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St. Maximilian Kolbe's missionary heritage

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE'S MISSIONARY HERITAGE

St. Maximilian, seeing the development of his Knights of the Immaculata movement, its publishing centres, and the missions in Japan, was deeply convinced that all these works were inspired by God Himself, through the mediation of the Immaculate Virgin. He did not want the works of such a divine origin to fail; so he asked the Franciscan seminarians in Rome: „Brothers, when the news of my death reaches you, you should know that, by virtue of this testament, you are my heirs... You should work unreservedly, even to shedding your blood if it is necessary; and you should spread the Knights of the Immaculata movement to the ends of the earth”¹. However, he not only asked them to continue the works he had started, but also to perfect and develop them, since he thought that „every generation should add its own works to the works and achievements of the preceding generations”².

If we seek to fulfil the Saints two postulates, let us give some thought to the questions: Which ideas, methods and means of work contained in his heritage we should accept? And how we should enrich it, so that it can remain vital and fruitful? There is no doubt that modern societies have their problems, their achievements and ideas. Nobody who wants to continue St. Maximilian's work can be indifferent to them. If he were still alive, he would notice them, take them to heart, and prepare himself to deal with them. I would like to consider here St. Maximilian's missionary work, in order that we might continue and complement his heritage. We know the history of his work, and it is not my intention to recall that here. Instead I would like to point to the factors, which most likely contributed to the beautiful and quick development of the evangelical seed, sown by St. Maximilian. That seed became a „great, strong tree”, which, in the opinion of the bishop of Nagasaki, Paul Jamaguchi, „gives the impression of something wonderful to those who know the circumstances under which this work developed”³. A dis-

¹ *Konferencja* (Conference), Rzym (Rome), 23.05.1933.

² *List do młodzieży zakonnej w kolegiach franciszkańskich* (Letter to Franciscan seminarians), Nagasaki, 28.02.1933.

³ *Beatificationis et canonisationis Servi Dei Maximiliani Mariae Kolbe, sacerdotis professi Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Conventualium. Aliae novissimae Litterae Postulatoriae pro introductione cusae*. Romae, Postulatio Generalis OFMConv. 1960, p. 13.

discussion of the factors which were decisive for the development of St. Maximilian's missionary work indicates at the same time a proper approach for today's missionaries.

1. The missionary attitude

Our Lord Jesus Christ often stressed that He was fulfilling His Father's will; that He preached and conveyed to the people what He saw with His Father, as He and the Father are one; that the Father had sent Him into the world to redeem it. Hence the documents of Vatican II call Christ the Divine Missionary. In order to allow people to participate in the process of redeeming the world, Christ established the Church, which is supposed to proclaim and bear witness to God, and to lead the world to Him until the end of time. So the Church is also a Missionary of the world. It is a lasting and „universal sacrament of redemption"⁴. Everyone who believes in Christ and belongs to the Church, should testify to Christ and participate in redeeming the world. The better one understands these truths and the more deeply he experiences them, the stronger will be his desire to speak about Christ and to testify to his mysteries. So much the better missionary he will be. It seems that one should look for the deepest foundations of St. Maximilian's missionary work in his understanding and experiencing of the above-mentioned theological truths.

St. Maximilian infinitely and unreservedly gave himself up to God and people. He wanted to fulfil the Divine plan of Redemption as precisely as he could, through the Immaculate Virgin. He articulated this inner attitude in 1917, when he was a student, in the act of offering himself to the Immaculate Virgin. In the act he gives up everything in favour of God and people. His desire is only to be a most perfect tool in the hands of God, in order to fulfil His plans as quickly and as well as he could. So his perception of himself as a tool in God's hands is dynamic, obligating him to a continuing perfecting both of himself and of the methods and means by which the world can be perfected and sanctified as quickly as possible, according to God's plans.

This complete giving of himself to God and people through the Immaculate Virgin had in the case of St. Maximilian two important dimensions: his desire to convert as many people as he could, all of them, with no exception, and especially those, whose way to God was longest; and his self-forgetfulness, whereby in his missionary activities he refused to take himself into consideration. It was only God and other people that counted: God, who is the way, the truth and the life; and all those who neglect or misuse the divine gifts.

⁴ *Lumen gentium*, 48.

