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Indirect Methods in the Missionary Apostolate: Some Theological Reflections

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(A) DEFINITIONS

1. By 'indirect methods' are understood those procedures or activities which do not directly intend, either *objectively* in themselves or *subjectively* in the intention of the agent, the immediate aim of the Apostolate, i.e. the salvation of man, but attempt only to prepare the ground for some subsequent direct activity. This 'indirect' preparation presupposes an ontological discontinuity between the indirect means and the direct methods.

2. A direct method is one which is immediately connected with the specific mission of the Church.

3. The mission of the Church is the continuation in space and time of the work of Christ. The work of Christ, the Pantocrator, is being realized not only in and through the visible Church, but also in and through the human person in an inscrutable way. The Church can thus be understood either as the Living Organism, whose vital principle is the Holy Spirit, i.e. as the Mystery, which existing since the beginning of the world was made manifest in Christ, or as the Visible Sacramental Organization which embodies the former, but which cannot be identified with it.

4. The work of Christ was not primarily to found a new religion, but to continue the creative work of God, i.e. to redeem the whole world sending his Spirit for the divinization of the entire cosmos. Likewise, the mission of the Church is not primarily one which could be identified with one religion alone, but of being an instrument of redemption for the whole cosmos, co-operating with the incarnate Son and the Spirit. Thus, under this perspective, there is no place for a sense of frustration, for the Church is neither the *nurse* nor the *educator* nor the *ruler* of the whole of mankind, but the place in and through which mankind reaches its destination, i.e. its final goal.

5. Redemption, here, stands for salvation, and salvation does not mean merely 'liberation' of the 'soul' or healing of the

'body', but man's wholeness, i.e. the full integration of his theandric being, that final—divine—perfection into which the whole cosmos has been called. This process is not automatic, but requires a free human response.

(B) PRINCIPLES

6. To argue that the Church has to rely on 'indirect methods' as a means of fulfilling her mission of earth would smack of pelagianism. It would also be unacceptable, for it would require a policy of strategy and scheming in direct opposition and plain contradiction to the spirit and the letter of the Gospel. Thus, the theology of 'indirect methods' consists in rejecting them altogether as proper tasks of the Church.

7. In order to decide what is an indirect method we have to take into consideration that the Church lives in history and that therefore its own awareness, like that of mankind, varies with the times. Thus, what according to the mental outlook of one epoch was considered a direct method may in another epoch be regarded as indirect.

8. History proves that the Church, as such, never purposely introduced 'indirect methods'; though what was started as a direct method may be considered indirect in the opinion of a following generation, and as such may continue only by virtue of historical inertia. The works of mercy, for instance, which were the crown of glory of the 'missions' and are now becoming the crown of thorns, were started as direct and not indirect means of apostolate.

9. Whenever a method is considered to have become an indirect method, it has to be transferred from the Church as such to such secular or non-ecclesial agencies as are capable of carrying on that particular activity.

10. Men's attitude regarding a particular method and its assessment may vary in different places and also among people living at any one time, though it usually follows a detectable general trend. It is the function of those in authority to discern the signs of the times and to take the necessary steps in line with the dynamism of life of the Church to avoid unnecessary traumas.

Corollaries

11. Whereas education, medical care and social uplift were considered direct methods when they were started as Church activities, and are still judged as such by a minority, they have been replaced nowadays in the mind of many Christians by the struggle for human justice in all its aspects, economic, racial, religious, etc., but in as far as the former values can be said to belong to the mission of the Church they are seen in direct connection with the salvation of man.

12. Whatever contributes to a more worthy and integrated human life, i.e. whatever tends towards a *complete* humanization,

which, in traditional Christian terms, could be called a *theandric transfiguration*, is considered today a direct means of apostolate. The shift in consciousness is caused by that process of ecclesial secularization—to be distinguished from profane secularism—which no longer envisages salvation in a merely disincarnate and transcendent way. The function of the Church is, accordingly, not to cultivate only a part of the human being—the spiritual or supernatural—but to integrate the person so that he may reach his theandric fullness: the Church, *sacramentum mundi*, being the incarnate link between an insufficient immanent secularism and a lop-sided transcendent supernaturalism.

13. A man's personal vocation does not necessarily coalesce with the mission of the Church. A method of apostolate can only be a direct method if it gets hold of the whole person, or, in other words, if the person believes in it as a direct method. Thus, it seems the duty of the authorities concerned to free all those members who no longer consider what they are doing a direct means of apostolate, and to enable them to engage themselves in activities where they may be able to integrate, first, their own personalities and, consequently, those also of the people with or for whom they work.

14. To 'de-freeze' present-day structures without creating confusion or harm to anybody is one of the most urgent tasks of those in authority. One course of action would be to hand over to non-ecclesial agencies all that those agencies are prepared to take, retaining a part, perhaps, of the same personnel, but ceasing to be an ecclesiastical organization.

15. More important still seems to be a positive determination to create, not new cadres on the whole, but a new type of personal formation which would enable consecrated Christians to collaborate in our society, realizing in a less organized but more personalist way the Christian vocation of being salt, leaven and light.

16. The highest importance should, finally, be given to the full recovery of the specific mission of the Church, which is centred around the Liturgy, understood as the integral work, *ergon*, of the people of God, *laos*, which finds its culmination in the Eucharistic Mystery.