

NEW EVANGELISATION



RENEWAL FOR A NEW EVANGELISATION

**Some Essays on the Renewal of the Church in
Shri Lanka**

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INTRODUCTION

The present epoch in the Church's history is fast drawing towards its end. The time is perhaps ripe to write its obituary. The ominous signs of a new emerging era in the life of the Church are already evident on the horizons of time. It is propitious then to rethink the content, the context and the meaning of the concepts of "Evangelization" and "Mission" that will pave the way for a "Renewed and sharing Church in Sri Lanka".

The very essence of "renewal" is an untrammelled search for ways and means of making our faith in Jesus more meaningful and more tenacious that it refuses to bow to insolent might, absolutised power and insidious corruption at the highest levels.

It is perhaps ironical that the Church, for a considerable period of time, felt herself inhibited by the fact that she was an impotent minority, Hamstrung by a debilitating 'mind-set' that her resources were to be restricted to her own faithful, she was almost at the verge of forgetting that she had a mandate to challenge the obscene accumulation of wealth with power, racial chauvinism, rampant poverty and militarized violence that flaunted a sweet disregard for our perennial values which drew inspiration from our religions.

Laments Fr.S.J. Emmanuel, a reputed theologian of contemporary times, in this selection of Essays on "Renewal for a New Evangelization", that we have turned Christianity into a religion cluttered with institutionalized structures, ritualistic cults, pietistic devotions and feasts that bordered more on the sentimental. These emphasized concern for the divinity of Christ but overshadowed the witness of our faith in the humanity of Jesus. While kindness and compassion for suffering human beings found a significant place in the life of the Christians, the urgency to confront the unjust structures that cause suffering and lay beneath the myth of 'development' went unheeded and unchallenged.

A renewal of faith, says Fr. Emmanuel, and an empowering of God's people with the spirit of Jesus cannot lie content with a lofty and idealist ideology that promotes nothing but a self-centred, vertical spirituality. Rather, it must go further, penetrate deeper and blossom into "a life of action" integrating itself into the world and inspiring the events of contemporary history. This would result in a rediscovery of the old word "evangelization" (proclaiming and witnessing to the Good News) by harking back into the its original, primitive meaning. In fact, a going back into past, a search for the roots, but with the clear objective of tracing a path for the future.

.A renewal of faith also brings us face to face with the term "missionary". This much misused term found expression in a panoply of

activities that were listed under the rubric of managing foreign missions counting converts and planting the church in various parts of the non-Christian world. But the New Evangelization, which underwent meaningful formulation in Vatican II, promoted a type of mission where those who believed in Jesus would not engage themselves in attempts to bring the non-Christian third world into the Church. Rather, Christians imbibed with the spirit of Jesus would become humble servants of the Good News, bearing vibrant testimony to gospel values in both the third world and the first world.

Woefully, this is not what ensued. Recounts Fr. Emmanuel, "Following Vatican II and the Synod Evangelization, the Churches in Asia and Africa went ahead with their new mission of evangelization, namely, sharing and witnessing gospel values to religio-cultural and socio-political realities of their context". Should the Church be the one and only towering lighthouse that guides wayward sailors safely to the shore? Or should she be an inner light helping people to look "within themselves" in search of one's own culture, while being open to values inherent in other cultures. The second analogy would perhaps better describe the missionary role of the Church.

The epoch of dichotomies has come to an end: secular vs. sacred; religion vs. politics; spirituality vs. the world; vertical vs. horizontal. The basic logic that governs evangelization today is its pervasiveness that englobes every dimension of reality. The New Evangelization is not an exclusivist concept, but includes within its sphere of influence all aspects of the human reality. The New Evangelization spawns a spirituality that is open to the whole of humanity, irrespective of racial or religious bias, promoting the universality of all reality created and sustained by God. It is a spirituality that spurns uniformity in apostolates and ministry, and nurtures the varied expressions of God's gifts which can enrich and enliven our mission.

What we look forward to in a Renewal for a New Evangelization is not a church of the missions, but a Sri Lankan church *with a mission* to the people of the whole of Asia which involves concern for the poor and the powerless, the elimination of injustice, the promotion of inter-religious dialogue and a cross fertilization of Asian cultures to sustain the values of the Kingdom.

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CHAPTER I

1.0. INTRODUCTION: THEME AND PURPOSE OF THE CONVENTION

A National Pastoral Convention has been convoked by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Shri Lanka (CBCSL) and scheduled for the latter part of 1994. The theme of this Convention is *Towards a Renewed and Sharing Church in Shri Lanka*. The theme has been well chosen, to be in keeping with Pope John Paul's call for a *New Evangelisation for the New Millennium*.

Accordingly the CBCSL in its Pastoral letter of 7th. Feb.1993 stated:-

"Discerning the importance of *renewal for a better living out of our faith in Jesus and the empowering of our human and cosmic reality in Him*. We the Catholic Bishops of Shri Lanka feel impelled by the Spirit to hold a National Consultation on the life and mission of our Church in today's Shri Lankan society."

A few phrases taken from the above texts will help us to clarify the important aspects of the goal and theme of the Convention.

1.1 To help the Church of Shri Lanka to renew herself

Although the Church by her very nature as a living organism lives by continuously renewing herself, yet institutional helps such as organised meetings, public exhortations, communitary efforts are indispensable. A convention offers all these facilities to various groups (priests, religious, laity, youth, family etc), spread out over a longer period of time (say one year or six months) and in various levels of the Church - such as parish, deanery/district, diocese etc. Thus the Convention is not merely an event limited to the few days of solemn meetings participated by few representatives but also a special period of grace for the whole Church in which the Spirit is invited to renew every part of the Church.

It will serve to take stock of our past, reckon our present resources and strategies and plan for the future.

" We feel that the time has come for us as a National Church to evaluate what has been achieved so far, take stock of the present day challenges and opportunities for evangelisation, evaluate the present situation of our Church and discover under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, strategies and plans for a renewal of its life and mission in the years to come. "

1.2 for a better living out of her faith in Jesus.....

Renewal, in so far it is religious and christian, it is aimed at renewing the faith of our life. That is why the CBCSL clearly spelt the target of renewal as "better living out of our faith". Individually and collectively (community) faith renewal is the primary goal of our renewal - convention.

This faith needs to be renewed very much with regard to its direction and content. We have moved too much in the direction of making Christianity into a religion and an institution of power, structures, cult, devotions, feasts etc. and very little in the direction of a belief in God, in His Fatherhood, in the Son Jesus who came to be amongst us, in the Christ who won for us Salvation and in the Spirit of God who still abides with us. We need to re-centre our faith, more and more towards God and His saving actions and liberate us from the clutches of power structures, from exaggerated cults and devotions.

On the other hand, we need to strike a balance in our faith on Jesus and on Christ. Jesus Christ was true man and true God, neither his humanity nor his divinity was a mere cover. Our growth in faith (and also our growth in discipleship) should follow the evolutive and dynamic pattern of Jesus becoming Christ. In the past an emphasised concern for the divinity of Christ has resulted in the overlooking of our faith on the humanity of Jesus. Consequently we need to emphasise the human experience of Jesus and its corresponding importance for our faith and discipleship.

1.3 and the empowering of our human and cosmic reality in Him...

