From the Concept of Missions to the Concept of Developing Churches: A Proposal

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Introduction

As we reflect in a Roman Catholic context on missions and the church, we may share ecumenically with churches or groups intent on clarifying their missionary identity. Clarified terminology can point to missionary work as that which serves a developing church, one in the process of growth to maturity, or that ministry which helps in the process of renewal. It distinguishes this ministry from the ordinary work of maintenance.

Such a clarification will help to shed light on the relationship between developed churches and developing churches. We can see more clearly how a developed church can help those developing reach maturity and adulthood.

The term "missions", used to delineate two different realities, suffers some confusion. It describes the work done by heralds of the gospel sent out by the church to preach the Good News to those who do not believe in Christ. It also describes pastoral work where the activities of the first announcement are brought to maturity. The term at this point in history has some limitations. This has prompted a search for new, more exact terminology. Some of the new terms are young churches, developing churches or forming churches. *Young churches* may not be precise enough because it seems to exclude churches which may have been evangelized many years ago but still are in the

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process of growing to maturity. *Forming churches,* or churches in formation, could be acceptable but also could be misleading unless understood as the process of development. The phrase *developing churches* seems to be the most clear. It refers to a process which is newly established or one which may have been going on for a number of years. In the following paragraphs the word *developing* will be used and at times interchanged or used with the term *forming* referring to churches in mission lands, where churches lack maturity, are not self-sufficient and stand in need of assistance.

What is being suggested, especially by those who are looking to sharpen their missionary identity, is a change from the concept of missions to the concept of developing churches (churches in formation). It refers to the pastoral process where the message of truth is preached, the church is established and proceeds to maturity with all the essential elements needed to make it complete and mature. This presupposes knowing what is needed to constitute the developed church. It makes the analysis of a church possible to determine if the elements exist in its work to bring about God's Kingdom and determine to what extent they have developed. If we discover what may be missing or not fully developed, it can assist goal setting in terms of all the elements necessary for a developed church.

Strictly speaking, the only formed church in the complete sense is the eschatological church. What is referred to in our discussion is the church on earth, always in the process of growth. It is called developed when it attains a certain state of theological, sociological and psychological maturity. When it offers all the means of salvation, has a stability, is fruitful, adjusts to the changing environments, has pastors and flock that are autochthonous and prophetically challenges whatever sinful or unjust conditions it discovers, it is a church on the way to becoming eschatological.

The concept proposed (developing churches) does not pretend to avoid all difficulties when defining missionary work or a mission, but from a pastoral point of view it is more exact than a juridical analysis. Grey areas still exist. It takes the analysis out of the juridical field and puts it into a theological-socio-psychological context insuring a continued growth and prophetic vision. By determining what constitutes a developed church we can discover those elements necessary in the process of development. The criteria used are based on faith, maturity, form, vitality and ability to be an agent of transformation. When speaking about maturity, we use what we know in psychology to apply it to growth in faith.

Thus a church in the process of formation comes to a point when it can humanly be judged to be mature or developed on the basis of essential conditions. These elements, extracted from the Vatican II documents, will be discussed at length later. Their bases are theological and socio-psychological. The theological aspect is faith and its expression in charity. Sociologically, it

is what is necessary to have a social group that becomes a community which is aware, active and growing. The psychological aspect is maturity, the maturity of faith and its response to reality.

Every developed or formed church is subject to sin and is in continual need of renewal to keep it in a state of health; or needs reformation, to bring it back to health. A study of the elements which make up a developed or formed church allows us to make a critical analysis to see what needs to be done or what has to be reformed. We then have what is necessary for a pastoral plan. In the process of a needed reformation, a church can be treated as one in formation, a mission church.

Missionary work, or work proper of a religious community with a missionary identity, is to serve a developing church (a church in formation) or one which needs reformation or to help a church in the process of renewal. It is not the ordinary work of maintenance. Service of that sort would not strictly be missionary and would not necessarily be proper to those groups with a missionary identity. If a work of maintenance is justified and assumed, it is for some other reason and not its missionary identity.