Owning such an attitude, the missionary of Japan and the martyr of Oświęcim became all things to everyone, in accordance with St. Paul's words, that a true witness of God is a Greek for the Greeks, a Roman for the Romans and a Jew for the Jews. St. Maximilian's missionary work began crossing the borders of nations and cultures. This was a typical characteristic of the world's greatest missionaries. Those who met St. Maximilian felt that he was fully devoted to them, that all he wanted was their good, and that he was ready to give his life for them. St. Maximilian's attitude of fulfilling God's mission and his spirit of service, made the Japanese responsive to him as a person through whom God was speaking, even though they did not always understand his language nor the periodical he edited. Since they experienced his being only an intermediary between them and God, they did not feel threatened by him. They allowed him to publish his periodical, to build a friary and to establish a school. They even allowed his co-workers, citizens of a state allied with Japan's enemies, to stay in Japan during the war, at a time when they were deporting or even arresting other missionaries.

2. Affirmative attitude towards the missionary world

In the theory and practice of the Church two attitudes toward the world can be differentiated. One of them sees the Church as the holy history of redemption, distinctly cut off from the world which is identified with evil. The world is the scene where God's Kingdom is being realized until the final defeat of evil. The Church here is seen like Israel in the Old Testament, chosen by Yahweh, and standing out as distinct from all other nations. The other view of the mutual relation between the Church and the world sees the world affirmatively. It notices and stresses the existence of sanctity in the world from the first creative act. Christ revealed and strengthened this sanctity, and it is being complemented ceaselessly till the end of time. The task of the Church is to make people realize the existence of this sanctity, to testify to it, and to increase it. St. Maximilian saw the Church and the world in this affirmative way. He believed that the sanctity which comes from God is contained in the world. Because of this sanctity, the world develops, is ennobled and perfected. In the process of its return to God, its source, the world becomes ever more divine⁵. This is a typically Franciscan way of viewing the world, which for St. Francis was full of God's goodness, love and sanctity.

These two different ways of viewing the world shape different

⁵ *Nasz cel* (Our aim), in: *Pisma* (Works), V.7, p. 411; *Życie Boże* (Divine Life), in: *Pisma* (Works), V.7, p. 488.

motivations for the Church's missionary work. In the former case, such work is undertaken first of all because of the existence of evil. The redemption of people from evil and sin is closely connected with their entering the Church, outside which there is no redemption. The Church is seen here first of all as an institution absolving and saving people. In the other case, God's wisdom and sanctity are seen as spread all over the world among all nations and religions. Hence even non-Christian religions can be seen to have many good features in their worship of God, both with respect to its form and content. Such religions are helpful in developing human religiosity, a characteristic basic to the nature of all human beings. They are certainly included in the holy history of redemption. The fact that Christian religion is relatively limited in time and space warrants our taking a favourable attitude towards non-Christian religions. This was also affirmed by Vatican II. The Church, recognizing that „it is missionary and that evangelization is the basic task of God's People”⁶, undertakes the evangelization of the world not so much out of fear that millions of people can be damned, but primarily out of the inner need to testify to Him and to show Him as the way, the truth and the life. In this way, individuals and nations which still do not know Him can fully participate in the task of redemption, and that which has already begun, can develop into a mature divine life, the complete love of God and neighbour. From this point of view, it is not so much the Church which is seen as the world's missionary, but Christ himself. Accordingly, missionary work is not connected so much with ecclesiology (as in the former case) but with Christology.

St. Maximilian's missionary activities are in this Christocentric current. The main motive for his going to the Far East was a desire to testify to his love for God and his earnest desire to bring people closer to God, because „only He is the source of happiness”⁷. And „if only one soul achieved... happiness” as he wrote after four years in the Japanese mission, „all difficulties and sufferings withstood so far are of great value”⁸. He wanted to rouse religious and moral sensitivity in people's souls, to open „the eyes of people who have false notions of religion”, to teach „about the beauty of heroic virtue in people living in this world”, to lead „those who honestly seek the truth... so that they would not lose their way in their striving for that most important aim”, to absolve „souls and like a friend to encourage them to follow the way of virtue”⁹.

⁶ *Ad gentes divinitus*, 35.

⁷ *Wspomnienia czterech ubiegłych lat* (Memories of the last four years), *Mugenzai no Seibo no Kishi* 5 (1934) 130—1931.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Co jest celem Rycerstwa Niepokalanej* (What is the aim of the I.M. Movement), *Mugenzai no Seibo no Kishi* 3 (1932) 121—122.

The Christo-centric, rather than ecclesiological, basis for St. Maximilian's missionary work is evident in the fact that he did not apply to the Church authorities for the right to organize a typically pastoral institution. It was difficult for him to agree to the practice of dividing missionary terrain into zones of work and influence each under the control of a particular order or congregation. Through his activities he wanted not so much to build up the Church in the Japanese world, in order to bring Christ with it; rather, on the contrary, he preached Christ first, and only then did he think about the Church.

