
Mission and Dialogue

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Given the seismic shift from church-centeredness to kingdom-centeredness in the Christian understanding of mission, given the growing awareness that to pursue the kingdom as Jesus did requires a preferential concern for the poor and marginalized, given the recognition that Jesus went about his ministry by means of a self-emptying dialogue with others — putting together all three of these new perspectives in Christian theology, we can describe the contemporary Christian understanding of mission as follows: Mission is dialogue with others in service of God's kingdom for the poor and marginalized. In such mission-as-dialogue, conversion remains a goal, but it is primarily (not exclusively) conversion to the service of God's kingdom.

The topic of these reflections — “Mission and Dialogue” — is often understood to mean “Mission *or* Dialogue.” At least within Christian circles, it seems that to have one is to exclude the other, or at least to make problems for the other. Mission and dialogue don't go together, or if they do, in the last analysis, one is going to win out over the other. Ultimately, a Christian's preference is going to have to be for *either* mission *or* dialogue.

In the following pages, I would like to show why that need not, and should not, be the case. My reflections will be built on contemporary Christian understandings of church (ecclesiology) and of Jesus (christology). First, I will describe and reflect on what can be called the seismic shift that has recently occurred in Christian views of the church and its mission.¹ Then I will look at how this shift in the theology of the church is grounded in newer understandings of Jesus the Christ — that is, understandings of what was his mission and how he went about it. The conclusion I would like to offer is that if the new insights into ecclesiology are consistently grounded in new insights into christology — or, if the mission of the church truly and faithfully reflects the mission of Jesus — then there will be no contradiction between mission and dialogue. The two are inherently ordered to each other. You cannot pursue one without pursuing the other. “Two sides of the same coin,” one might say. But, really, that means that mission and dialogue are the “same coin.” Mission not only requires dialogue; mission

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is dialogue. I hope that at the end of these considerations the reader will see reasons why the relationship between mission/dialogue is neither “or” nor “and,” but “is.”

The Shift in Christian Missiology: From Church to Kingdom

What I am calling a seismic shift in the understanding of the Christian church’s primary purpose and mission took place, especially for Roman Catholics, during the decades following the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). As one observer has put it: “The Catholic Church’s approach to mission turned upside down in the years that followed the Vatican Council . . .” (Fox 2002:69). Whether we call it a clarification or a correction, there has been a genuine — yes, a radical, — change in what Christians understand to be the *raison d’être*, the “reason for the very existence” of the church. That change is rooted in the simple, but revolutionary, distinction between *church* and *kingdom of God*. What at least in the Catholic church had long been taken for granted is no longer a part of the basic beliefs of Christians: for centuries, the church had believed, and explicitly taught, that “outside the church there is no salvation” (Sullivan 1992). In other words, the kingdom of God and the offer of God’s love were confined to the church. The church was identified with the kingdom. That is no longer the case. Today, Christians for the most part recognize that although the church and the kingdom are related, they are different; the church is not to be identified with the kingdom. Indeed, the kingdom is larger than, and more important than, the church. More precisely, the church is meant to serve and foster the kingdom, not itself. The kingdom is the end; the church is the means — indeed only one of the means by which God is realizing the kingdom. This is truly a monumental shift in the self-understanding of Christians and of their community called the church.

To understand both the content and the intent of this shift, we must explore the content and intent of this Christian symbol, the kingdom or reign of God. As we shall see in the next section, the kingdom of God, or the *Basileia tou Theou*, was the heartbeat of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Although it is a symbol whose meaning and implications can never be fully unpacked and will be understood with different emphases in different historical periods or cultures, we can perhaps best indicate its fundamental meaning with the words of the church Father Irenaeus: “*Gloria Dei vivens homo*” — “the glory of God is the well-being of God’s creatures.” The kingdom of God represents that vision of human society in which all will *be well*; and all will be well because all will care for each other as they are cared for by God. It is a state of the world in which, as the Gospel of John puts it, all peoples (and we can add, all creatures) will have life and will have it abundantly (John 10:10).