Empowering our human reality in Jesus ...implies that the humanity weakened or wounded by sin can be em-powered again only by imitation and union with the Perfect Man Jesus Christ. Jesus is the surest and safest way to regain man's authentic human personality. The disciples of Jesus Christ and the community of disciples (Church of sinners) - both have a weak humanity - individually and institutionally, that both have to regain their power through a renewed faith in Him. They need to be empowered once again in the Spirit of Jesus. The individual christian and his community, both have disfigured or tarnished or caused wrinkles on their face, They need to recapture their original personality, identity and mission in Christ.

Empowering the cosmic reality in Him.... implies that this world of our existence is also fragmented and weakened by sin. We believe that salvation in the final stage is in the form of the coming of the Kingdom, in the form of recapitulating everything in Jesus Christ. Hence our present mission goes beyond our church walls to embrace and direct the whole world and all the aspects of our existence - be it sociopolitical, religiocultural, scientific, economic etc. The Good News of Jesus Christ must penetrate, permeate and empower the whole of creation in order to bring everything to fulfilment in Him.

1.4 for a meaningful New Evangelisation in today's Shri Lanka.....

A renewal of faith and an empowering in Christ cannot stop with vision, ideology and conviction. It goes further and flowers out into "a life of action" called evangelisation. This old word "evangelisation", from the Greek - evagelion, meaning good news - is rediscovering today its original meaning!

In the original, evangelisation meant the spreading, sharing and giving of the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom by one's life of action, But unfortunately, it has been

used, even in some high ecclesiastical and responsible quarters, to mean only traditional missionary activity of conversion and extension of the Church.

In Vat. II a definitive return was made to the evangelising-mission of the Church and it was in this sense, and only in this sense, that the whole Church and every Church was defined as missionary. In other words, *the whole Church is missionary only in the sense of having a mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom by word and witness to all realities of life.* Thus the best term to describe this new post-Vat. II mission of the Church came to be the old term "evangelisation"

The Congregation called Propaganda Fidei, which was then in charge of all the traditional missionary activities of the Church, hurriedly already during the Council, changed its name during the Council to be called the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. But the content of work done by the Congregation continued as before, namely managing the "churches of the missions"

If all the churches of the whole world were expected to be missionary in the Vat. II sense of evangelisation, then all the churches of the world should have come under the new Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. Or leaving the older Propaganda Fidei "to manage the foreign missionaries and their activity of conversion and planting the churches", a new Congregation for Evangelisation, to promote the mission of all the churches of the world, including those of the first world, should have been started. But that did not happen.

Pope Paul VI, who well understood the developments of the Council, called for a Synod of Evangelisation (1974) and issued an Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to the whole world, explaining the total or integral evangelisation as the mission of the Church. Following Vat. II and the Synod on Evangelisation, the churches of Asia and Africa went ahead with their new mission of evangelising, namely, sharing and witnessing gospel values to the religiocultural and sociopolitical realities of their context. Direct proclamation with conversion and planting of churches, as was done by earlier foreign

missionaries, decreased and caused concern for the Congregation for Ev. of Peoples.

When Cardinal Tomko became head of this Congregation, being an intelligent theologian he found that the specific work for which his Congregation was started three centuries ago, the old traditional missionary activity of proclaiming the gospel for the purpose of extending the church (*Plantatio ecclesiae* = planting of churches) was neglected. The actual work that was going on in the missions in the Third World, was not conversion and extension of the church among pagans, but evangelisation as understood in *Vat. II*, namely, proclamation, inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, etc. Hence he pressed on the Pope to issue the "Encyclical about the Permanent Validity of the Missionary Command" in order to emphasise proclamation for conversion and extension of the Church.

But in order to distinguish it from the "old missionary activity" which we have had a few hundred years ago through the foreign missionaries and which is now wrongly claimed as the "first evangelisation", we agree with the Pope and his collaborators and include the word "New". This New Evangelisation, is ultimately not mere traditional missionary activity as was done by foreign missionaries, but a genuine "gospelisation" or sharing of the Good News with all the realities of our Shri Lankan existence.

We cannot do this New Evangelisation of the world around us, with our old traditional faith; a renewed faith in Jesus Christ and His Good News of the Kingdom is called for.

1.5 The renewal of faith demanded by New Evangelisation?

During the last few decades even when the Spirit urged us to renew our faith, there were even leaders who kept warning "Let's not disturb the faith of the people. Let's do only the rubrical changes on the surface of our liturgy and life!". The deposit of faith was regarded as some formula to be kept in cold storage and guarded by the Magisterium. But *Vat. II* has overcome that antiquated attitude to opt for the biblical notion of faith as life -

commitment to the person and message of Jesus Christ. It has to be reviewed and renewed and reformulated to make it meaningful and relevant to the people and the times.

A faith expressed merely in words or in devotions or even in liturgical action may give at the most a self-satisfaction, but is awfully inadequate and incomplete. It has to flower out in our living with others, both in the Church and in the world. A total living and sharing of our faith with others, by word (proclamation) and witness, with all the realities of our existence (religions, cultures, poverty, sociopolitical and economic structures of oppression etc etc.) is the New Evangelisation clearly called for in Shri Lanka.

In the past, the dimensions of our faith were mostly narrowed down to some assent and liturgical celebration of mysteries. Considering our faith as part of a privatised religion, we failed to give expression and witness to our faith amidst the varied realities of life. We bypassed challenging sociopolitical, religiocultural and economic issues and hurriedly rushed into our churches. But today we are invited by the mother Church to live out our faith amidst the contextual challenges of our day.

The Convention is thus for renewal of faith towards a New Evangelisation. This renewal will enable us -

a) to look *deep within ourselves* as christians (discipleship of Jesus Christ) and as a church (sharing community of the Spirit)

b) to look *beyond our church or parish boundaries*, to the other Christian brethren (Ecumenism), to the followers of other faiths (inter-religious dialogue) and even to the followers of other ideologies and persuasions (apostolate to non believers).

and c) to look *at the sociopolitical and economic signs of the times and context in Shri Lanka*.

For such a strong faith the seed has been gifted in our baptism. But it does not grow with our physical stature or with our mere increase of religious knowledge. Nor does it grow, as some religious leaders think, in the rigid protection of a static church. Some church leaders encourage a passive or nonquestioning

attitude to faith. They think that the faith must be kept in the cold storage and religion must continue with warm and profitable devotions. That is a gross misunderstanding of faith or even misuse of the faith of the people.

1.6 Nourishing, Purifying and Maturing in Faith

Faith has to be nourished by regular prayer, by deeper experiences with God in suitable spiritual exercises (reading and reflection of the Word, sacraments, etc.), by encounters with the poor and the suffering and by deeper reflections on oppressive and dehumanising realities of the context.

At the same time, there is need to purify our faith. The faith of the present day Catholics and their communities are very much centred on saints and devotions, on legal observances and material benefits. During the counter-reformation period, because of the attack of the reformers in Tradition, Sacrifice of the mass, hierarchical priesthood, devotion to Mary and other saints etc. we not only strengthened, but overemphasised these aspects and they have become the essence of our christian life. Now Vat. II has made the call and given the directives, almost 30 years ago, to go away from a counter-reformation faith-attitude, towards a Christ-centred, Spirit-centred, Word-centred, community-centred attitudes in faith, but many Catholics led by priests, prefer to go on with the old faith and practices. A cleansing of our temple is very much needed.