St. Maximilian was not a typical missionary of his time, like those who defined the results of their work by the number of established parishes and the amount of baptismal water poured on the heads of „pagans". At every moment he was ready to give his life to make others accept God and the Immaculate Virgin, but he was not known as a dispenser of baptism. We do not even know if he baptized one Japanese, although there were conversions during his stay in Japan — he mentions them himself. His missionary work resembles what St. Paul says of himself: „Christ has not sent me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, and not in the wisdom of the word"¹⁰. St. Maximilian, like Paul the Apostle, wanted first of all to preach God to the world, to bear witness to Him; he ceded to others the glory of solemnly incorporating the converts into the Church.

St. Maximilian in his Christo-centric view of his mission was also Mariological. Right after Christ he wanted to show the world the Virgin Mary as the one who of all people most fully realized the ideal of sainthood, and in whom is accomplished most perfectly the task of transforming human creatures into something Godlike. She is „the most perfect creature..., the most adored of all creatures"¹¹. Hence he showed her as a model of human perfection. At the same time he showed her to be the Saviour's Mother and a mediatrix between Him and us. He preached her moral beauty, her mercy, and power. He presented her as the world's greatest missionary — after Christ. She leads people to Christ by the most sure and straight way.

Because St. Maximilian's missionary work was deeply rooted in his cult of the Virgin Mary, we can say that it had better chances of success in the Far East countries — where he had always been inclined to go — as in the religions of those countries there is a cult of the woman, unlike the Near East, where woman is con-

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 1,17.

¹¹ *Niepokalanej Milicja* (The Knighthood of the Immaculate Virgin) (M.I.), in: *Pisma* (Works) V, 7 p. 439.

sidered inferior to man and where even today her social status and prestige are low.

3. The testimony of faith

Faith in Jesus Christ takes the shape of imitating Him first of all in His love towards the Father and all humanity. Christianity is supposed to realize the presence of Christ's love in the world. This means that the truth of Christianity is not primarily the truth of a teaching office, as doctrine, but the truth of a person, expressed in an act of love. Hence the Church considers the primary means of evangelization to be: „the testimony of a true and precise Christian life, which perdures in an inseparable communion with God, and at the same time in a fervent and unlimited spirit of dedication to the others”¹². So the missionary „following the footsteps of his Master, who was quiet and meek”, is supposed to show „that his yoke is sweet, and his burden light”. He is to testify „to his Lord through a truly evangelical life, through great patience, mildness, gentleness, through a love which is not hypocritical, and — in case it is necessary — through spilling his blood”¹³.

St. Maximilian was fully aware of the fact, that Christian witness is the most efficient method of evangelizing the world, and he accepted it as the basic method of his missionary work, considering it typically Franciscan. It consists of three elements: a) priority of example over word, b) poverty, c) sacrifice and offering oneself for others in everyday activities. Like the founder of his order, St. Francis, he persuaded his co-workers and the whole order that people's minds and hearts can be better stimulated to love God and neighbour by our being true witnesses of Christ, than by beautiful sermons in church. He taught that „holy poverty is a powerful capital allowing one to compete with the greatest financial powers”, and that „in the work of redemption and sanctification, the most efficient means are the cross, suffering, sacrifice”¹⁴. St. Maximilian demanded such attitudes of those, who were going to undertake missionary work. In a letter to one of them he wrote: „Brother Marian, write to me... if you still intend to give yourself up to the work of the Immaculate Virgin, if you would really like to give your life to her, to exhaust yourself completely and perhaps because of starvation and inconveniences to let your life be shortened, and to expose yourself to an early death for the Immaculate Virgin? Write to me, to Niepokalanów; since branches of «The Knight» and I. M. are

¹² Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 41.

¹³ *Ad gentes divinitus*, 24.

¹⁴ *Rekolekcje* (Religious exercises), Mugenzai no Sono 1935.

opening in other countries, I would like to know how many such «madmen» as I are available for this cause"¹⁵.

St. Maximilian realized that the Franciscan method of Christian witness in its missionary work is not easy. Some of his co-workers returned from Japan to Poland, or went to America, because they were not able to cope with the tasks set by the Saint. However, he himself was faithful to his ideals, and he persuaded Franciscan seminarians that „there is no means more proper for remedying the evil of our age” than the Franciscan method of bearing witness¹⁶. He spoke to the young generation as if he had an intuition that in the near future this method would be indispensable for bringing back to God the rich countries of Europe, countries with perfectly developed propaganda, which now were becoming secularized. In modern societies, in which the word is passing through a crisis, because of its abuse, Christian witnesses are more readily „heard” than teachers, and even if teachers are „heard”, it is because they are witnesses first. Already St. Peter the Apostle saw it, pointing to the need for a real and noble Christian life, so that even those, who do not believe the word, seeing this life... would be won over without the word¹⁷.