The kingdom of God, one might say, is the biblical symbol for what we can call in more contemporary terms, a new world order — a new way for humans to live with each other, a new way of structuring society in which the foundational values for all laws and economic policies and international relationships will be a compassion that calls for and animates justice.² Such a new world order will certainly call for structural change, even revolutionary structural change, in the way individual nations and the community of nations go about their political and economic business. But such structural change in the world of politics and economics will be short-lived (maybe not even possible in the first place) without internal structural change — that is, without change in the human heart and consciousness. The vision of God’s kingdom to be

realized here in this world is, in other words, radically socio-political and at the same time profoundly spiritual. It calls for a change of social structures based on a change of the human heart.

So Christians are recognizing — and being challenged by the recognition — that the primary purpose and mission of the church is to promote the ever greater realization of God's kingdom in the world, for only in this way can the church be "saving souls" for the next world. No longer can Christians say — as I was told during my studies in Rome during the early 60's — that the primary purpose of missionary activity is the *plantatio ecclesiae* — the planting of the church in new cultures and regions. Rather, the primary mission is to plant the kingdom. This is the end to which all other goals are subordinate.

And there are other goals — other essential ingredients to the church's mission: Christian missionaries must preach the good news of Jesus, they must form new communities of believers, they must provide these communities with animating liturgies, and they must foster Christian education. But all these essentials of Christian life and community are subordinated to — they are means to the end of — trying to build God's kingdom of compassion and justice on earth. The church must ever remain the servant of the kingdom. The church must never make itself more important than the kingdom. As the Second Vatican Council, in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, states: "The Church has but one sole purpose — that the Kingdom of God may come and salvation of the human race may be accomplished" (Section 45).³

Jesus: Prophet of God's Kingdom

Admittedly, this shift in the Christian churches' understanding of mission has come as a response to what the Vatican Council called "the signs of the times." These signs were seen especially in the incredible suffering of people, and of the earth itself, due to the equally incredible injustice and economic inequity that dominate, and seem to be produced by, the political and commercial structures that rule the world. The cries of the poor, the plight of the earth — these were the signs and prods by which God was speaking to and shaking up the church. Those Christians who were most shaken by these signs and who made the most resolute efforts to respond to them came to be called liberation theologians.

But such theologians — whether they call themselves liberationists or not — then did what every Christian theologian must: in order to respond to the ever new signs of the times, in order to answer the new questions that were being thrown at the churches by the realities of human and ecological suffering, these theologians had to return to the sources of their faith — that is, to the message and the person of Jesus the Nazarean in the New Testament, especially the four Gospels. And when they began their "re-viewing" of this Jesus through the lens of these new questions and these newly experienced realities of injustice and human suffering — that is, when they *listened* to the Word of God with the ears of the poor and the victims of this world — they heard things they had not heard before. One can truly say that the seismic shift in the understanding of the church was grounded in and propelled by a seismic shift in the understanding of who this Jesus really was and what he was about.

There was a rediscovery of Jesus. Prodded by the signs of the times, guided by the new tools for studying the Gospels, many Christians were surprised and inspired to

discover that the primary purpose of Jesus' mission and ministry was not to establish the Christian church, nor was it to proclaim himself the only Son of God and savior of all; rather, it was to announce and call all people to believe in and work for the kingdom of God. Yes, after his death and resurrection, he would soon be understood by his followers as Son of God and savior, yes the community of his followers would grow into the church — but all these essential and integral developments are meant to further, not replace, the original vision and mission of Jesus: the kingdom of God.

But to be honest, Christians must admit that for much of the history of Christianity, they have so emphasized the divinity of Jesus and his role as unique savior that these beliefs *have* overshadowed, even replaced, what was the central belief and concern of Jesus — the kingdom of God. As has often been said, the proclaimer became the proclaimed. Jesus the prophet of God's kingdom became Jesus the Son of God and only savior. Certainly, for Christians there need not be any inherent contradiction between Jesus as Prophet and Jesus as Son of God. But when Jesus as the Son of God is no longer also Jesus the Prophet of God's Reign, then Christians have an immense problem. Then they no longer have the original, the authentic Jesus. For Jesus himself, to believe in God but not in God's kingdom was to believe in a false God. For Christians to proclaim Jesus as divine but not as the prophet who calls us to commit ourselves to God's kingdom on earth is to proclaim a false Jesus (Sobrino 1993:69).