Faith cannot mature unless we improve our understanding of the faith as indicated by the Church of our times - in the documents of Vat. II and in the other documents of the Magisterium - and as demanded by the existential realities of our times and context. The faith that was nourished by the penny catechism of the counter-reformation Tridentine Council cannot withstand the above contextual challenges. A faith formulated in the counter-reformation spirit of the Church cannot withstand the challenges of a post-Vat. II age.

A renewed faith, not so much as a faithful member of a parish, but as a disciple of Christ and a member of a believing

and sharing Community of the Spirit is needed. A renewed faith, not so much despising and condemning those outside our parish boundaries, but a faith that goes after "the others" is demanded. A renewed faith, not so much shunning the world of real existence, but a faith that takes up the challenges of the sociopolitical and economic realities of life is needed.

1.7 Convention in itself is not renewal but at the service of Renewal

Renewal with regard to Christian discipleship and community life (ecclesial life) is essentially a spiritual process whereby individually and collectively we change for the better. Acknowledging and repenting a state of sinfulness and deficiency, we effect a conversion for a better understanding of self in relation to God, to fellow human beings and to our own world of existence. In short, *it is a spirituality of opening ourselves actively to God, to His other children and to His world.*

In a renewal process we are invited to open ourselves actively to the voice of God, heard in our individual and collective conscience, to allow ourselves to be possessed and energized by the revealed Word for action and, lastly but not least, to be challenged by the crying human and cosmic realities of our life. The intention or goal of this renewal process is a *new way of being a Christian and a Church.* And this is what the chosen theme of the convention expresses. "Towards a renewed and sharing Church in today's Shri Lanka" means that the Church as a community of christians is searching for a new spirituality of being and acting in today's Shri Lanka.

Hence an active engagement or participation in the convention and with all that goes on before and after the convention as preparation and execution cannot be a substitute for renewal itself. *The Convention is limited to facilitating the needed conversion or change of heart, individually and communitarily.* It is successful only to the extent it facilitates a renewal and brings about a change in our spirituality both as individuals and as a community.

CHAPTER II

2.0 RENEWAL : WHAT IS IT? WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

2.1 Renewal is the vital exercise of a living Church

Every living organism lives on by renewing itself continuously. It does this both by the nourishment it receives from outside as well as by the activity it engages in. Only a dead body is incapable of renewal because it can neither nourish itself nor engage in any action. Unable to grow, it degenerates, gets corrupted and finally dies.

The Church, we believe, is not a dead body, but a community of living faithful. It is the living mystical Body of Christ. And for this reason she has always accepted the wise principle *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* i. e the Church must be always reformed. This principle was clearly stated by Pope John XXIII when he called for an *aggiornamento* of the Church in our present century. In other words, the Church of Shri Lanka can survive and grow only by a continuous renewal of herself.

What the CBCSL proposes to do in this convention, appears to be very similar to what Pope John XXIII did for the world Church in the sixties. When Pope John XXIII, moved by the Spirit, called the Second Vatican Council, it was not meant to be a magisterial council for the defense of some doctrine, but a pastoral convention of the whole Church to reflect on her present and future situation, by opening herself to the three realities - God's Spirit, His Word and His world - especially for the first time, to the secular realities of the world. Words like *aggiornamento* or updating and reading the signs of the times were meaningful to him and often used by him in calling the Council.

2.2 Renewal is the work of the Spirit

Since God is the author of the Church, and His Spirit is the abiding power in the Church, only He can renew it. The Father who promised and prepared the Church and the Son who founded the Church have given us *the Spirit as the abiding manifestation of*

God's saving presence with us. The work of renewing the Church is therefore a work of the Holy Spirit. Our role in renewing ourselves and our communities is to become more and more actively open and co-operative to the promptings of that Spirit.

This does not mean that we have to remain totally passive. No. We are called to be actively receptive. It means an active openness to the Spirit, listening to his inspirations, courageous readiness to changes and conversion etc.

In this sense the Convention is like a new Pentecost, where all the members of the parish communities, laity priests and religious, all have to observe an active waiting in prayer, listening and reflection. For this purpose cenacle meetings of prayer and reflection at various levels, provided with material for inspiration, reflection and analysis are indispensable. The preparation at parish level or community level or presbyterium level for the final event of the Convention will be one of prayer, reading the scriptures together, raising relevant questions and seeking answers. Thus even the answering of some questionnaire before the Convention will not be merely an academic exercise but one in prayer and courageous sincerity under the guidance of the Spirit.

The prayer of the local Church at all levels before the Convention should be loud and intense "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the hearts of the faithful, enkindle in us the fire of thy love, send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created and thou shalt renew the face of the Earth."

2.3 Genuine Renewal calls for Conversion

Renewal is change, a change for the better. From a humble acceptance of one's own reality a sincere effort with the help of God to change for the better. The word conversion is often thought of in terms of non-catholics becoming catholics or a public sinner turning over a new leaf. But genuine conversion, as taught in the bible, is an essential ingredient of christian discipleship. Repentance and conversion to God in Jesus Christ is the continuous process of christian life.

There cannot be a true renewal of the Church unless and until the accredited leaders of the Church - priests and religious - are ready for the conversion to which the Spirit calls. The present leaders can be tempted to be mere organisers of a convention and not participators of it. As good preachers about the conversion of others, the non-Catholics and the laity, leaders can be very stubborn about their own conversion. They can be still holding on to self-centred positions and views and expect everyone else to change. Usually leaders place themselves as teachers and instructors with authority, but not prepared to sit with the people at the feet of the One Teacher - the Spirit. A false notion of infallibility and authoritative teaching seems to prevent present day religious leaders from dialoguing with the people and listening to the Spirit at work within them and often speaking through them.

2.4 Renewal does not take place in isolation but in relation to a Community

No man is an island. He is created as a social being. Salvation is not offered to him in isolation. The supreme commandment of love has two inseparable sides - the love of God and the love of neighbour. Our filiation to God the Father implies affiliation to His children. Our discipleship of Jesus Christ implies incorporation into His community (Church). There is no isolated discipleship of Jesus Christ, but only a community (Church) oriented one. There is a mutually beneficial relationship and inter dependence between the individual christian and the community. Every Christian is community oriented and he cannot live his discipleship in isolation - not even a contemplative monk.

On this perspective, the renewal of the individual Christian and that of his community are inextricably bound together. The individual is renewed only in relation to his community, and the community is renewed only in so far as the individuals are renewed.

2.5 Christian Renewal, both individual and communitary, is essentially a Self - Renewal

Renewal, though a work of the Spirit, is dependent on the active co-operation of the individual Christian and the individual Christian community. It cannot be imposed or forced upon even by the Spirit. Unless we open ourselves and actively wish and yearn for renewal it will not happen.

In so far as it remains a set of proposals, plans, and even execution for others, renewal is not a difficult task at all. When a house is to be renovated, the architect, the building contractor and the masons can cooperate and accomplish a fine job. When a meeting or a celebration is to be held, a few gifted people can get together, discuss plans and realize the event very successfully. So simple is that for many material things and worldly events. And when it concerns a living being, like renewing the health of a human person, it cannot be so simple and so successful. It cannot be accomplished even by the best of doctor giving the best of medicine. *The patient has to cooperate actively, with his body as well as with his mind in his own healing and renewal.*

And here when we come to talk about the renewal of a christian or his Church, which is more a spiritual community of persons than a hierarchical organisation (as taught clearly by the Church in Vat. II through its document on the Church), renewal becomes much more difficult and demanding. Like a patient the individual christian has to cooperate with the Spirit and other facilities offered or organised by the Church to renew himself or herself. And the Church, in so far as it is a living community of living disciples of Jesus Christ, it cannot be renewed by the mere diagnosis and instructions which come from the magisterium and the theologians, from the Bishops and the priests not even from a unanimous decision of a national or diocesan convention. It can only be done with the active cooperation of the whole community of members with the Spirit.