The attitude of bearing witness, in which the spirit of Franciscan poverty is stressed, is desirable in the work of evangelization for several reasons, especially the following two: first, it dispels the doubts with those who are the subject of the work, and who may fear that the work will be followed by new forms of control and by limiting their freedom; and second, if missionaries live in poverty, it brings them closer to the masses, which are most prone to be secularized. These two phenomena enable ties of mutual trust, help and cooperation in many fields between the missionaries and the people they serve to be formed. A witness to poverty certainly opens the way for the God's Word to penetrate human souls. St. Maximilian noticed these blessed results of the Franciscan attitude of Christian witness as soon as he began his missionary work in Japan. After a few months' work in Nagasaki he wrote to Father Florian Koziura: „If we could afford any comfort, we just would not be able to work. But without it, everybody helps us, and our most proficient interpreter is now Professor Yamaki, a Japanese, born a Protestant Methodist”¹⁸. In an article published in the „Misje Katolickie” („Catholic Missions”) monthly, St. Maximilian stressed that

¹⁵ *List do brata kleryka Mariana Wójcika we Fryburgu* (Letter to Brother Marian Wójcik in Freiburg), Asyż (Assisi), 26.01.1930.

¹⁶ *Do młodzieży zakonnej w kolegiach franciszkańskich* (Letter to Franciscan seminarians), Nagasaki, 28.02.1933.

¹⁷ Cf. I P. 3.1.

¹⁸ *Do o. Floriana Koziury* (Letter to Father Florian Koziura), Nagasaki, 9.12.1930.

the simple way of life of the friars in Nagasaki, as described by correspondents in the local non-Christian newspaper won the favour of the local public towards the Franciscan community. On the basis of their favourable attitude minds and hearts opened to the „seed of God's Word" sown by the missionaries¹⁹.

4. Modern means of evangelization

Throughout the ages the Church has worked out three types of foundations and means for its missionary work. They are the following: an organized place for religious cult; schools; and hospitals. Missionaries, wherever they came, first of all would build at least a small chapel. Around it they would assemble the first Christian parish, so that it would be the beginning of a developing young Church. They would organize schools, as well as medical and social programs. Missionary work in the period between the two World Wars was based on these three foundations, and it is still the same now. The lower the level of civilization or state of development at which a country finds itself, the easier the task of organizing schools and hospitals is for the Church. It is much more difficult to do so in modern countries where the state takes over the education system and schools, as well as the system of social and medical care. Maintaining Catholic schools and hospitals in such a modern state becomes so expensive that the Church is not able to support them with its own means.

Appreciating the importance of the above mentioned means of evangelization, St. Maximilian nonetheless sought other means — those resulting from the development of technology and the mass-media. Using them for the evangelization of the world was not something completely new in the work of the Church in the 1930s. The Church already used the printed word on a large scale. There were great publishing houses both in the established Christian world and in the mission countries. What was new was St. Maximilian's open attitude towards modern media, as well as the principles according to which he used media in evangelization.

a) The attitude of both the clergy and the laity towards technical inventions and modern organization has always been divided. In the period between the Wars a considerable number of clergy disapproved of them, thinking that they were used for sowing unbelief and doubt, for propagating loose morals, for fulfilling people's lowest desires and drives. In short, the world would be better if mass-media did not develop so rapidly; in fact it would be better if mass-media did not exist at all. St. Maximilian belonged

¹⁹ *Japoński Niepokalanów rozrasta się...* (The Japanese Niepokalanów grows...), *Misje Katolickie* 51 (1932) 280—283.