Jon Sobrino, S.J., liberation theologian in El Salvador, describes the historical process by which Christians, as it were, kept Jesus but lost the kingdom of God. "The gradual disappearance of the kingdom of God from christology" was, in a sense, understandable. It began already in the New Testament, for understandable historical reasons. New Testament scholars are in general agreement that in the Synoptic Gospels, "Jesus' existence unfolded in an essential twofold relation: to a God who is Abba [Father] and to the kingdom of God." And yet in other books of the New Testament, the kingdom side of this twofold relationship blurs. "The Kingdom ceases to be central in the other strata of the New Testament" (although, as Sobrino points out, it is there in "equivalent" but modified versions — such as Paul's understanding of "salvation" or of "Good News"). This under-development and defocusing of the kingdom resulted from the state of the communities after the resurrection. "Jesus resurrection and the imminent expectations of the parousia . . . made it difficult to formulate the Christian utopia as the Kingdom of God." After the resurrection-experience, the "Abba" side of Jesus' twofold relationship to God took center stage. Christian piety and reflection became more concerned about Jesus' person than his work — his divinity or relationship with God from all eternity rather than his mission from God here on earth. And so, "Jesus' relation to the kingdom of God, equally constitutive during his lifetime, gradually disappeared from christological thought. . . . By the time of the fourth century conciliar debates it is clear that the kingdom of God plays no role whatsoever in christology" (Sobrino, forthcoming).

Since the turn of the past century, shaken by the revolutionary discoveries of scholars like Albert Schweizer and Johannes Weiss, Christians have been about the task of re-appropriating what Sobrino calls "the Jesuanic Principle" — that is, the kingdom of God as a constitutive element of Jesus' message and mission. This re-appropriation of the centrality of the kingdom in christology has been taking place

throughout the Christian churches, but especially in the ever growing churches of “the South” — Latin America and Asia, where liberation theology has had its most marked influence (because, of course, it is here that poverty due to injustice is so prevalent). This explains why it is especially in these “southern churches” that the seismic shift in the understanding of church and mission has been most vigorous and resolute (despite attempts on the part of the Vatican to contain and reduce it).⁴ If Jesus was focused on the kingdom of God, so should the church.

But further understandings among Scripture scholars about how Jesus was kingdom-centered place further requirements on how the church’s mission should follow his example. To say that Jesus was “kingdom-centered” is to say that he was “victim-centered.” As New Testament scholars in Latin America, in Asia, and in the so-called Jesus Seminar of North America have recognized, for Jesus, to proclaim the reign of God was to automatically be driven by a preferential concern for those who had been pushed to the sidelines of social and economic life.⁵ It is to relate the “good news” to the “signs of the times,” especially, to the unjust, needless suffering that wracks our world. In Sobrino’s words: “It is a matter not just of recognizing the historical Jesus and his central concern for the kingdom of God; it is also, and more importantly, a matter of placing the poor back in the center of Christian concern, and giving them the privileged place that they so drastically need” (Sobrino, forthcoming).

Without such a preferential concern for the poor and for the marginalized, Christians cannot really be Christians, and the church cannot promote the kingdom of God as Jesus understood it. But that means that without a preferential option for the poor, the church would not be carrying out its primary mission. Sobrino draws a sobering conclusion for Christians: “God makes our final salvation depend on what we do with the poor.” To make his point even more sharply Sobrino reformulates an ancient theological dictum. The mission of the church is no longer driven by “*extra ecclesia nulla salus*” (“outside the church no salvation”). Rather, the kingdom-centeredness of Jesus provides a different motivation and challenge: “. . . *extra pauperes nulla salus, nulla ecclesia*, (outside a commitment to the poor, there is no salvation, no church) . . .” (Sobrino, forthcoming).