In this perspective of what has been said above in nos. 2.1 - 2.6, we can define *christian renewal as the work of the spirit effected in a living christian or in a living community (parish) when the individual or the community willfully opens himself/herself or itself to*

a continuous conversion towards God His children and His world. Such a renewal is an indispensable aspect of christian life and spirituality.

Renewal = openness of self to the Spirit + work of the Spirit through signs, inspiration and impulses + continuous conversion of self to God, His children and His world.

2.6 Spirituality and/of Renewal

There are many who, even after Vat. II, may misunderstand spirituality merely as a static set of spiritual exercises (regular prayers, devotions, sacraments etc.) or as a membership in a state of life (religious states of perfection). Similarly there are also people who misunderstand renewal as a set of external superficial or cosmetic changes with regard to certain structures of administration, of relationship or style of life. For such people, spirituality and renewal can appear to be two different things and one can take place without the other. A person, according to them, can be said to be spiritual, without ever renewing himself or herself, without any room for improvement. Or one can be said to be renewed, without any changes in his or her spirituality, without any change in his or her relation to God, man and world. Hence a clarification of the two concepts and their inextricable relation to one another is required.

The spiritual exercises in themselves, and participation in them are necessary and indispensable means or resources for Christian spirituality. However all those added together do not make up the true Christian spirituality, which is essentially a new life of dynamism - (even for a contemplative). A Christian is not meant to be a constipated consumer of sacred things, nor the Church a supermarket for dispensing those sacred things. Nourished by the word and sacraments, the christians are to become better disciples of christ and to make up a living Church, that lives, pulsates and radiates the saving message of Christ (evangelisation!) True spirituality evangelizes.

There is no such thing as a non-evangelising Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is an evangelizing spirituality and every Christian or a Church is an evangelizer by nature.

On the other hand, if Christian renewal as explained above, is a change or conversion of self for the better with the help of the Spirit, then renewal is the beginning of a new Christian spirituality, and Evangelisation is its natural flower and fruit. Thus the goal of every renewal is *a new spirituality of being a Christian and a Church for a new evangelisation.*

Continuous renewal of self or conversion effected by the Spirit is the essence of Christian spirituality as understood by the early christians. And openness to God's Spirit, to His Word and to His world is the essence of renewal called for by the preaching of Jesus Christ. Hence we have to renew our understanding of Christian spirituality itself, and see personal and communitary renewal as its essential component.

Renewal and spirituality are both continuous processes going on in us as living persons and communities, and not a set of changes or a state achieved within a set period of time and space. We never achieve it completely so as to say, let us now stop renewing or let us stay put in this state of self. Thus the constant goal of the renewal process is a deeply Christian spirituality, a fruit of opening oneself, as explained above, to God's Spirit, His Word and to His world.

So if these are rightly understood, as clearly intended in Vat. II, then *Christian Spirituality and Christian Renewal are two faces of the same reality called Christian life.*

CHAPTER III

3.0 ECCLESIAL PRINCIPLES FOR RENEWAL

A building has its own principles of renovation. So is a town or a village. These principles are laid down by planners, architects and masons. The human body too has its own principles of renovation laid down by doctors who know the nature of the organism. The Church is a Church of God, called by God, but made up of weak human beings. It is a divine-human reality, spiritual-temporal, invisible-visible etc. By its long history of experiences, it has expressed its own principles of renewal.

The CBCSL expressed these principles thus :-

"The convention would seek to engage in a process of discernment of the Will of God for us, members of the church in Sri Lanka, through a *dialogue with the Word of God, the traditions of the Church and the realities of our society today.*"

In keeping with this triple dialogues for the discernment of God's will, let me explain the principle further.

3.1. Supreme Norm is Revelation

Word of God, is the primary link between us and God. Through His Word He created us, through the Incarnate Word He redeemed us and through the abiding Word He sustains us. Hence the primary source and guide of our renewal is the Word of God enlightened by His spirit. We are called to be a Church listening attentively to His Word... It is not human wisdom that will guide us in our renewal, it is the inspiration and the courage that comes from a sincere listening to God. Let us go back to the sources, to the Bible, read and meditate on what God calls us to be. Does He call us to build our own Church and Kingdom or His? Looking at ourselves on the mirror of God's Word will be the beginning of our self-renewal. Many of the present things we do will appear meaningless, contradictory and anti-christian. Much of the effort we make as an institutional Church, with all the structural wastage of money and personnel will become meaningless on the mirror of

God's word. Let us return to the sources, because we have strayed far away from our ideals as given by Christ.

Let every Christian in our Church be invited to listen to the Word again. Let every Christian family be given a Bible and encouraged to read daily and meditate the same. A biblical consciousness is indispensable for a genuine renewal.

3.2 Magisterial teachings give the orientations

The Church as a human institution has acquired a long tradition of teachings about her nature and mission in the world, as to what she is and what she must do in the modern world. Thus the revelation about the Church is made clearer and more concretely spelt out by the magisterium, especially in our times and for this century by Vat. II.

Vat. II has been acknowledged as the Pentecost of this century and the inspiration and guidelines given by Vat. II will be our blue print for the renewal of our local Church. You might wonder why I am proposing a thirty year old event as the blue-print for today and for tomorrow. Vat. II has been not only proposed by the universal Church as the Plan for renewal of all the local churches, but there has been a hesitancy and tardiness of our own in accepting, imbibing and realizing the vision and priorities of that Council.

The Spirit and spirituality of Vat. II is essentially a sincere and radical openness to the Spirit of God. openness to the whole humanity irrespective of religious and racial barriers and openness to the whole world of realities as created and maintained by God.

The Second Vatican Council, as a pastoral council for renewal of the Church, did not give anathemas but orientations and directions and spelt out the Spirit in which we must understand our nature and our mission in the world. It was left to the local churches 'to understand their own local world and reorientate and plan pastoral actions for renewal. In other words, *a whole spirit, an attitude, an approach to things more than the rubrical changes suggested in various areas was the main thrust of the council.* It was not the intention of the Council to spell out, like in the

counter-reformation Church, with the aid of minute laws and rituals, every detail of what is to be done at the base-level of the churches.

But unfortunately, what has happened? Many Bishops and priests who were to realize the vision of Vat. II, and effecting a change in their personality and vision (a new spirituality), with the help of the Councils' documents, have simply waited for the detailed instructions from Roman congregations, did the minimum requirement of the law and the rubrics and gave orders or instructions to do the changes. At first they waited for some years for the new Code of Canon Law and now they may wait for the new Catechism to spell out details for their action.

But on the other extreme, there were the free lance liberals, who did everything in their own plan and labelled it a post Vat. II. change! This tension between extremes, between those who carelessly went their way and did all fashionable things and those who did the minimum rubric, was a hindrance to their imbibing the true Spirit and spirituality of Vat. II.

