

**In response to Robert M. Dorans's discourse,
"As the Father has sent me:' the mission
of the Church in a multi-religious world"**

Spoken in our day, the term, *mission of the CH*, evokes the memory of the Second Vatican Council and even the *blessed* memory of Pope John XXIII, about whose intention BL himself lectured just thirty years ago at Boston College (a lecture I was privileged to attend; while I am quite sure that Fr. Doran was there himself, no doubt even more present than I). The title of the lecture was, "Pope John's Intention" (later published in *A Third Collection* [TC] ,1985)), and the reference was to the Council he had convoked in Jan, 1959. Moreover, Lonergan's own intention was to interpret that of the Pope, who said simply that the Council was to be *pastoral*. What did he mean? It was not altogether clear, for it was a novel idea. From ancient times there were two categories employed to identify conciliar documents. They were either *doctrinal* (even dogmatic), typically expressed as anathemas; or *disciplinary*, aimed at correcting abuses. But the Pope's concern was concrete living (not doctrinal formulae) and his thrust was positive (not to rein in what was apparently going awry).

While the Council was adjourned between the first and second sessions (early 1963, therefore) Giuseppe Siri, Cardinal Archbishop of Genoa, stood forth to declare that there was nothing peculiar about a pastoral council, since all councils aim at the presentation of revealed truths. And such an aim is obviously *pastoral*! Soon after, however, a Dominican theologian, fr. Marie-Dominique Chenu took exception to the Cardinal's intervention, in a vigorous article published in the April, 1963, issue of *Parole et Mission*, where he affirmed that to highlight the doctrinal function of the Council is to "put the cart before the horse." What is primary he said is the word of God, i.e., the kerygma, which turns out to be synonymous with Lonergan's term, *communication of the Christian message*. And this is precisely what is pastoral, for that word (that message), which is both act and content, is spoken by the prophets and the Son of God himself, in whom all prophecy is fulfilled, a word still present in the CH through Scripture and Tradition, communicated in movements that are (he said) the life-giving principles of the Council: biblical, liturgical, catechetical, and ecumenical (this latter very dear to the heart of John XXIII).

Finally, Chenu insisted that it is a message that is proclaimed especially to the poor. Let me cite the closing lines of his *plaidoyer*:

“[The word of God, he writes, is] alive, personal, communal [and] historic. As the old covenant, so also the new names a dispensation, an economy, an ongoing disposition of divine providence, both emergent in human history and carrying it forward to an ultimate, an eschatological goal. With its origins in the distant past and its term in an unknown future, its scope extends to the ends of the earth and its mission to all men [and women].... [T]here comes to light the complete inadequacy of attempting to begin from doctrines and then to attempt to flesh them out into living speech, when it is living speech that, from the start, alone can be at once concrete and alive, interpersonal and communal, historical and ecumenical” (I am citing from Lonergan’s summary [TC, 228] and it is not too clear where Chenu ends and BL begins; but no matter for they are thinking along the same line).

You see where I am going, perhaps! I want to make an explicit connection between RMD’s interpretation of “the incipient heuristics [anticipatory outline] of ecclesial ministry that are contained in chapter 14 of *Method in Theology*,” coupled with a “specific focus on the interreligious dimension of the contemporary world-cultural context,” on the one hand, and Pope John XXIII’s program, which might well be thought of as in grave danger of being derailed. And I should like to make these remarks in terms of what may be named a constant and variables. Moreover, I should like at least to suggest a conciliar framework for this connection, at the same time insisting on the quasi-identity in direction of Doran’s discourse and the conciliar vision.

The **constant** is the challenge of persevering in an unremitting pursuit of an effective communication of the Christian message. *Constant*, because the proclamation of the Love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit is in substance, though not perhaps in its expression, an unchanging deposit, and even the heart of the Christian faith, when that Spirit is thought to be the Spirit of the risen Christ. And this despite the changing modes of presentation to meet the needs of different times (a distinction that the Pope himself brought to the floor of the Council in his introductory address [October, 1962]). Now it is a fact that the opening chapters of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, are in effect a conciliar response to this challenge, with respect to the mystery of the Church itself, grounded as they are in the Trinitarian mystery and the Pauline doctrine of the Body of Christ. The bond of the indwelling Spirit is constitutive of the Church as one and holy.

The **variables** emerge from the implicit invitation that the present complex situation offers to the CH. We are told that this involves a “mutual self-mediation and self-constitution” with other components of contemporary culture. On a super-structural level this would mean the human sciences, notably history, psychology, sociology, economics, and political theory. On the level of infra-structure there is the encounter with other religions and the recognition that the world itself in its common sense mode and structures has something to say to the Church. The Pastoral Constitution on the CH in the Modern World still offers us a template for this sort of development, especially in the chapters of the second part of the document:

- The dignity of marriage and the **family** (intersubjective community)
- The proper development of **culture** (for the creation of cosmopolis)
- Economic and social life (to promote a just distribution of the world’s goods)
- The political community (for an environment where all people caown participate in a democratic way of life)
- Fostering of peace and establishment of a community of nations

The anticipated result of this complex process, which is beyond us to engineer, but in which we are all called somehow actively to participate, is the gradual emergence of situations in which dialogue becomes more probable. This recommends itself as a goal, since dialogue is possible where those involved recognize a measure of authenticity both in themselves and in those with whom they are engaged, and look to increase that authenticity by offering what each has to give in the exchange. Thus, a more authentic religiosity in the world at large, a more authentic grouping of Christian Churches, in view of eventual Eucharistic unity, a more authentic culture, in which theology and the human sciences are integrated, according to a vision that approximates that of Lonergan himself, and at a basic level a more authentic set of economic and social structures, that deliver world-wide a standard of living that promotes self-transcendence, and puts people’s hearts in the way of listening to the gospel message. The perspective is that of a new evangelization under the banner of a reoriented *theology of liberation*. We must allow ourselves this dream, and I thank Fr. Doran for having it at heart to promote it, and for pointing us in the right direction.

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