Jesus: The Self-Emptying, Dialogical Prophet of God’s Kingdom

But Christian theologians are recognizing another essential ingredient in the way Jesus sought to promote the kingdom of God. He did so not only through a preferential option for the poor but also through a self-emptying openness to everyone. If liberation theologians have been rightly insisting on the centrality of the kingdom in what Christians call *the work* of Jesus, theologians engaged in interreligious dialogue are calling attention to the centrality of *kenosis* (or self-emptying) in *the person* of Jesus. Both are crucial if we are to have the real, the total Jesus — which means that not only the kingdom of God but also the self-emptying of Jesus must be part of the seismic shift in the understanding of Christian mission. Let me try to explain, schematically, what I mean.

Certainly the notion and action of *kenosis* has long been recognized as a defining characteristic of who Jesus was and what Christians believe God has done in and through him.⁶ Such a kenotic understanding of Jesus as one who gives himself totally to others, who has come to serve and not be served, who preaches that those who

lose their own selves for others will truly find themselves runs as a recurrent theme throughout the diversity of New Testament traditions. The *locus classicus*, however, for Christian experience and belief in Jesus as the self-emptying Christ is Philippians 2:5–11.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
 Who, though he was in the form of God,
 Did not regard equality with God
 As something to be exploited,
 But emptied himself,
 Taking the form of a slave,
 Being born in human likeness,
 And being found in human form,
 He humbled himself
 And became obedient to the point of death—
 Even death on a cross.
 Therefore God also highly exalted him. . . .

In unpacking these rich verses of a liturgical hymn that predated Paul, commentators point out that they put into words what the very first disciples had seen and felt in their following of the man Jesus: that if they could call him Messiah, Son of God, Word of God, Savior it was because of the way he embodied self-giving love in his fidelity to announcing God's kingdom. If later they were to speak of Jesus as the en-fleshed or incarnated Word of God, they realized that such Incarnation came about as a process of self-giving to the point of self-emptying. Incarnation, therefore, was the result of an act of relating, in which the Divine giver is emptied of the Divine Self in order to give of the Divine Self to others. "Other," therefore, is an essential part of "Incarnation." Christians believe that the becoming-human of the Divine is an act of self-emptying in order to relate to, make room for, the other. The most mind-boggling revelation of this becoming-through-emptying is the cross. The Divine Self becomes, in Buddhist terminology, a No-self in relation to other-selves and thus becomes the True Self of God-made-flesh in Jesus. Kenosis and Incarnation are inseparable.

Such is the basic content of a "kenotic christology." Only recently have theologians begun to gauge and mine the dialogical content and challenge of such a christology. Expectedly, this has come about from the hermeneutical pressures that have been generated by other "signs of the times," in this case, the complexity and challenge of interreligious dialogue. David H. Jensen's new book, *In the Company of Others: A Dialogical Christology*, pioneers this effort to show that one cannot honestly and coherently say that one believes in the kenotic Christ if one is not engaging in the practice of some kind of dialogue with those who are genuinely other than oneself. Kenosis, one might say, is another word for dialogue. Let me offer a few insightful, sobering statements that summarize the message of Jensen's book:

Jesus Christ is the One who embodies openness to others. He is the One who empties himself on behalf of us, enfleshing our right relations with each other and humanity's relation with God. As those who confess Jesus as the Christ, Christians are likewise called to open themselves to others, particularly those who profess different religious

communities. . . . In order to become more faithful disciples, Christians need the insights of persons who profess distinctly different religious commitment. (2001: x,xiii)

. . . in confessing the One who embodies being-with-others so completely, Christians open themselves as well to the utter gift of the Other, to the endless mystery and bedazzling surprise of interhuman relationship. (2001: 88)