3.3 Realities of our times determine the Priorities

The sociopolitical as well as the religio-cultural realities of our times, in fact all the realities of our context, become realities crying for salvation/liberation. We Christians and our communities live these realities daily and still we keep them away from our belief and our Christian living, We lived a privatised religion, divorced from life and reduced to cult, devotions and laws. We could have afforded such a religion few decades ago. We could have patted ourselves on our backs and still claimed ourselves to be good Christians. But today when we ourselves, especially the vast majority of our people are living in fear amidst death and destruction, wailing aloud for the basic necessities of life - for their basic freedom, dignity, food, medicine, movement etc, *we can never entertain a privatised and an apolitical Christianity* in our midst. If we are the true followers of Christ here today in Jaffna, let us preach the message of Christ and live it.

Our proclamation should not be reduced to soft exhortations to pious devotees who gather inside the Church, but be the challenging message of Jesus Christ in the market place.

The Church founded by Jesus Christ was more prophetic than cultic, more service-oriented than power-oriented, more poor-oriented than elite-oriented, more people-oriented than priest-oriented. But still the Church of our times has degenerated either into an elitist club of the clergy and the religious, or into a clergy-managed Church for the poor, but never a Church OF the poor. It has become a society with liturgical celebrations and pious devotions to quieten the spiritual thirst of the people. It has very rarely become a community of Spirit-filled believers with a prophetic message and witness from Jesus Christ.

As far as we Asians are concerned, we did not have any preparations for the Vat. II and we did not contribute actively to any of the decisions of Vat II. Hence after Vat. II we have selectively taken certain aspects of the changes prompted by Vat. II and left out the others. We have taken the liturgical changes especially with respect to language, culture etc. but we have left out a major section of the Biblical, Ecumenical and Lay apostolate changes. There is discrepancy and disorder in our acceptance of Vat. II. We need to rectify this and *initiate a Total acceptance of Vat. II.*

This will mean imbibing the Spirit and openness of Vat. II.

CHAPTER IV

4.0 RENEWAL OF THE NEW PEOPLE OF GOD

The Church was presented in Vat. II not in the traditional manner as a perfect society under the Pope and the hierarchy, but as a spiritual community of salvation existing in the present as the new People of God. The first two chapters of the document on the Church gave a revolutionary starting point to understand the new place of priests, religious and laity in the Church. Though this people form one messianic people with Christ as their head, with equal dignity and freedom due to the children of God as their common heritage and the Kingdom of God as their common destiny (L.G. 9d), yet "for the nurturing and constant growth as the people of God", they are hierarchically structured (L.G. 18a). They all enjoy an equally intensive invitation to holiness - universal call to holiness - whose essence is the striving towards a perfection of charity (L.G. 39b). Renewal of this people of God must take into consideration the specific states of life.

The renewal of the present christian and his Church must give importance to the ecclesiological revolution introduced by Vat. II.

4.1 The Spirit moves the People from below

When we are talking about the renewal of a community, of a local Church, we are talking about a collective renewal where the means will include mutual help, enthusiasm and encouragement which are sustained better by mass movements for renewal. The initiative and active co-operation of the people themselves is so vital and indispensable to the renewal of the Church, that we can say without any hesitation that, *there is no total renewal without the active participation of the lay faithful.*

In the history of the Church, renewals have been called for by leaders. But it gathers momentum not from the top, ex capite, but from the grass-roots, ex populo. They take the form of movements of ordinary Christians, who feel the need for changes and get the courage and inspiration to do things in a different way

though not suggested from above. Smaller groups of simple laypeople have been the starting points for many a movement of renewal in the Church. Sts. Benedict, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Threse of Avila are among the many initiators of renewal from below.

What an original group did with certain hesitation and fear vis a vis the authorities, have often gained gradual acceptance by a wider section of the faithful and after a long time of discernment became legally approved and promoted for the universal Church. This was the history of many of our present day practices whether it be in liturgy, canon law or pastoral practice. Even in this century, after the Second World War, it was the four grass root movements of post-war, Christian Europe-the Biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and the lay apostolate - which providentially prepared the way for Vat. II. These movements culminated in the greatest event of the Church in this century. And the fruits of the event are carried out too by the help of newer movements!

Indispensable involvement of the Laity in this Effort

In the light of the above understanding, if the NPC to be an event of genuine renewal of the Church of Shri Lanka, then more than planning, organisation and execution from the centre or above, *the involvement and engagement of the lay faithful in this national effort must be underlined and assured.* In this sense the NPC should not be merely limited to a week of expensive or hierarchically loaded celebration with the VIPs of the Church, but more an extended event whereby the larger part of the Christian faithful including the lay Christians at the grass - roots and in the peripheries are drawn into active involvement and participation.

With Vat. II, the universal Church opted to move away from a clerical Church and a caring Church to become a Church where everyone had a sense of belonging. But this too was only a half way house to the ideal intended by Christ. What Christ inaugurated and the apostles instituted was a community of all believers. It is not enough to be a member in the sense of belonging to a 'Church and getting its services and gifts. It is much more important that believers, including those who are called to serve

them by special ministries, make up the Church. In short our ideal should be a *people centred Church* where ministers and leaders are at the service of the faithful.

There is a general tendency and temptation for the clergy to dominate the Convention both in its preparatory phase and in the actual event. We do not under estimate the ability responsibility of the Bishops, the pastors and the theologians in organizing, guiding and conducting such meetings. But given the situation that we are in the initial phase of our laity's awakening in the Church, let us have the patience, humility and wisdom to work WITH the laity right from the beginning. The Spirit is at work not merely from above, but also in remarkable ways from below. Let us have our eyes and ears wide open for inspirations not merely from those who are regular churchgoers and satellites of priests but also from those living their Catholic faith in the heart of secularity.

Our present approach to administration of sacraments and other services are largely confined to those who come to us, but not to those who need us. Priests nominate and select laity for participation at meetings only those who are pleasing to them, if not their "yes men and women". Let us go out to welcome and listen also the others who may contradict us but all the same inspired by the Spirit.

4.2 Renewal of the Priest is vital for the renewal of the people

The present structure of our churches are still pyramidal, though the ecclesiology of Vat. II is for reducing it gradually towards a structure of concentric circles. Whether we like it or not, this process is already on, as a work of the Spirit. We have to make way and open ourselves to the Spirit.

Some are stepping down voluntarily to be closer to the people, while others are reluctantly pulled down by the people. Some responding to the invitation of the Spirit coming from below are discovering their true prophetic leadership among the people, while others are experiencing a crisis of identity among the people.

The whole theology of Vat. II gave a new christological and an ecclesiological dimension to the priests. The discipleship of Jesus Christ and becoming a zealous apostle of his Message constituted the christological dimension while the prophetic leadership of the christian community and of the liturgical assembly constituted his ecclesial dimension. And these dimensions mean a new spirituality, new vision of the priestly life and ministry, new priorities for apostolate etc.

Many priests have executed some suggested or ordered changes in their liturgies and in their apostolate. They have suggested and even demanded that many changes be made above them and around them. They have ordered many changes below them with respect to the people, But they are most reluctant for any change IN them, in their vision, attitude, relation etc.

Those few who recognise themselves in the above manner, as intimate disciples of Christ commissioned to serve people by their charism of leadership, as ministers and coordinators of lay charisms - they are an asset for renewing the parishes.