A missionary group with a ministry to developing churches, or helping to reform developed churches, accentuates its itinerancy. It enjoys a special freedom to terminate work according to the pastoral plan and be ready to move on and serve other communities. Individuals are available to respond and serve the missionary needs of any church. Religious groups are also available to make corporate commitments to provide personnel for longer spaces of time. If understood properly, *itinerancy* does not destroy the stability necessary to complete a planned task. Planning ensures adequate stability which can be defined in terms of days, weeks, months or years, depending on the objective of the pastoral work. This does not imply permanency. We can see the distinction here between stability and pernanency.

What becomes evident when using this dynamic is the relationship between developed and developing churches. Clarified are the duties and obligations of a developed church towards those developing to help them in their transitory state to reach maturity and adulthood. Growth does not stop at that point. Growth must continue until the church reaches the eschatological state, its final perfection. If no growth occurs, the developed or formed church becomes deformed and needs reformation. At this moment it needs to be treated as a developing church to help it reform.

The Process of Church Growth to Maturity

Biblically the church has a mission to unbelievers to complete God's plan so that all be "summed up" in Him (Matt. 28:18; Ephesians 1:9-11). The church is missionary, the sacrament of unity to the whole human race. The

missionary task is given to all the people of God, but not as a territorial expansion since this has been virtually achieved. It is a call to make the church actively present to non-Christian cultures.

In addition to this begetting or act of presence, another pastoral concern is voiced by St. Paul when he speaks of the local church community and its "building up" process. This is the process of life, evolution in growth to maturity. In the fourth chapter to the Ephesians, Paul makes an exhortation to unity and to growth. He points to the diverse gifts so that each member can contribute to the growth and maturity of the church. The progress and growth of each member exercising his or her gifts for the benefit of the whole community of faith contribute to the "upbuilding" of the whole. This process enables the church to develop to maturity.

To make a pastoral analysis and determine the growth and maturity of a church, I would propose the most efficient model to use is the *church as community of living faith*. Analysis based on this model indicates if a church has reached maturity or not. If it has not, the analysis would indicate what aspects are still missing in the process of evolution toward maturity. The results of this analysis can help to set objectives so as to ensure the "realization" of a church or, if necessary, its renewal. The choice of this model among various images and models is not to set the others aside, but it makes possible a reflection which refers to the "realization" and care of churches. Thus the model is not the church as an institutional hierarchical society (juridical, canonical), but the church as community of faith, placing the accent on growth and development. It looks in on itself *(ad intra)* concerned about its faith, charity, celebration in assembly, self-government and self-determination and work of self-criticism. It is also interested in growth and development as it goes out of itself *(ad extra)* to share faith with those who do not have it or to share faith with other Christian communities. This model follows theological socio-psychological categories and gives special attention to the local community in all its aspects, but especially to local or particular churches. The church as community goes through a process of self-realization *as church* in the world. All members, laity, religious and clerics, have the right and responsibility to participate in the building up of the church in the world moved by God's Word and guided by the Spirit. It grows as a community going through the different phases of development presenting to the world the Father's saving grace in Jesus through the Spirit. This is done by a local church in its own social and cultural context; thus its task of inculturation, incarnation, localization, contextualization and politization. The incarnation of Jesus is the model for these tasks. The faith lives and grows in a concrete situation passing through its important phases.

The universal church, the church as one, is realized through concrete local communities such as dioceses and parishes. It is even more concretely

realized in the Christian base communities and groups and assemblies (prayer groups, charismatic communities, family groups, etc.). Here the church is articulated, not from above, but from below. In this context meaningful interpersonal relationships and community experience move to a maturation of the faith. The most important are the Christian base communities which embody the church.

From the Concept of Missions to the Concept of Developing Churches

Rather than referring to "missions" and dealing with the many limitations of the term, the suggestion is to move to the concept of "developing churches" or churches in formation. This emphasizes the process of "upbuilding" (Eph. 4), growth to maturity in faith, a process of evolution in the developmental phases of the essential elements which lead to a mature Christian community. Taken from the proceedings of Vatican II, especially *Ad Gentes* and *Christus Dominus*, they are the elements which treat of the leadership and obligations of bishops in the tradition of the apostles, namely the duty of bishops to establish the church, help it grow to maturity and maintain it.