to those, who approved of the progress in technology and mass-media. He thought that all inventions, including those in the field of mass-media, are beneficial. Their ultimate source is in God's wisdom, and they ought to serve Him. If they do not, it is not their fault, but that of the people who use them. Those people are frequently indifferent or even hostile to God. This kind of people should simply be outdistanced in using technical and organizational achievements. On the grounds of such simple reasoning St. Maximilian formulated the following rule: „Let all means, all inventions in machines or work systems, first of all serve the cause of sanctifying souls through the Immaculate Virgin"²⁰. Following this rule, he successfully used an already tried medium to evangelize the world, namely the press. He attempted to use the radio, which was becoming popular at that time, and even mentioned television which was in its initial stages. Since he wanted to make his co-workers and the M.I. members well-disposed toward all technical and organizational possibilities, he gave them, as it were in testament, an order to use for evangelization of the world everything that „ever is invented for enlightening minds and inflaming hearts"²¹. This order is especially timely today, when the transmission of thought by means of word alone is becoming inefficient and useless. Visual transmission is becoming ever more prominent. Pope Paul VI, noticing and stressing the importance of this change, said that a „picture civilization" is being developed which requires the Church to use such means of preaching the Gospel as are available in this civilization²². They include, among others: film, theatre, television, video-recorders. We can be sure that St. Maximilian would use them.

b) Using the new mass-media, St. Maximilian wanted to reach as large a public as possible, and first of all those who were far from God or did not know Him at all. He adjusted the contents, language, typography and distribution of his periodical to the needs and level of the average reader. He asked the readers to write articles. Together with his co-workers he went out to the streets and railway stations; he went into the country; he gave away his periodicals to everyone he met. He widely applied the method of looking for customer, without waiting for them to come to him.

c) St. Maximilian sought to organize a large and dynamic evangelization center, which would make use of various mass-media. He thought this was more important than building large and magnificent churches. That is why in Nagasaki he organized a printing

²⁰ *Do rycerzy i rycerek Niepokalanej* (To the Knights of the Immaculate Virgin), *Rycerz Niepokalanej* 16 (1937) 353—355.

²¹ *List do o. Floriania Koziury* (Letter to Father Florian Koziura), *Mugenzai no Sono*, 21.12.1931.

²² Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 42.

office before establishing a public chapel and a school. He thought that these social centers of mass-communications could play a great role in the evangelizing work in the modern world, and that their employees were true missionaries. Admittedly, a missionary of pen, of radio, or television does not evaluate the fruits of his work by „the amount of issued baptismal certificates, but he is an educator of the public, shapes opinions, tempers hatred for Catholicism, clears up and gradually removes from minds musty prejudices and reproaches, gradually disposes people to loyalty toward the Church, and also in the course of time (shorter or longer) toward a disposition of trust and ultimate willingness to become more closely acquainted with the religion. This missionary route is long, but it leads masses, not only individuals”²³.

d) St. Maximilian did not want those who evangelize the world by means of mass-media to constitute an isolated group. He wanted them to feel deep bonds with the people to whom they were communicating news and ideas. He wanted them to know and understand their problems. Hence he suggested that the people working for the press, radio, television and film should „go and get closer to the souls through religious exercises, missions, lectures and confessions, through organizing and visiting M.I.2”. Then „they will learn better what and how they should write for the country and for the neighbourhood at the moment. Moreover, orally they will be able to penetrate into the hearts more intensely”²⁴.

e) Mass-media should present the good side of social life, at the same time as it clearly formulates Christian principles of conduct. Giving advice to „Mały Dziennik” („The Little Daily”) St. Maximilian formulated this principle in the following way. „Stress and praise the good more than point to the evil — so that good example might be attractive. However, if one must draw the attention of the society or of the authorities to an evil, it should be done gently and with love towards the evildoers. One should not exaggerate or go into details about evil more than is necessary to remedy it”²⁵.

Today the Church fully recommends St. Maximilian’s attitude towards mass-media, because it thinks that „these media harnessed to serve the Gospel, largely spread listening to God’s Word and they bring the message of redemption to millions of people. The Church would be guilty before the Lord if it did not use those powerful aids which are being constantly improved and perfected

²³ *Sprawozdanie z pracy za rok 1934* (The annual report of 1934), *Wiadomości z Prowincji OO. Franciszkanów w Polsce* 5 (1935) 24—25, 27.

²⁴ *List do o. Floriana Koziury* (Letter to Father Florian Koziura), *Mugenzai no Sono*, 2.12.1931.

²⁵ *Dyrektywa dla „Małego Dziennika”* (Directions for the „Mały Dziennik” — The Little Daily). *Zapiski* (Notes), Niepokalanów 1936.

by the human mind"²⁶. Pope Paul VI calls them „the modern pulpit of the world". Through them Christ can speak to the masses more efficiently today. They can be certainly included in the Franciscan model of mission which has always been disposed towards the masses. In the past the Franciscans built large Gothic churches and preached in town squares to reach as many people as they could with the God's Word. Today they have to use mass-media. This means of preaching the Gospel is given to the Order by technological and organizational development. The Evangelical message which is delivered, however, will penetrate the consciences of the people listening only if this message is supported by the Christian witness of those who use modern media.

