanic immigrants in contemporary America. One does not need a microscope to see the conditions in which many of these immigrants live and work. One of the publications by the Boston Theological Institute, *One Faith, Many Cultures*, discusses their plight as victims of consumerism.³²

Mian Ridge in "The Tablet" described midtown Manhattan as a winter wonderland with sumptuous shops on Fifth Avenue, stunning decorations, and ice skating at Rockefeller Center. He compared that to life on the Upper West Side -- another America where the working poor rely on charity to feed their children.³³

Both African-American and Hispanic immigrants are fleeing mainline Christian Churches and finding havens in newly founded churches where they are provided with hospitality and a warm welcome.

Through evangelization, and this again reinforces America as being a mission land, the Christian Churches have the responsibility of bringing about a change in people's prejudices. If Christianity stands idle, it becomes a social sinner. Rather, it should follow the example of Christ, who loved all humankind including sinners and tax collectors.³⁴

Feminism

Androcentrism, the movement toward gender-neutral language in the Bible, and the calls for ordination of women have helped to fractionalize Christian Churches, prompting those in the debate to reach for political labels such as "right" and "left" to describe their differences. Some Churches allow women to be ordained priests and deacons; others do not on the basis that Jesus did not do so and the fact that the priest is acting *in persona Christi*. The "right" and the "left" have an ongoing debate, and their representatives keep tugging the issues in one direction or the other. A proliferation of literature on the subject of women and the Church abounds. Women throughout the world have called for full representation in the Church and have become a force to be reckoned with in evangelization and its styles. Many women theologians are involved in the liberation of women, some of whom include Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague,

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Rosemary Ruether, and Deanna A. Thompson.

Women no longer allow themselves to be regarded as the personification of evil (Eve). They reject the patriarchal society, male dominance, and their being defined in terms of relationships to the men in their lives.

History records that women played a tremendous part in the early Church. How can we forget those women who helped Jesus through their own resources, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Dorcas/Tabitha, Phoebe and Prisca.³⁵ Women's issues and God-talk in the Church severely affect the proclamation of the Gospel and cause polarity among Christians, thereby affecting ecumenism.

Family

One hundred years ago, personal issues pertaining to family, marriage, and sex were not publicly discussed, with the exception of divorce. The Christian Churches were not faced with the issues of gays and lesbians and same-sex marriages. All these lifestyles have now become subjects for academics, mass media, school/college debates, and theological musings.

Most Christian Churches, and the public at large, are in agreement that there should be no discrimination against homosexuals and bi-sexuals. To some, however, to accept same-sex marriages would be to redefine marriage. It would be a clash with faith and Christian practice, with enormous civil and social implications for all. To these people, marriage is the unique, essential, and fundamental relationship between a man and a woman. Basing their argument on the teachings of Christianity and a reflection on human history, they see marriage as an expression of mutual love between a man and a woman, as well as a means of procreation.

To those who are faithful to the traditions of their Churches, same-sex marriages are condemned. Those who want to contract same-sex marriages consider themselves victims of discrimination when denied the opportunity to marry. Consequently, Christians in Third World countries are breaking relationships with some of the mainline Christian Churches in Europe and America. Fresh in our memory is the recent conflict in the Episcopal Church when a gay cleric was raised to the dignity of bishop. Fractions, fractions! Is there, through evangelization, a possible common Christian front in conformity with the Scriptures -- the Word of God?

American families are being destabilized by cohabitation, divorce, and overworked parents and the phenomenon of *über* mothers -- well-intentioned, rushing their children around to soccer and baseball games, swim

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meets, etc.-- often limits the quality time they have available to spend with their children.

Importantly, Christian Churches, theologians, and society at large must address the needs of contemporary families in an effort to build a society in accordance with the gospel. The Acts of the Apostles depicts the ideal Christian family as one where there is unity and sharing and devotion to God.³⁶

How can Christian Churches help to overcome the individualism and disparity which are ravaging our families? If we are to cultivate healthy families, perhaps we could adopt the African philosophy of co-operative living, best exemplified by their proverbs, for example: "I am, because we are; we are, because I am." Or the Amharic (Ethiopian) proverb: "When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion." The Sukuma of Tanzania proverb: "One knee does not bring up a child," is not very different from the clarion call sounded by Hillary Rodham Clinton when she cited an additional African proverb, popularized by Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund, "It takes a village to raise a child."³⁷ Evangelization can be the catalyst for the healthy family, the backbone of the healthy society.

Technology

It is unfortunate that science and religion have at times appeared to be rivals. It is gratifying that the situation is changing for the better. However, subjects such as embryonic and stem-cell research have pitted these disciplines against one another. It is not only the Church that wants to set boundaries on these issues: President Bush has endorsed limited embryonic and stem-cell research. According to Gerald Coleman in his article "The Embryonic Stem Cell Research Debate" in "Origins," scientists want politicians to stay out of their petri dishes.³⁸ It is when scientists take this arbitrary position that religious or faith-based opposition arises. Some Christian Churches are not opposed to technological manipulation produced in a somatic cell nuclear transfer, for instance, the regeneration of a hand. It is the production of an embryo from an ovum fertilized by human sperm in a petri dish and the attempt to clone human beings which raise moral questions.