The nature of the church makes it capable of spiritual and behavioral development. Growth does not come in neat packages nor does it cease at any specific time. Some churches were fathered centuries ago; they are no longer young but neither have they attained a maturity to provide for themselves. They still have needs and demand some type of parenting. After many years they still have life, and still have the capacity of growing to be mature faith communities. The church continually grows until it becomes the eschatological church. The forming church imperceptibly matures. At one point it can be called developed or formed, but it is to continually grow. If it stops growing, it is deformed and may need to be treated as a developing or forming church to bring about its reformation.

Pastoral Implications

Moving from the concept of missions to the concept of developing churches or churches in formation brings with it various pastoral implications. Apostolic work is analyzed on a theological level and centers on persons rather than structures. This analysis becomes the basis for pastoral planning, stimulates creativity and clarifies the relationship between developed and developing churches. Mutual sharing is more apparent and it fosters a solidarity and communion of particular churches throughout the world with an interchange of values and experiences.

To determine whether a church is developed or in the process of development, a socio-political-psychological-theological analysis is suggested. The most important of this is an analysis of the vitality of faith of a

church. Growth in faith implies growth in charity. Thus vitality is concretized in a commitment to justice and the basic ways of expressing fraternity in forms which respond to the proper needs of community. The focus, therefore, is not on structures but on persons and the vitality of their faith charity. Those that make up the church become more important than buildings and administration. Therefore, in the assignment of pastoral agents, priority will not be given to the ability to administrate, but to the ability of working with people and helping a community to grow in faith-charity.

An analysis of the faith-charity life of a community will determine the type of response needed in ministry: whether simply to maintain it so it grows spiritually, or to reform it because it is a formed church in need of reformation. This method of analysis helps to distinguish between a ministry that is only one of maintenance and another which is missionary. It helps to strengthen the missionary aspect of the church, planting God's Word where it yet has not been accepted, helping churches in the process of development so they come to maturity, or, treating formed churches as developing churches to assist these communities in renewal.

Essential Elements of a Formed Church

The Vatican Council document *Lumen Gentium* gives us some elements of particular or local churches. The churches are stable groups founded by the Apostles, organically united in faith and are divinely constituted as part of the universal church. They have their liturgical rites, proper discipline, a theological patrimony, with their own theology, a proper spirituality and their own peculiar catechesis. The orderly development of these elements constitutes the next part of this study. An analysis of a certain church will help us to understand its phase of development. The following eight elements, suggested as necessary to constitute a formed church, were assembled after a study of the Vatican II documents, especially *Lumen Gentium*, and a dialogue with missionaries and theologians.

1. A significant group of believers.
2. A church that is evangelized and catechized in what is fundamental to the faith.
3. A church which offers ecclesiastical services sufficiently established and inculturated: preaching, liturgy, sacraments and a church life that has some established order.
4. A church where ecclesiastical services are realized with native pastoral agents: bishop, priests, deacons, lay ministers and those living the evangelical life.
5. A church with organized works or personal initiatives ready to serve the community with prepared people, and economical resources that come from that same church, all sharing a prophetic social commitment according to gospel principles.

6. A church with mission awareness and with some significant contribution to developing churches according to its means.

7. A church which is ecumenical and thus partakes in dialogue with other Christians and/or with non-Christians.

8. A church with the ability of analysis and criticism of the world around it which can assume a prophetic role; it has the capacity for self-analysis and self-criticism for its own reform and renewal; it is able to say what it should be.

1. A significant group of believers.

The church is a complex reality made up of groups of believers. It implies a society, people who come together for a distinct purpose. It is a structured group community of salvation existing in a specific cultural-historical context. The group is not merely one constituted sociologically, but one which always expands and is in the process of growth within eschatological dimension. What is implied is growth and the capacity for growth in faith. The Holy Spirit is the integrating element of the group. Life is given through the theological virtues. The church has a theological life through the Spirit.