5. Social work

Acts of the Apostles tells us that Christ, the most perfect example of a missionary, did not limit His mission to preaching, but „He walked doing good and healing everybody"²⁷. The Gospels describe numerous cases in which His deep concern about the temporal good of His people is shown. He taught the unknowing, comforted the worried, restored sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute. He opposed the wrongs done to helpless widows, He fed the hungry masses, that followed Him, so that they would not faint on their way. From earliest times His followers and disciples wanted to imitate Him in this respect too. Church documents stress that missionaries, if they want to be true to the Gospel they preach must first of all be true to its fundamental principle — the principle of love. Ultimately Christianity is the religion of love for God and neighbour. Hence a missionary cannot be indifferent to the conditions in which people live.

St. Maximilian was not very active in the field of charitable and social work, but he was sensitive to material poverty and social humiliation around him. He handed this sensibility down to his co-workers, of whom Brother Zeno Żebrowski became the foremost witness. The latter, through his charitable and social work, became another pillar of the mission in Japan. Brother Zeno took care of the homeless, the poor, the ill, the depressed, the unemployed, and those who were affected by natural calamities. He gave them clothes, food, medicine, good words, faith, hope and love. For those most severely in need Brother Zeno established orphanages and nursing homes. He organized and supported those who could work; he fought for their proper rights, joining them in opposition to poverty and social degradation. He managed to activate the deepest

²⁶ Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 45.

²⁷ Acts 10,38.

resources of the good both in the poor and in the rich who, thanks to his words and deeds, shared their wealth with those who were in need.

Charitable and social work became — alongside the publishing apostolate — an important characteristic of the Franciscan mission in Japan, and perhaps it was the main reason why this mission developed so quickly.

It is indispensable to complement evangelization with charitable and social work, because a person to whom the Gospel is preached, is not an abstract being. He or she is a person involved in economical and social problems. Evangelization would not be complete — as Paul VI said — „without taking into consideration the mutual relation which constantly occurs between the Gospel and an actual personal and social life of a man”²⁸. One cannot grow beautiful flowers of religion and morals where there is a plentitude of hunger, unemployment, ignorance and social injustice. A missionary must notice these weeds and eradicate them.

6. The attitude of dialogue and ecumenism

People today are aware that an attitude of dialogue is indispensable. Harmony among individuals, nations, religions and cultures would not be possible without it. Such dialogue is becoming even more necessary, as mutual relations between people increase and living space diminishes.

Although St. Maximilian did not write about the attitude of dialogue, he possessed such an attitude. He manifested it in several ways: looking for contacts with people of other creeds, other religions, other outlooks on life; in his ability to maintain these contacts; in gaining very numerous co-workers; and in the positive approach of his periodicals, where one does not find negative opinions about their creeds, religions or cultures.

The conviction that Christ is the source of life and the aim of every person and of whole nations, and that their culture springs from the same source — from God's wisdom — is the foundation of the attitude of dialogue. The same eternal Word is reflected, although not to the same extent, in every culture. A missionary must admit this pluralism and in a dialogue with people of other religions and cultures he should notice and accept what is „true and holy” in them²⁹.

Every religion gives answers to the fundamental questions: Who is man? What is the meaning of human life? What happens to a person after death? What is the good? From where does evil

²⁸ Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 29.

²⁹ *Nostra aetate*, 2.

come? What is the way to happiness? Only a dialogue between people of different religions can allow us to find the right answers to these questions. Moreover, only through dialogue can Christian humanism, enriched by Christ, perfect that humanism which is formed on the basis of man's natural desires and philosophical reflection. Only through dialogue can the Church benefit from the experience of ancient cultures and absorb their treasures into its life. To this end the Church encourages missionaries and religious institutes.

Dialogue rooted in a consideration of human problems and God's mysteries leads people of different religions and cultures to the same understanding of God and humanity. It guarantees peace in the world. Dialogue between Christians, which is rooted in their common search for a deeper and closer bond with Christ, leads all Christians to an ever new understanding of the mystery of Christ and to new forms of unity with Him. This dialogue we call ecumenism.

The Decree about the Church's mission work encourages Catholics to „cooperate in a brotherly way with the separated brothers, according to the norms set by the Decree about ecumenism, together, in face of the nations, believing in God and Jesus Christ, and by a cooperation in the social and technical as well as in the cultural and religious fields, but excluding any shade of indifference and confusion of nations as well as of morbid competition. Let them cooperate first of all for Christ, their common Lord; let His name unite them"³⁰.