But there are still some priests who are still on top of parochial pyramids and consider themselves as powerful monopolisers of sacred and secular power. Renewal has to take place even with respect to those little pyramids.

The helps for renewal given to such priests and their communities have to be delicate suggestions and promptings. Much of the renewal of the community depends on the initiative of the priest for renewal. A hard approach on the part of his bishop and brother priests might make his renewal more difficult. An exaggerated softness or leniency too may never initiate any change in him and still worse, the people will be deprived of any avenues for change and renewal. Hence a fraternal approach with firmness petition and prayer is needed.

4.3 Religious must lead us towards Gospel Radicalism

Religious congregations of men and women have been a source of strength and beauty in the life of the Church. Founded to intensify dedication and commitment to Gospel values, they have served the Church admirably well. In the history of our Shri Lankan Church, they were the pioneer missionaries who planted and brought up our churches. We must gratefully accept their contribution.

The transcendence of religious life has become a strongly canon law structured house.

The gradual institutionalisation of these religious, initially founded as more spiritual, charismatic and prophetic have gone on for centuries. And now in Vat. II where a radical change of ecclesial vision took place, there was a clear attempt to re-situate religious life in the Church and underline their authentic charisms. Without forming part of the hierarchical structure of the Church, they are invited to be a people responding in a special way to that universal call to holiness in the Church.

The General Chapters of religious congregations and the magisterial teachings in and after Vat. II have clearly defined religious life as nothing but radical discipleship and radical christian life. Christian men and women have taken it upon themselves to embrace this way of life whose task and challenge is to live courageously the supernatural but prophetic realism and radicalism of the gospel.

Unfortunately the minimum institution that was needed at the start has degenerated into an Institutionalism full of individualism. These have helped religious orders to become closed up upon themselves and to become institutions, loaded with property and power, almost parallel to the still pyramidal Church. At local levels too, this parallelisation has taken place and parallel to pyramidal structures of the diocese and the parish, the religious have their own little pyramids of power. Ultimately both the Church and the congregation of religious, the parish structure and the religious-convent fail to have christian personalities (gurus) to be servants and motivators for christian

life among the people. Neither the prophetic leadership for service nor the radical renunciation for the Kingdom is found in the Church.

Hence in the effort of the Church for renewal, the religious congregations, as gifted sons and daughters of the Church, should renew their gospel radicalism inherent in the vows and become a catalyst, if not active agents, of renewal.

CHAPTER V

5.0 SOME INTRA-ECCLESIAL ISSUES FOR OUR RENEWAL

5.1 Earlier efforts for renewal 25 years ago.

It was in this Spirit that late Thomas Cardinal Cooray, of revered memory, called a National Synod in 1968, It was intended to effect a renewal of the Church of Shri Lanka in the Spirit of Vat. II. Coming soon after the event of Vat. II the Synod included Bishops who took part in the Council, theologians who kept abreast of what was going on in and out of the Council and others who were having a deep thirst to update our Shri Lankan Church. Though the documents of that Synod were soon published in all three languages under the title "*After Vatican II*", there was no systematic follow-up of what transpired at the Synod. But it must be acknowledged that many of the national and diocesan commissions and centres and their leaders benefited by this Synod.

Twenty five years after that Synod, the coming National Pastoral Council will serve also to acknowledge the progress we have made or the regress we have suffered and the reasons for the same.

5.2. Realistic acknowledgement of past success and failures

In some areas we achieved success, in certain others we failed. Success and failures need not discourage us because they are part of any human life, leave alone religious life. In certain ways we may have suffered and earned even ridicule. Many of these could be accepted as the cross and contradiction for the Church of Shri Lanka. But let not failures and crosses explain away or exempt us from blame for actual mistakes or even blunders we have committed in not being the true Church of Christ in Shri Lanka.

In trying to adjust ourselves to the new aspirations and changes taking place in the religious and political leadership of the

country, especially in the Buddhist world, especially after the Independence, we may have at times watered down or even betrayed our faith, by a wavering stance or a connivance with evil forces against truth and justice. Many changes of policy at the national level called for responsible evaluation and reaction from the Church. We may have kept an apolitical distance vowing to have nothing to do with "dirty politics" and thereby contributed to easy passage of unjust laws and even constitutional changes.

Very often it is those who vow to an anti-political religiosity who stoop down to dirty politics of wooing the politician for personal or parochial favours, Under the pretext of being a minority, we have often kept silence even in the face of national injustices. On the other hand for personal or parochial or denominational benefits, we have put up heroic resistance. In short, in the matter of national welfare and politics, the Church has not acted with one voice and standard.

The voices of suspicion and even accusation heard even now from among the Buddhist and Hindu leaders, the complaints of certain sections of our own people that they have been let down, the disappointments of some other sections that have not been cared for..... all these must be taken seriously and a genuine discernment done. Identifying the areas of concern, their challenges and the forces at work will determine the direction of our Church for the future.

5.3. From being a foreign Church to becoming a local Church

The Church in Shri Lanka cannot anymore be considered a young Church nor a "Church of the missions" as referred to by the earlier Congregation of the Propagation of Faith and may be handled so even today. But in recent years there have been many signs of its growth towards maturity. Besides the many centenary celebrations of Church institutions (dioceses, congregations, colleges and convents...) which showed its firm historical rooting in the country, we have also witnessed the emergence of many helpful post-Vat. II structures (The Catholic

Bishops' Conference of Shri Lanka, The National and Diocesan Commissions for various apostolates, the birth of new Dioceses, the inter-diocesan activities) and courageous missionary ventures (sending missionaries to other Asian countries, making genuine attempts at inculturation, inter-religious dialogue etc).

While these events must give us a sense of satisfaction and evoke our gratitude to God, let us not fall into a complacent nationalistic triumphalism and fail to take due note of the new challenges and threats to our Christian faith, particularly to our style of Christian life in this country.

5.4 Though a religious minority, still uniquely called to build a unity out of the given variety

Though we are maturing as local churches in various parts of the country, can we say that there is truly a national Church? What do we mean by a national Church? Is there a cohesive stability for the communion of diocesan churches? Having a single Bishops' Conference or national commissions to link up certain diocesan apostolates within the country and with the outside does not necessarily mean that we make up one national Church.

We know well the problems the government faces today because *instead of building a nation, it presumed it too much*. After many decades of death and destruction only, they are calling people to be united as one nation and raising the question of a single national identity. The government is now trying to impose a national unity which it has never built. What was inherited from the British was nothing more than an administrative unity for about 150 years. The one state-nation concept should have been thought of at the beginning of independence and efforts made to build a single national identity. Instead the country was divided into language streams and led in a different direction to reach the present chaos and destruction.

Let us not make similar presumptions, and run into disappointments but use our strategy and resources to build a unity of peoples by recognising the variety. If there is one

institution which has the obligation and the means and the strategy to build a unity in this country, out of the variety of peoples, cultures, languages, religions etc., it is the Church. But unfortunately, this is not understood and accepted by the official Church which still sees these as "political issues" and excuses itself as a minority that should live by the favour of the majority and of the government in power.

5.5 Unnecessary uniformity in ecclesial structures and apostolates is a waste of God's gifts and a neglect of our true mission.