The group should be *significant*, that is have a size necessary to be of sign value, prophetic if necessary, of what it represents within the social context that it finds itself. The units of the particular church should have the capacity to work and function as a group to accomplish its end as a prophetic faith community.

2. A church that is evangelized and catechized in what is fundamental to the faith.

The judgment as to whether a community is evangelized and catechized in what is fundamental to the faith is based on the maturity of the people's faith, considering their ordinary capacity. This differs with cultures and particular circumstances. Within a community itself it will differ according to personal abilities. The Episcopal Conference and pastoral councils determine what is fundamental for a people and address the expectations they may have for a faith community.

The essential work of the church is to provide the means of salvation and conversion. It authentically proclaims the gospel as witness by word, by silent witness of prophetic action or even by the silent presence of gospel life lived faithfully among others. The church is to listen to life and discover the presence of God's Word and Spirit among a people. In this way the gospel can continually illumine the signs of the times and manifest the language which is to be used to proclaim the gospel in a specific situation. The proclamation of the gospel announces the means of salvation and conversion, furthering the values of the Kingdom within a specific culture even as it also denounces what is not of the Kingdom of Christ.

The means of salvation and conversion are made possible by an

inculturated evangelization and catechesis in what is fundamental to the faith in a historical and cultural context. A developed or formed church adequately cares for itself, offering the means of salvation established by Christ to the members of a particular society. Church members need to be a sacramental sign of salvation. For this to be effective, they need to be grounded in what is fundamental to the faith. Knowledge of the fundamentals and living them gives witness to a theological life of faith concretized in a society.

Episcopal conferences and individual bishops play an important role in this aspect of a particular church. They lend the leadership that is necessary. Bishops determine collegially what is fundamentally to be taught and learned by church members. They ensure an inculturated evangelization. In the concrete, bishops with their pastoral councils and agents adapt the general norms to their own particular churches. In their hierarchical role as part of the apostolic college, they represent and serve a particular or local church. It is their duty to assist the church to be inculturated in the historical present. Both an Episcopal Conference and individual bishops in their analysis of a culture and concrete circumstances, linked with the whole believing church, can judge what is to be taught and known as fundamental. In practice it can usually be based on a shared policy statement on what should be taught and known for the reception of the sacraments. Thus each particular church could be different because of circumstances and culture.

3. A church which offers ecclesiastical services sufficiently established and inculturated: preaching, liturgy, sacraments and a church life that has some established order.

To fulfill its mission a particular church provides means to proclaim and teach God's Word and brings people together for common worship. It makes available the sacraments Christ gave and offers some established order for the common good along with linkage with the universal church.

Preaching – The Word of God, its meaning fully taught and proclaimed, sheds light and life on the human condition of the community. The church prepares agents of evangelization to transmit God's message in the language of the community with its signs and symbols. Hearing the message of Jesus, the community begins to sense its responsibility to proclaim prophetically the Good News to others by word and example. The Word of God effectively proclaimed maintains the vitality of Christian life and gives the stimuli needed for growth in faith, charity and justice.

Liturgy – Important to the faith community is the celebration of its common faith. The church provides the celebration of Word and sacraments adapted to the culture of the people to reflect and to help the spiritual growth of the community. Meaningful liturgies bring individuals closer to each other and at the same time fulfill the community's obligations to worship and glorify God.

Sacraments – Besides preaching and liturgy, sacraments are also made available. This implies adequate means to prepare the faithful to receive them fruitfully. Both the preparation for the sacraments and their administration are done in such a way that they are adapted to the culture and mentality of the people so they can grasp their full meaning.

An established order – For an organization or group to run smoothly, some type of order needs to be established for the common good. This does not imply that there must be a common type of structure for all churches. Some recently established church will not need the same infrastructure demanded by a church which has come through the centuries and may have a large membership. What is necessary to have order may be very minimal. No reason exists to make unusual demands on the church which does not need a complicated structure. A careful choice of modes avoids excesses. All that is needed is some type of established order to serve the common good, fulfill the basic church laws and establish linkage with the universal church.