In the classroom, creationism and evolution, the death of God, and demythologization of the Bible are debated in a way that often causes tension rather than understanding. Instead of the Bible's uniting, people are using it to create division.

Guy Consolmagno in his article "Talking to Techies" helps us to

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understand that a technical worldview is not always antithetical to religious beliefs.³⁹ Physical science and biology should, therefore, be a help in our understanding of the world and our own anthropology, as opined by John Polkinghorne:

Yet, in both science and theology, the central question is, and remains, the question of truth. We shall never attain a total grasp of it but in both disciplines we may hope for a developing understanding of it.⁴⁰

Secularization—Politics in America

It was the intention of the Founding Fathers that the State would not sponsor any religion. The American Constitution guaranteed the freedom of religion, with the Fathers themselves taking moral values for granted. The courts through their interpretation of the Constitution have had a strong influence on the increasing separation of Church and State, to the point that today religion is banned in public schools and in the public square. Displays of the Ten Commandments or the crèche or the crucifix are similarly prohibited. Politicians have become outspoken in perpetuating a growing split between Church and State, at the same time differentiating between their personal beliefs and public policy.

Mario Cuomo's speech at Notre Dame University ("Faith & Government: What Religion Demands & Pluralism Requires") detailed what has become recognized as a classic position. Governor Cuomo explained that he was not comfortable imposing his Catholic beliefs and convictions on others as a government official.⁴¹ During the recent presidential campaign, some Catholic bishops declared sanctions on John Kerry's reception of Communion because of his stance on the issues of abortion, etc. Robert W. McElroy, in his essay "Prudence, Politics and the Eucharist," claims that the turbulence surrounding the 2004 presidential election divided both Catholic bishops and the laity.⁴²

In "Catholic Politicians: For God or Country," J. Peter Nixon brings to the fore the realization that only Catholic politicians are given a litmus test for their moral values.⁴³ Isn't it important that all candidates, Democratic or Republican or other, be moral -- not just Catholics?

President Bush is considered by some to have been elected because of his stance on moral values. The Evangelicals, formerly a marginalized minority, have become identified as a "moral majority." From being apolitical in the late 1960s, the Evangelicals are now proactive and are calling on all Christians to join them.

In the opinion of Martin Marty, now is the time for us to seek spiri-

tual maturity and create a "convicted civility," thereby drawing upon our convictions to strive to show gentleness and reverence for human life and each other.⁴⁴ This helps to define the process of evangelization in America -- a mission land.

Evangelization: Pastoral Ministry/Witness

In order to effectively transform American culture and society, the Gospel should be proclaimed as a means of liberation -- an avenue for resolving the challenges facing the American Christian Churches.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council -- "The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity" and "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" -- challenge Christians to participate in the improvement of the human condition and spirituality. In their quest to apply the light of the Gospel and banish evil, they must write, they must talk, they must inspire, always sensitive to the economic, social, and political dynamics, cognizant that they are the leaven of the world.

Modern theologians, such as Karl Rahner, Walter Kasper, Jürgen Moltmann, and Johannes Metz, exhort Christians to be involved in the public square in response to the command of love of neighbor.⁴⁵ For Christians, the love of neighbor demands a commitment at the level of social politics and the courage to criticize our society when love and social justice are lacking.

The Prophets always dared to challenge their times and their peoples, liberating them from circumstances which dehumanized their dignity and relationship with God. Therefore, it is imperative for evangelization in America that there be prophets. These prophetic voices must be the salt and the light of the world -- witnesses by word and deed. Jesus enjoined his disciples to be his witnesses in the world.⁴⁶

What better way is there for Christians to reach the unchurched than to extend their hands to them in Christian love? Will the poor not come to us when we care? Will the immigrant run away from us when he knows we are there to protect him? Like Ruth, wherever they go, there we should go.⁴⁷ A quote from a Shona (African) proverb is most apropos at this juncture: "Do not scold people on a journey; a foot has no nose."

The responsibility for evangelization of America falls on all Christians, who, according to Peter, are a chosen race, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.⁴⁸

Lex Credendi; Lex Orandi

(the law of faith is the law of prayer)

The quality of preaching and vibrant liturgies can be a means of satisfying the spiritual hunger of God's people -- evangelization. Liturgy, according to the Second Vatican Council, is the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows.⁴⁹

Through participation in liturgy, humanity expresses its gratitude to God, acknowledges its guilt, and proclaims and experiences forgiveness. Liturgy assists in overcoming the alienation imposed on individuals by the excessive demands of this world. It places participants in the hands of the Creator/Greater Transcendental Power. During this sacred time, people are disposed to hear the Word preached and shared.

Why is it that some Christians are attracted to Eastern religions for their spirituality? What is missing in Christian liturgy and spirituality that some Christians are drawn to New Age, esoteric and messianic movements? Is this attraction a result of religious diversity in America or is it a rejection of Judeo/Christian teachings and lifestyles?