The appearance of Jesus as the Christ and the face of the religious Other are two aspects of the same living, incarnational trajectory. Neither is ever exhausted, and Christians return to both again and again. (2001: 88–89)

Spelling out further the dialogical demands of a kenotic understanding and following of Jesus, Jensen announces: “The ‘difference’ kenosis makes, if adopted as a model of discipleship, is that it empties the self’s own privilege and isolation . . .” (2001:136). Note: not just isolation, for we need others; but also privilege, for we cannot put ourselves above others. “The movement of kenosis is to de-center the ‘self’ — and anything else, from any privileged place of permanence. . . . The moral significance of kenosis is that it leaves no single being alone. Recognizing the illusion of self-absolutization, persons are called to relinquish any privilege that would ‘elevate’ the self at the expense of others.” (2001:190, 198). Why must any form of self-privileging be avoided? Because it would protect us and prevent us from being surprised by the otherness of our neighbor, which is the vehicle by which the Otherness of God addresses, and sometimes disturbs, our life.

Jensen ends up with an understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus that stands in tension with, if not downright contradiction to, many interpretations of Jesus’ uniqueness, both popular and magisterial:

The kenotic Christ’s uniqueness manifests itself in a way that stubbornly resists imperialistic or triumphalistic appropriation. The confession of the kenotic Christ cannot rest in pointing to the figura of Jesus Christ alone, above all others. To advocate such a narrow Christocentrism is tantamount to truncating the kenotic dynamic that Jesus Christ embodies. Christ’s being-for-others would thus disappear under the distortion of triumphal appropriation. . . . Christomonism — the proclamation of Jesus Christ at the expense of everything else — is a distortion of the life of discipleship and not its faithful execution. Indeed, conformity to Christ involves *being claimed by others*, and not claiming others as our own. (2001: 87, xii)

To understand and appropriate this self-emptying, dialogical quality of the way Jesus went about his mission is, finally, to understand and follow Christ as the Way that is open to other Ways. Jesus is for Christians “the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:5–7). This means he offers a clear, a demanding path to follow; it is a path leading to the kingdom of God, a path on which Christians know where they stand, from which they will have to challenge themselves as well as others. But it is a path on which they cannot, as it were, stand still, nor stand alone. For this Way is self-emptying and dialogical. It is, in other words, a path that can be walked and followed only with others, with the assistance of others who walk different paths. Christians, therefore, can carry on the mission of fostering God’s kingdom only if they are doing so in dialogue with others. And this brings me to my conclusion:

Mission = Dialogue in Service of God's Kingdom

Given the seismic shift from church-centeredness to kingdom-centeredness in the Christian understanding of mission, given the growing awareness that to pursue the kingdom as Jesus did requires a preferential concern for the poor and marginalized, given the recognition that Jesus went about his ministry by means of a self-emptying dialogue with others — putting together all three of these new perspectives in Christian theology, we can describe the contemporary Christian understanding of mission as follows: Mission is dialogue with others in service of God's kingdom for the poor and marginalized.

It is important to note that I am not claiming that the Christian church's mission contains such dialogue; I am saying that it is such dialogue. This is the church's primary goal, this is what animates and guides its missionaries, to promote the well being of all persons, especially those who have been made victims of injustice, and to do so in conversation and cooperation with anyone else who shares similar concerns. As stated above, in order to pursue this mission-as-dialogue, the church will have to do many other things in order to nurture communities of those who choose to follow Jesus: teaching the message of Jesus, education, liturgy. But all of these essential activities will be subordinate to, or be ways of achieving, the primary activity: working with others to promote God's kingdom of compassion and justice.

In order to lay out the contents of this understanding of mission, let me respond to two concerns, or criticisms, that such an understanding of the church's mission has stirred up. One is voiced by Christians within the church, the other by dialogue partners outside the church.