The Bishop – What is mentioned above is consistent with the office of bishop. Through the bishop's proper charism the Holy Spirit works and is made manifest in the functions of sanctifying, teaching and giving leadership. By his service and through those whom the bishop delegates, God's revelation lives on. Through the Eucharist the community comes together with its pastor in the unity of Christ in the Spirit. Through the bishop the church community provides for its own life when he delegates priests and laity to serve the common good. This delegation assures that no one be deprived of service and have adequate opportunity to hear and celebrate God's Word. It provides for an easy access to the sacraments and other religious services. Thus the Holy Spirit is given ample opportunity to work through the ecclesial charisms of community members to meet needs they discover in everyday life. An ideal community exists, linked with the whole church. Interested not only in local affairs, it also has a world vision.

4. A church where ecclesiastical services are realized with native pastoral agents: bishops, priests, deacons, lay ministers and those living the evangelical life.

Native bishop, priests, deacons, lay ministers. – Important to any church is the recognition of the charisms that may be present in a community. In this way the vocations to service are promoted and discovered and finally become operative in a Christian community. Of particular importance is the recognition of the new structures in today's church which encourage the recognition of charisms in the people and foster the new ministries in accordance with these charisms. This stimulates a co-responsibility at the grassroots level of the church. By this way we can foster a communion, an interdependence, and not dependence.

An established particular church will have its own native bishops, priests, deacons, lay ministers and those who make some type of commitment to a life of the evangelical councils. Maturity is shown in producing autochthonous prophetic pastoral agents who serve God's people for the common good. This need not imply that a church is developed or formed when it has a hierarchy of its own: bishop, priests, deacons, lay ministers. What is implied is that maturity comes when the Holy Spirit has the opportunity to work theough charisms found in the members of a particular church providing essential services and attending to its needs. This accentuates the operative charisms, personal or ecclesiastical, by which the Holy Spirit works. A pure hierarchical structure for its own sake must be played down. The native bishop, priests, deacons and lay ministers active in the ecclesial community will work in harmony to serve the good of the Christian community. The native bishop will bring the message of the apostolic college to his church, but what is more important, he shares the more perfect inculturated message of his community with the members of the college and the universal church.

Inculturated leadership – The mature church cares for itself through native leadership, those of a same socio-cultural background. They are people of the same country, tribe or race. The better the inculturation accomplished by the charismatic leadership, the more mature will the church become.

Evangelical life – The Holy Spirit is also manifest in the theological life of God's people, when individuals of a church commit themselves privately and publicly to the evangelical life. The public profession of poverty, chastity and obedience in religious communities or institutes is not essential to church maturity. It is, however, an official form of life recognized by church authority, a radical commitment to gospel living within a church community and canonical recognized.

What does serve as a sign of church maturity is that individuals make the radical commitment to the evangelical life which implies serving the community. It can be in the form of private or public commitments. This charismatic gospel dedication provides laity dedicated to the service of the particular church. Maturity in faith is manifest when members of a particular or local church make a personal or group radical commitment to a life of the evangelical councils to serve their own church. Thus, groups officially recognized by church authority with the special charism of a founder, given as a gift to the whole church, become present in a particular church. The church is then served in a prophetic way by its own native members.

5. A church with organized works or personal initiatives ready to serve the community with prepared people, and economical resources that come from that same church, all sharing a prophetic social commitment according to gospel principles.

When a church grows in maturity, its faith will become operative and respond in charity to the needs of individuals in society. Serving not only the individual persons themselves who constitute this society, this faith also inspires the community which comes together, becomes organized, and in this solidarity has a special ability as a community to itself attend to the needs of people. The vitality of the community is concretized in good works (James 2, 14). A fraternity is demonstrated, motivated by the gospel, in forms which respond to the concrete needs of people, or, the community as a whole. This is also evident in a commitment to justice. A mature faith community which recognized unjust situations in the light of the gospel becomes bent on rectifying the injustice. Social change can become an objective.

To speak of organized works does not necessarily imply institutions, buildings. The world is full of examples of substantial, sometimes massive, projects which are splendid examples of service. Here the charity of Christ is expressed in a loving, compassionate response to people. Hospitals, asylums, orphanages, etc., are organizations of the local church or religious institutes which are living signs of the gospel.