Though we are in a small country, there is a variety of life, professions and problems within which we are called to be churches. The Church is present along the coastal areas, in the cities, in the agricultural zones and on the hills (tea estates). An unnecessary uniformity in the structures and apostolates imposed from above leads to a misunderstanding in the mission of the Church in those areas and a waste of God's gifts by way of lay talents.

Just as unity has been confused and confounded with uniformity in the matter of our state administration, and thereby the purpose of a good government has been made counter-productive, so too in the Church, a similar state of affairs have resulted in a huge loss of the gifts of God, and a fatal neglect of some of the most important and urgent apostolates.

When the leadership of the Church was mainly steered from Rome and the leaders were all members of foreign Congregations, it was understandable that a good part of the administrative energies were spent on writing reports, answering questions and appealing for permissions from above. Without any intention of disobeying or unfaithful to any sacred leadership, let us admit that time has come for us to do things and take decisions in a more mature and meaningful way when it comes to putting up structures in the midst of slum-estates just as in the cities or when apostolate-priorities are discerned for different areas.

The coastal communities, the urban communities, the farmers' communities and the estate-workers' communities - these call for a variety in administrative structures, diocesan and parochial, as well as with regard to apostolates among them or mission activity by them. More creativity and initiative is called both from the local leadership who have the power to decide and from the foreign agencies who assist. For example, the three dioceses Kandy, Galle and Badulla, which have a large population of estate-workers as their members must have a different structure, apostolate, ministries etc. than the majority in the dioceses of Kurunegala, Anuradhapura and Mannar.

5.6 To be genuinely local and genuinely universal

The Church of Jesus Christ, as a sacrament of salvation for the humanity, is invited in every country to become genuinely local and at the same time genuinely universal. But unfortunately these two terms local and universal are often misunderstood as incompatible, if not opposing, aspects.

Becoming more and more a genuine Sri Lankan, with genuine love for the country, for the people etc. does not mean that that person cannot be a genuine citizen of the world (cosmopolitan). A Christian and a community called to live the faith in the particular context of the country can always remain open to the others outside of himself and his community. Our universality is not in belonging to an internationally powerful organisation, but in our openness to the whole world. Similarly our locality is not in slavishly embracing and glorifying all that is found in the context, but in loving and growing with the joys and sorrows of the people and the land.

In recent decades, under the title of liturgical inculturation, some have been trying to introduce archaic symbols and forms and got into trouble or disappointments. Avoiding the more important and basic need for changes in life style and concerns in our salvific service to the people they chose the relatively safe area of liturgy to localise the Church. There is no compartmental approach to inculturation (or better localisation) of the Church, Unless there be a genuine dialogue or encounter with the religions

cultures and sociopolitical and economic realities of the people, there cannot be any successful liturgical inculturation.

On the other hand, universality of the Shri Lankan Church is not mere linking ourselves to the world hierarchy and aid agencies, but being open and growing in fraternal concern and dialogue with all the religiocultural and sociopolitical realities of the little world around us.

CHAPTER VI

6.0 SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS HINDER OUR PROGRESS

6.1 Not a Church of the Missions but a Church with a Mission

We have stated above that the Church in Shri Lanka is no more a Church of the missions but a maturing Church sending its own missionaries to other parts of Asia. This does not mean that the essential missionary character of the Church consists in continuing the old type of missionary activity but in the reverse direction, from Shri Lanka to the outside. That may be a sign of its maturity and of fraternal concern for other countries. But the genuine missionary function of our Church has to be fulfilled here in our own country, in the context of our own religio-cultural and sociopolitical realities. What is the wisdom of being generous towards other countries when locally we are allergic to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue? There is a lot of homework to be done with regard to post Vat. II missionary activity in the local scene.

Given the context in which we are called to be christians and a Church, we have a missionary mandate and a missionary message of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom with our countrymen without any hidden agendas for conquest or conversion.

The language of "conquest and conversion missionaries" echoed by locals have caused much damage to the genuine missionary intentions of the Church as enunciated in Vat. II.

Let us be clear about our mission to be a christian and a Church in Shri Lanka. Our final goal is neither the conversion of our Buddhist or Hindu brethren nor the extension of the Church of this world. Though we rejoice and welcome people of other faiths coming into our communities (the Church) by their own convictions, still we should not stoop down with hidden agendas and favours to entice others from their faiths.

6.2 What does New Evangelisation mean for Shri Lanka

Yes, evangelisation has been understood from the beginning as a sharing of the good news with others, carrying the good news to others, and even forcing the good news on others. There is a certain form of apostolate of evangelising those outside of our communities of faith, evangelising all the realities of life outside of ourselves etc. This will come as a part of our apostolate, seeking new impetus and directions from the NPC too. But here I refer to and under line *our basic obligation to evangelize ourselves*. Thus new evangelisation for the new millennium starts with the evangelisation of our own selves.

We are not mere Christians, but Catholics and not of recent origin, but traditional ones. What does evangelisation of ourselves mean? What is the new evangelization or re-evangelisation of ourselves mean? This is not a need felt just by the Shri Lankan Church because of some defect or burden of our history. It is a genuine need felt by the whole Church, the universal Church, because times have changed, the world has changed, in fact everything has been affected by some change or other. And the Church, meant to be a sacrament of salvation for the world, necessarily needs to renew herself for the times.

It is very important that we go far beyond an academic acceptance of the need for renewal. It can become crystal clear that the world has changed and the Church needs to change. But that is not enough. Many of us are armchair critics of the Church and its life. Some of us may even believe that a change is needed. But very few of us will undertake a change, especially if that concern our own selves as priests, religious and laity.

Hence the need to be convinced and to become ardent and zealous believers about the renewal that is needed in ourselves and in our churches. Let us ask ourselves how serious we are about a renewal, do we believe in its need, are we prepared to pay the cost of such changes?

It will be the responsibility of a pastoral convention to conscientise and awaken interest about the need for renewal.

Yes, for hundreds of years we have lived a heritage of faith handed down to us by our forefathers. Our forefathers were evangelized by the European missionaries long ago at the cost of their lives. So much so, we can boast of a tradition of faith. We can even think of canonizing our own saints. But still the urgent need of the hour is not to glory in the past, to have celebrities of our old faith, but evangelising ourselves anew, yes anew, to be the genuine disciples of Jesus Christ, to be his communities of faith and love, to be his Church, to be his sacrament of salvation for today's world.

The old evangelisation, we commemorate with gratitude, we cherish with pride, but if we have to be faithful to the old as well as to the present needs of our times, we have to re-evangelise ourselves, we have to submit ourselves to a new process of evangelisation where conversion, belief, commitment etc. are involved. It has been customary to think of evangelization only in terms of extending, or passing on further what we have received hundreds of years ago. This is wrong. In justice, we have an obligation to update our experience of salvation. Similarly in justice the people outside the Christian communities, have a right to receive the person and message of Jesus Christ in a manner suited to their times giving the total salvation they are seeking.

The work that lies ahead of us all in this NPC is immense.

6.3. Our New Missionary Apostolate

Since Vat. II, there has been lot of misunderstanding about this apostolate. Some of us cling on to the old concept of missionary activity and consequently suffer discouragement and disillusion at failures. Many of us have fallen into the other extreme or mistake that missionary activity is out of date or pre-Vat. II and have completely given up. In both ways we have fallen into errors, and there is urgent need to reactivate missionary activity according to Vat. II and make every member of the Church - priest, religious, laity, even children - a missionary of Christ in his her own way.