Varied outside factors have diluted the peoples' commitment to fulfilling their obligation to attend Sunday liturgical celebrations. Many occupations require long hours and work which is not limited to the Monday-Friday work week. Furthermore, the American consumer society encourages competition for wealth and status -- all attainable at the cost of time, energy, health and relationships, even relationships with the Church. Church attendance must compete with other pursuits such as attending sporting events, travel, television entertainment or the opportunity to do nothing at all.

John Paul II's teaching that liturgical celebrations should become more eloquent signs of Christ's presence in the world⁵⁰ is certainly pertinent for contemporary America. If Christian churches are to be viable, an effort should be made to present a liturgy which meets the needs of the particular congregation. In this way, Christ's presence can be experienced in people's lives.

Lessons from European Christianity

Once the cradle of Christendom, now Europe seems to have forsaken its religious and cultural birthrights. What has caused Europe to abandon its patrimony? Whither goes North America? The response or responses to

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this last question were the basis for the Boston Consultation.

The *raison d'être* for that gathering was to provide a forum to share experiences of the present reality of Christianity in North America in the hopes of devising ways to overcome some of its current challenges through the study of Scripture and theology. Basic to this meeting was the desire to engage our society in dialogue in order to build the City of God here on earth in preparation for the future.

Rather than being pessimistic, one must be hopeful, for that is the message of Christianity as elaborated by John Paul II.⁵¹ One should focus on the positive achievements of Christianity, and at the same time be cognizant of Christianity's place in history with all its questions and tribulations. Even though the *Book of Revelation* promises a new order in God's time,⁵² one cannot assume a triumphalistic attitude. It is the role of all Christians to prepare the world through evangelization for the eventual coming of The Kingdom.

In attempting to focus on the causes of the problems confronting American Christianity, we have only touched the tip of the iceberg. These problems, which threaten the very fabric of religion as we know it in America, can only be combated through evangelization. Welcome to America-- a mission land.

End Notes

¹ 2 Cor. 13:13

² Rom. 10:14-20

³ Lk. 7:16

⁴ Rev. 21:5

⁵ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:7,9,13,18

⁶ "Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church":2, 35.

⁷ Ac. 1:8; Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15

⁸ Mt. 5:9-16

⁹ Ac. 1:8

¹⁰ Walbert Buhlmann, *With Eyes to See: Church and World in the Third Millennium*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990): 7.

¹¹ Toby Lester, "Oh Gods!" *Atlantic Monthly*, Volume 289, No. 2 (February 2002): 45.

¹² Jn. 1:14; 10:10

¹³ 1 Tim. 2:4

¹⁴ Ac. 14:8; 17:22

¹⁵ *America* 186, 3 (2002):8-15

¹⁶ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol. VI: Concerning Vatican Council II*, tr. by Karl-H. & Boniface Kruger (New York: Seabury Press, 1974): 390-398.

¹⁷ Lk. 4:18

- ¹⁸ Mk. 10:35-45
- ¹⁹ Is. 11:6
- ²⁰ *Theology Today* 61 (2005):449
- ²¹ Mt. 25:34-36; Lk. 10:29-37
- ²² Lk. 16:19
- ²³ Is. 1:17; Jer. 22:3; Ez. 22:7
- ²⁴ Mt. 5:3
- ²⁵ Fall Meeting of American Catholic Bishops, November 14, 2001
- ²⁶ *New York Times*, Magazine section, February 13, 2005:11
- ²⁷ Mk. 6:34; Mt. 9:36
- ²⁸ Rm. 2:14-16
- ²⁹ *Theology Today* 61 (2005):449-450
- ³⁰ *Origins* 34, 25 (2004):396-397
- ³¹ *America* 190,11 (2004):6
- ³² Costa, Ruy O., ed., *One Faith, Many Cultures* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988): 136-144
- ³³ December 18/25, 2004:6
- ³⁴ Lk. 15:1-2
- ³⁵ Lk. 8:1-3; Mk. 16:1-2; Mt. 28:1; Ac. 9:36-43; Rom. 16:1-3
- ³⁶ Ac. 2:42-47; 4:32-37
- ³⁷ Healey, Joseph & Sybertz, Donald, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996): 104-153. See in Hillary Rodham Clinton, *It Takes a Village* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).
- ³⁸ *Origins* 34,23 (2004):364
- ³⁹ *America* 192,3 (2005):11-13
- ⁴⁰ John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003): 47.
- ⁴¹ *Commonweal* (December 6, 2002):11-12
- ⁴² *America* 192, 3 (2005):8-10
- ⁴³ *Commonweal* (February 25, 2005):9-10
- ⁴⁴ Martin Marty, *By Way of Response* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981): 81.
- ⁴⁵ Jn. 13:34-35;15:1-17;Mt. 25:31-46
- ⁴⁶ Ac. 1:8; Lk. 24:48
- ⁴⁷ Rt. 1:16
- ⁴⁸ | Pt. 2:9
- ⁴⁹ "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy":10
- ⁵⁰ "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*" (June 28, 2003): 69
- ⁵¹ "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*" (June 28, 2003)
- ⁵² Rv. 14:15-16;22:20