Yet, there are instances where one can rightly question the witness value of local church projects and wonder if they are counter-signs. A large project could be an island among the poor, serving only those who can afford its service. Among non-Christians an institution could be seen as a form of colonialism where foreign wealth has come and serves only the Christian community. Institutions in such circumstances should effect some visible improvement among the poor, witness fraternity, and thus be symbols of a mature faith. Thus, to help a church grow to maturity does not necessarily imply building institutions of service (sometimes importing the funds).

In the developing world this process can take very simple forms. Witness to maturity and faith is not necessarily institutions, but a fraternity with charity and justice at work. To deny a church is mature because it lacks physical facilities misses the point. Material assets are not always proof. In developing countries institutions may be a sign of the faith of other Christian communities (developed churches). These share in charity and justice in solidarity with another local church which has determined its own specific needs.

A maturing process is discerned through an operative faith expressed in works of Christian charity and justice. In the developing world it may be only a call to simplicity and poverty where the local church involves people (without excluding the poor) in a decision-making process to determine what to do and how to do it to avoid excesses and mistakes. This simple way of proceeding without demanding institutions as in the developed world, ensures the local church the ability to continue its work according to its own capacities and culture. As these communities grow in human and material resources, so

will the exterior manifestation of their faith. In the process of growth, the institutional expression of charity is not the only thing to be desired. To demonstrate the ability of the local church to offer opportunities for manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit present in the community members (1 Cor. 14:6) is also desirable. God-given gifts are used to fulfill needs. The works manifest are sacramental signs of the faith of the church, a community involved, a community socially aware. A prophetic community, through its good works, manifests the Spirit in its members.

6. A church with mission awareness and some significant contribution to developing churches according to its means.

The majority of the previous elements of a formed church have a "centripetal" purpose of drawing people into the center of the church, creating a visible communion which can grow to a full mature reality. A "centrifugal" purpose is also needed by which the power of the gospel moves out to encounter humanity. This is of the very nature of the church.

The church, sent by God to all nations to be the universal sign of salvation, is the mandate of Christ, its Founder (Mark 16:16). The gospel is to be proclaimed to all since it is God's will for all to be saved (1 Tim. 2,4). Thus, the church is missionary by its very nature. Its sacred duty is to preach the gospel and extend the means of salvation to all. In this activity it gathers force for its own growth. Love of God and the desire to share with all the spiritual blessings of this life and the life to come, compels members of the church to be missionary. This maturity in faith moves a church to carry the Good News of salvation to others and to share faith.

Local churches must witness of Christ before people and nations. Sharing faith with those who have not heard God's Word or have not been sufficiently evangelized proves its maturity. Through prayer, penance and collaboration, a mature community exercises a missionary activity through those God chooses for this task. As St. Paul reminds us, resources along with prayer and penance are needed to spread the Good News of the Kingdom. These resources are people to witness and preach as well as the material assistance to make preaching possible. This process of growth creates a desire to share what good God has given to a church and helps to increase and express mission spirit and zeal.

In growth to maturity of faith, the zealous expression of a missionary spirit leads the local church to become aware of its existence as "church", living not on the margin, but within the unity of the universal church. Communion and cooperation with other churches in the building up of the Body of Christ gives witness to God's presence in the world as a sacrament of unity.

A mature church proclaims the gospel to peoples, encountering them in their real struggles and their diversity. It seeks to proclaim Christ,

prophetically denouncing what is found in a culture contrary to the spirit of the Kingdom. With this is the courageous defense of the right of the poor and oppressed as a constitutive element of the proclamation of the gospel. In addition to presenting Christ by proclamation, the church uses dialogue to search out the Christ that is already present. God's Word is discerned in other persons, institutions, ideologies and secular realities. The mature church is aware of its mission to evangelize and to make a significant contribution to the missionary work of the universal church within its own means. If its means are frugal, the evidence will be simple.