Let me say that there is a radical shift of focus and change in methods. Unless we understand and accept these, we will end up either giving up our missionary responsibility or doing the wrong mission. We should not waste any more funds or personnel without making sure that we are in keeping with the missionary content and methods proposed by Vat. II and clarified later by magisterial documents. With proclamation of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom as the focus of evangelisation and the widening of these methods through dialogue and inculturation, social apostolate etc. we have ample opportunities to be creative, dynamic and enthusiastic. I do not see any reason why the present day priest should be inferior to the old and handicapped missionaries in the field of evangelisation.

The CBCSL expressed its mind in this :-

"The proclamation of the good news in Jesus goes hand in hand with dialogue with other religions which is part of Christ's own mission.

CHAPTER VII

7.0 NATIONAL PASTORAL CONVENTION

7.1 Limits of the NPC

The NPC is not going to be a "catholic parliament" to make decisions and execute them for the future, but a combined effort of all catholics and churches to renew themselves to be a greater evangelising force by word and witness. Hence in the preparation and in the convention itself, let us bear witness to our intended goal.

The holding of a NPC in 1994 calls for some preliminary remarks about the timing, the preparations and the form of the convention. Although the convergence of many historical and important events may have encouraged the Bishops in calling the convention, fixing the goals and other particulars about the convention, yet there are certain limits beyond which these aspects of the convention cannot be pushed without endangering the convention itself.

7.2 Let the NPC be purely for our renewal

If the convention is to retain its basic character as a convention for the renewal of ourselves and of the Church in Shri Lanka, then we must set the goals clear and go for it with all our might and allow the Spirit to effect that renewal. Linking it up with other events may overshadow the genuine intentions of the convention, or may even draw out most of the organizational strength of the Church for itself and adversely hinder the needed renewal. Let us not make the mistake of trying to kill many birds with one shot and miss the main target.

The Convention is not something that we are forced to conduct or something that we want to hold and finish off as early as possible so that we could be relaxed. It is not a mere event within the frame of time and space. It is intensifying or initiating a new phase in the continuous process of renewal. It is the beginning of a new era calling for new initiates and efforts. Hence

adding other celebrations, however important they may be, to the intentions of the convention, may adversely affect the Convention.

7.3 Let's not be triumphalistic on borrowed money

The canonization of Ven. Joseph Vaz and the coming of the Holy father to our country are important events which call for a rejoicing and a national celebration. But let that not be exaggerated by an expensive and triumphalistic national celebration that will only be a counter witness to the values of the gospel and to the lifestyle of the venerable apostle we want to honour.

We Shri Lankans have the weakness of going for big and elaborate celebrations beyond their means. Very many of our people, and even the government of our country, go on living and celebrating on borrowed money. The Church of Shri Lanka, which is far from being a self-supporting Church, maintaining most of her institutions on charities from abroad, must think seriously before planning out celebrations. Even if the borrowing for celebrations are kept to the minimum, let us not forget that we should not draw out too much from our people, majority of whom are very poor. The people are already scandalised to a great extent by the grand celebrations for First Masses and jubilees of priests and religious. We must be realistic in ascertaining the financial resources of our people and of our Church as well as abstaining from celebrations with borrowed money.

The blame for such extravagant spending should not be on the international agencies that channel European or American charities into our country and into our Church ostensibly with good intentions, but on our own misappropriation and mishandling of funds. Hopefully with this convention we Christians, especially the clergy, will make some serious efforts to put at least our own house in order.

7.4 Let the direction of the renewal be from below

Without steps for renewal at the grass-root level, at the level of the local diocesan churches, the holding of a National Convention appears imprudent. Even at this late hour let efforts be made to insert ourselves into the process of renewal in the right

direction, namely from the individual to the community, from the particular to the whole, from the smaller communities or the parish and the diocese to the larger national Church. The last synod of 1968 was in our opinion a failure, not because of anything wanting in those who participated, but because hardly any preparation was done prior to the Synod and much less to carry the decisions to the parishes. Let us learn by our past experiences.

7.5 Let the convention be truly National and truly Diocesan

Though the Pastrol letter of the Bishops calling for this Convention lists many global and foreign issues as the challenging changes calling for our national convention, we think the challenges of the local situation are much more urgent reasons for renewing our churches both nationally and diocesanwise.

Can the Convention be termed National when a third of the churches are unable to participate? Can it be National when the national identity of a whole population is threatened with death and destruction? Can we have a national convention which does not take the national question of ethnic harmony and peace as a priority? Let us not be accused that the convention was termed national for the benefit of getting funds but conducted only for the dioceses of the South. We may be doing worse than the government.

Whether we like it or not, we have to face the fact that the living conditions in the North and East of this country are entirely different from those in the South . Except for the very few Christian leaders who have visited these parts, especially the North, it is nigh impossible to imagine the quality of human life going on among the people.

Very big issues of life and death, of sustenance and physical survival - situations clearly beyond the control of civilians - condition the day to day life. Surviving in spite of the last three years of severe attracks from air, land and sea and imprisoned without the bare minimum necessities of life (not sufficient food and medicine, no fuel, no transport, no post etc. etc.) - this is already a miracle of their existence. Our brethren of

the South, even those who have visited the North more than a decade ago, will never understand what it is to survive here. A media oriented towards cheap popularity and managed by a government, that is looking only for power, hides the truth from the people and blows profitably the sirens of war. We still hope and pray that at least our Christian brethren understand and do something courageous towards justice and peace and that the NPC makes justice and Peace a primary motive of the whole convention. Let national convention be one for national reconciliation and peace. Why not?

7.6 Diocesan Pastoral Conventions must precede the NPC

Is a national Convention really beneficial without the holding of diocesan pastoral conventions? Is renewal going to be *ex capite* from the top or *ex populo* from the people? Questions of these types must be seriously considered before spending lot of our energy and finance.

Though handicapped by the lack of all communication people in the North have still welcomed the belated news of this Convention. Taking advantage of this invitation, and moved more by the urgency and seriousness of the dangerous situation of life in these areas preparations are well afoot for Diocesan Conventions - both in Jaffna and in Mannar. *These Conventions are primarily a response to the cries of the people from below rather than a response to invitations from above.* They want renewal of their faith individually and communarily, in order to face the growing challenges to life in those areas. After all Christianity is meant to give liberation and life to people who need them, not a religion to connive with the injustices of oppressive powers.

The participation of the dioceses of Jaffna, Mannar and Trinco - Batti in the National Convention, will be determined by the situation of war. Whether civilians will survive the aerial bombs of the coming months and a death-free passage is possible to the South is an open question. But a period of suffering is the optimum period for renewal too, *because every renewal is through the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection.*

If the Bishops, priests, religious and laity of these dioceses despite the hardships in travelling (only cycling and walking) communication (no regular mail service) and stationary (no white paper, ink, etc - all prohibited), are making mighty efforts to prepare themselves for renewal through seminars and grass-root meetings, then it is all the more expected from the dioceses of the south that they too have diocesan conventions before they come for the national convention.

We wish and pray that all the dioceses make serious efforts to initiate renewal of their churches by means of diocesan conventions. Without sufficient preparation and conscientisation at diocesan levels, the National Pastoral Convention will be a mere celebration, if not a failure and a deception with regard to renewal.

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