From within the precincts of the Christian church (especially from Vatican precincts) comes the concern (even the charge of heresy) that such a dialogical understanding of mission excludes the Christian obligation to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. It reduces mission to talking with, learning from, cooperating with others in order to attain a purely social agenda.⁷ To attempt a dialogue with such fellow-Christian critics, I would suggest, first of all, that they seem to forget that authentic dialogue has two legs, not one. For them, interreligious dialogue is exclusively a matter of *speaking with* others — of listening to them, possibly learning from and cooperating with them. They forget the second leg of dialogue: to speak to others — that is, to proclaim what one has found to be living-giving truth. Authentic dialogue requires both speaking with and to others, which means listening to what is true for them and announcing what is true for us. So to speak of "Dialogue and Proclamation" as the Vatican does seems to indicate a one-legged understanding of dialogue; "proclaiming" is one of the legs of dialogue, the other is "listening." *Listening + proclaiming = dialogue*. In order to have a real conversation between two religious believers, therefore, both of them must be as fully committed to their own truth as they are open to that of others. They must want to persuade others of their truth and at the same time be ready to be persuaded by them. That's not easy. Dialogue is demanding.

More precisely for Christians, proclamation will consist mainly in bearing witness, through word and example, to the way Jesus went about trying to build God's kingdom. This will include, naturally, presenting his belief in a God of justice and love; such a belief, of course, is shared by other religious communities. But Christian witness will

also have to proclaim Jesus' preferential love for those who are victims, his belief that God calls all peoples to work for justice, especially for those who have been pushed aside or exploited by the powerful. As Aloysius Pieris, S.J., of Sri Lanka, has put it, the God of Jesus, the God whom Christians have to proclaim, is a God who "has a defense pact with the poor." This perhaps is a distinctive contribution that Christians bring to the dialogue (Pieris 1996:150–151).⁸

But in this dialogue in service of the kingdom, Christians will also be ready to be witnessed to — to learn from others, to be challenged by others, yes, to be corrected by others. If there is something distinctive about Jesus, Christians are ready, in this new self-emptying, dialogical understanding of mission, to recognize what is distinctive about the Koran, or the Dharma, or the Torah — and to learn things they have not learned in and through Jesus. In holding up the kingdom of God as the primary goal of mission, Christians also admit that what this utopian vision of the kingdom is, and how it is to be realized, is a reality that cannot be captured and contained in any one religion or revelation.

Regarding the concern that the new understanding of a kingdom-centered mission leads to the "reduction" (a word that appears often in Vatican warnings) of the church's purpose to a social, this-worldly program, I can only point out that what is true of the social agenda of all religions is true for Christianity's: what makes the social agenda of any religious community different from that of NGOs or political parties is precisely the insistence of religion that for a social agenda to work it needs to be more than just social or human. The monsters of greed, hatred, and violence that are devouring people and planet are so mighty and well-established that many give up their hope and efforts to overcome, or at least diminish, them. Religions make the claim that we humans are not alone and that in working for compassion and justice we are in harmony with a reality that is more than human. On the basis of such religious convictions, we can overcome these monsters. We are enabled to hope that the world can be different tomorrow than it is today, that we can find the wisdom to guide us and the energy to maintain us, even in the face of failure. This is why, as I reported above, proponents of the new understanding of Christian mission insist that social transformation can come only through spiritual transformation. To be religious is to believe in the ultimate power of good and of love. That is why it is said that anyone who believes that good and evil have a 50–50 chance is an atheist (Nolan 1992:103).

Regarding the critics from outside the Christian church, I know that one of their main concerns revolves around that aspect of Christian mission that has caused, and continues to cause, so much apprehension outside the borders of the church — the drive of Christian missionaries to convert all peoples to Christ and Christianity? Our new notion of mission-as-dialogue still makes room for — indeed, it requires — proclamation. Isn't conversion the purpose of proclaiming?

Yes it is. Conversion remains the top priority of every missionary, but within the new model for mission, it is, first of all, conversion to the kingdom. In this model, making all people members of this kingdom of compassion and justice is more important than making them members of the Christian church. Naturally, one goal does not necessarily exclude the other, but they are different goals, sometimes very different. A Christian missionary who has no baptisms to report but who has helped Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians to live together and work together lovingly and

justly is a successful disciple of Christ; a missionary who has filled his or her church with converts without seeking to change a society that condones, for instance, dowry deaths or bonded labor is a failure.