The attitude of dialogue and ecumenism make it easier for a missionary to join in the cultural and social life of a given country, to live with the national and religious traditions, to participate in solving topical problems.

7. Inculturation

The last characteristic of missionary work which should be discussed here is inculturation. Inculturation is the entrance of the Christian message with its understanding of God, the Church, with its various gifts, like grace, the holy sacraments, with its cult of God and its norms of conduct, into the concrete culture of a nation. Christianity enters into this culture, bringing into it something that it never had, and giving it a new perspective for development, without destroying any of the important values proper to that culture. Pope Pius XII expressed this reality vividly: „When the Gospel is accepted by various races" — he wrote in *Evangelii praecones* — „it does not destroy or restrain anything that is good,

³⁰ *Ad gentes divinitus*, 15.

praiseworthy and beautiful, and which they had achieved with the power of their native genius and natural abilities. When the Church calls and leads a tribe to a higher level of perfection and to a more cultural life under the inspiration of the Christian religion, it does not act as a lumberjack who cuts down without choosing, and devastates the luxuriant wood. It rather acts like a gardener who grafts a cultivated shoot on a natural tree, so that later noble and juicy fruit can grow and ripen on it"³¹.

Conscious of the fact that it must bring the light of the Gospel to all nations, and that it must give the life brought by Jesus Christ to every nation, the Church also realizes that it should come into the culture of every nation in such a way that does no violence to that nation's identity. We can take from that culture everything that is not contrary to Christ's teaching. This mode of divine life coming into human life was shown by Christ Himself. Coming into the world in order to redeem all people, Christ Incarnate entered the concrete conditions of the Jewish nation. His entrance into the Jewish nation can be seen under two aspects: the first one is described by St. Paul in the following way: Jesus Christ, being the Son of God, „deprived Himself of everything, assuming the shape of a Servant, as He became like us"³² not only by name, but in fact, experienced „in everything to our likeness, but in sin"³³. The second stage is Christ's acceptance of the whole culture of Israel and His active help in solving the problems of that nation.

Likewise today Christ wants to come into particular nations in these two ways. Fulfilling this ideal of Christ the Church does not identify itself with any particular culture, „even with the culture of the West with which its history is so closely connected"³⁴. Missionaries coming to a nation should „deprive themselves" of everything that might constitute an obstacle in their contacts with the natives. It may include behaviour patterns, social activities, habits and customs, prejudices brought from their own culture. It may be the feeling of superiority resulting from the economic and cultural importance of their own country. A missionary must give up much of what was essential in his own country and he must be very humble, so that he can accept the way of life which is prevalent in the country to which he has come with God's Word.

Adjusting itself to the local culture, the Church requires also that the young Christian community adjust itself to God's Word — and sometimes to do so at all costs. Christ demands His new followers to give up much, sell much, and to buy „the new precious pearl". This may mean that they must renounce polygamy when that

³¹ P i u s XII, *Evangelii praecones*, 89.

³² Phil. 2,7.

³³ Hebr. 4,15.

³⁴ J o h n XXIII, *Principes pastorum*, 16.

prevails in their culture, or admit equal rights for the man and woman, or reject revenge as a principle of conduct, or leave temples frequented by many generations, forsaking the feasts to which their family history is related. This means that entering a culture, the Church cannot give up the truths and norms essential for Christianity. The core of these truths and norms is the same, irrespective of the culture and the latitude in which a Church develops.

Thanks to the fact that the Church is open to every culture and that it simultaneously in all places preaches the same and inviolable truth of God, Christ can be received and worshipped in every nation in slightly different way. Every culture experiences His presence in its own way, but for all cultures He is the same way and truth and life. Hence the Church is the same everywhere, although in every nation it is a little different. What is universal in it is divine; and what is particular is human. It is a continuing incarnation of Christ in human life after the model of incarnation that happened in the Jewish nation.