Yes, conversions to Christianity may occur. And the Christian missionary will accept them, and be happy. But he/she will not seek them, or proselytize for them, as the primary goal of mission. Such conversions will take place not so much as the fruit of the missionary's intent and effort — but, rather, as the result of the Spirit working through an individual's personal needs and free will. But, the Christian missionary will also be ready to accept, and be happy if members of the Christian community are so moved by the Spirit to become members of the Buddhist or Islamic community. In this new understanding of the church, Christians acknowledge that there is no one way, and there is no one religion, to bring about what Jesus envisioned as the kingdom of God. There are “many mansions” in this kingdom, many ways to realize and work toward it (John 14:1–3). What is primarily important is not which religion one belongs to but whether one is working resolutely and effectively toward this new world order of compassion and justice.

If such an understanding of conversion sounds radical, maybe heretical, let me point out that the Vatican has endorsed it! In the declaration “Dialogue and Proclamation” issued by the Vatican Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in 1991, the church teachers recognize that the goal of dialogue is not primarily conversion to a particular religion but “conversion to God.” And then they go on to add an elaboration that is, for many, astounding: “In this process of conversion, the decision may be made to leave one's previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself toward another.”⁹ They are recognizing and affirming that a Buddhist may decide to become a Christian — but also that a Christian may decide to become a Buddhist!

This, then, is the new view of dialogue and mission that is taking shape within many of the mainline Christian communities, a view in which Mission *is* Dialogue. If Christians can truly carry out such a mission that is a dialogue with others toward building a world of compassion and justice, they will be more faithful to the Gospel of Jesus, they will promote more fruitful relationships with other religions, and they will bring our suffering world a little closer to the peace of God's kingdom.

Notes

1. When I say “Christian,” I am referring mainly to the so-called mainline Christian confessions and not the fundamentalist or evangelical churches.
2. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), Part 4; Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), id. *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).
3. Elsewhere, I have tried to show that in recent statements of Pope John Paul II and the Vatican, there has been both an encouraging, but at the same time ambiguous, endorsement of this shift in the theology of church and mission. See Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 125–42.
4. The Vatican statement, *Dominus Iesus*, which reasserted the absolute uniqueness of Jesus as Savior, the superiority of Christianity over all other religions, and the need for Christian missionaries to seek conversions, has been seen by many as aimed primarily at the Asian churches and their theologians. See the special edition of *Jeevadhara*, 31(183) (2001).

5. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: id. Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); George Soares-Prabhu, "The Jesus of Faith: A Christological Contribution to an Ecumenical Third-World Spirituality." In *Spirituality of the Third World*. K. C. Abraham and Bernadette Mbuy-Beya, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 139–164; Samuel Ryan, "Jesus and the Struggles of the Masses in India." *Third Millennium: Indian Journal of Evangelization* 2(1):18–31 (1999). John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), pp.89–224; Marcus Borg, *Jesus A New Vision* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), pp. 77–189.

6. Lucien Richard, *Christ: The Self-emptying of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997); id. *A Kenotic Christology: In the Humanity of Jesus the Christ, the Compassion of Our God* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982). For a review and interpretation of this literature see the doctoral dissertation of Sr. Moly Thomas, "A Christology of Christian Witnessing: Kenotic Christology Reconsidered" at the Catholic University of Leuven, 2002.

7. Such concerns and accusations are found scattered throughout Pope John Paul II's 1991 encyclical on mission, *Redemptoris Missio* (see especially section 17), in the Vatican declaration *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 1991, and quite acerbically in Cardinal Ratzinger's *Dominus Iesus*. For a more scholarly, dialogical criticism, see Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religions Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 370–74.

8. See also Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor: A Return to the Jesus Formula*, (Tulana Research Centre, Sri Lanka: 1998), chapter 4.

9. Paragraph 41.

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