The entrance of Christianity into a nation and its culture creates a new context for the divine life. In this context dogmas are formulated in a way which is closest to the way that nation perceives the reality. The forms of contact with God stem from the experiences and behaviour of that nation. Hence to obtain true African Christian prayers, it is not enough to simply translate Gregorian hymns, the breviary, Franciscan rosary or songs to the Holy Virgin sung in Italy or in Poland into one of the African languages. This is insufficient. Such a prayer might be alien to the spirit of the African culture. To be truly African, it should arise from the events, experiences, problems, spirit and language of those nations. The most mature Christian life in a nation which becomes Christian can be only created by the natives. Only they can unite their culture with the Christian faith completely and creatively. St. Maximilian understood this very well, and he did not impose the European religious forms upon the Japanese. He made efforts to enable the natives to take over the evangelization of Japan. When the Provincial Father Anselm Kubit was going to establish a separate province of the Order in Japan, St. Maximilian opposed it. He felt that a new province, consisting mainly of Europeans, should not be established, since they were an alien body in the Japanese society. About this problem he wrote to the Provincial in the following manner: „I do not think it expedient to establish a Province of the Order here with our fathers and brothers. We are rather the seed for forming native religious in our spirit. And only they will develop the action”³⁵.

³⁵ *List do o. Anzelma Kubita* (Letter to Father Anselm Kubit), Nagasaki, 3.11.1934.

Inculturation is not a spontaneous, blind process. It should be preceded by a detailed study of the history, law, customs, and processes going on in the nation, and by looking for an answer to the question why they are going on. This latter is most important, since knowing the causes and mechanisms of the changes going on in the culture in question allows one to join in them and to control their development. One must know in which direction he should lead, in what ways, and with what tempo, so that the native culture will not be destroyed, and especially that new sufferings will not be caused. Inculturation is a subtle game of courage and wisdom, initiative and intelligence, creative fantasy and common sense, strong resolution and inexhaustible patience, great respect for one's own culture, and humility to accept someone else's. It progresses best when the following rule is kept: faithful to Christ and to the particular culture, trusting always in the influence of the Holy Spirit.

8. Conclusions

A presentation of the missionary heritage of St. Maximilian in the light of research and the contemporary situation of the Church would not be complete if we did not try to formulate a few postulates for the missionary activities of the Church.

A. In developing countries the number of Christians is ever increasing. In 1960 48,5% of all the world's Catholics lived in the countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America; in 1984 already 58%; and in 2000 probably 70% of the world's Catholics will live there³⁶. The old Christian countries will constitute a minority in the Catholic Church. Our Order should have a share in the development of the young Church, and already today our attention should be drawn first of all to India, China and Brasil. Why to these countries? 1° The population of these countries already constitutes more than half of the world's population, and they still show a great demographic vitality. So in the future they will decide about „the face of the world". This face will be the more beautiful, the more strongly it can be shaped by Christ. 2° They are countries open to Christianity, especially India. 3° If in St. Maximilian's missionary work one can see a message of Divine Providence, then this Providence directed him constantly towards India and China, but did not allow him to develop his missionary work in those countries, leaving them as a task for his spiritual heirs. He indicated the direction for developing our missions.

B. In the countries with great populations and high birth-rates, which at the same time are quickly modernized, the mission work

³⁶ J. Mitterhöffner, *Der Missionsbegriff: Werden und Wandel*, Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift 132 (1984) 255.

should be based on: a. creating centers of social communications; b. organizing and directing charitable and social work. The choice of these means of evangelization is justified by two phenomena: 1° Using mathematical terms we can say that the amount of churches and chapels will grow in arithmetical progression, whereas the population will grow in geometrical progression. The result of this difference is such that more and more members of the young generation will not have access to God's Word. It can only be made accessible if we proclaim it through the press, radio, television, cassettes, film. Moreover, the young generation in those countries eagerly uses this kind of mass-media. 2° A high birth-rate makes a multitude of children and young people live in the conditions of material, social and often moral poverty. Work toward their betterment and liberation from penury and social degradation is the task of the Franciscan Order in the modern world. A Franciscan should share his life with the least ones of this world.

C. Without questioning the priority of the divine factor (the charisma) in people going to the missions, one cannot today underestimate the human factor, namely a versatile preparation for missionary work. To make such a preparation possible, an international mission center should be established. The center would have the following tasks: a. intensifying a missionary spirit on the basis of the recent documents of the Apostolic See; b. introducing missionaries to the culture and current problems of the mission countries; c. establishing personal contacts with future co-workers; d. instructing the missionaries in various forms of pastoral and social work which are possible in the mission areas; e. teaching the languages of the mission countries and one global language; f. developing a distance from one's own culture, and the religious attitudes peculiar to one's own nation; g. forming an attitude of dialogue; h. developing a sensitivity to new problems, so that the missionaries can understand them and shape their developmental processes in the spirit of the Gospel. The problem of peace, for example, so current and so much discussed today, could be solved because of a fear of war, or a feeling of threat. On the other hand, a whole peace initiative could also result from a vision of human brotherhood among all peoples — the vision of an agape, in whose center is Christ.