Mission praxis has often demonstrated that as a faith community grows in maturity, the desire is born to reach out and to share faith and charity. Many mission programs give priority to ministerial training. Catechists and Delegates of the Word are prepared to teach doctrine and bring a priestless village together for the Service of the Word to reflect and pray. With this, a faith community begins to emerge. In this process, more often than not, faith growing communities recognize other close-by villages who may not be as fortunate. Usually, on their own initiative, they go as missionaries to these neighboring villages. They teach doctrine, bring the community together for the Service of the Word and encourage the villagers to choose individuals of their own group to send them to the ministerial program of the mission. Their missionary zeal and knowledge of their own people make their evangelizing work effective, and the circle of missionary work spreads. The faith maturity of a community moves it to be missionary.

7. A church which is ecumenical and thus partakes in dialogue with other Christians and/or with non-Christians.

Another sign of Christian maturity in faith is the ecumenical spirit of the church. The faith could hardly be called mature when it is suspicious and favors patterns of separateness rather than engage in dialogue. This would be a dialogue with other Christians which discovers the common Christ that we believe in and how He is found in present circumstances; or a dialogue with non-Christians which discovers the hidden likeness of Christ present in their history. In any case, there is a search for ways to build cooperation to make the world more humane.

Unhealthy rivalry, calumny and detraction show a lack of maturity. A cooperative spirit will exist in a mature, developed Christian community. It realizes that those who believe in Christ are His disciples reborn in baptism. They also share in many riches with the people of God. In this context an ecumenical spirit is furthered without an appearance of indifference to one's faith. A spirit of cooperation will lead to collaboration in social, cultural and religious acts. The name of Christ, or the discovery of the hidden Christ in cultures brings peoples and groups together; it may even have them working

for a common good, not only as individuals but also as communities. Dialogue becomes a humble discernment of the presence of God's work in other people.

8. A church with the ability of analysis and criticism of the world around it which can assume a prophetic role; it has the capacity for self-analysis and self-criticism, for reform and renewal; it is able to say what it should be.

Living things are distinguished from non-living by growth. It is the same with the faith community. If it does not grow, it is dead. The capacity of growth remains until a church is eschatological. Responsibly fulfilling its purpose, the church grows to maturity in faith. To ensure continued growth and maturity, it has the ability to reflect upon itself, developing the capacity to be self-critical and to renew itself.

In addition to having the ability to examine itself critically, a mature church in its prophetic role is able to analyze the world around it and to be critical of Christ's teaching of what is sinful and unjust. It denounces what is evil, announces what is good and gives testimony to what it believes. Aware of all the elements that make up a developed church, it can make a self-analysis, be self-critical and plan for its reform or renewal.

Conclusion

If we move from the concept of missions to the concept of developing churches, the elements of a developed church need to be established. Eight have been presented. From this we have more precise language and ideas for the work of evangelization which preaches the Good News to those who do not believe in Christ or for that ministry which brings the first announcement to maturity. Concepts are offered on the basis of the vitality of the faith-charity of a Christian community. This can be useful in the process of pastoral discernment for a religious community or group to insure its missionary identity. From a better understanding of the basic or essential concept of a developing church and its elements, pastoral tools become available to help judge if a church is in the phase of development or formation and merits the response of a religious community or group with a missionary charism. It helps to maintain its missionary identity.

A *developing church* can make a self-analysis on the basis of the eight elements presented which permits it to discover what may be lacking to arrive at its maturity. From this, a pastoral plan can be made to assist its growth in faith-charity and finally arrive to maturity as a developed church.

Developed churches can use the eight elements for a self-examination of their vitality of faith-charity. This analysis permits them to discover if they have any weaknesses and, on the basis of this, to elaborate a pastoral plan of renewal that will not allow a formed church to become deformed and stand in

need of reformation. It is a help to discuss the quality of preaching, catechesis, liturgy, etc. and also to question vocation programs, services of charity, the missionary spirit of the church, ecumenism and many other elements which continually need revision. A self-analysis may have the misfortune to discover a decadent church in need of urgent reformation. At this time a missionary community could be called upon to use its missionary charismatic gifts for the good of the church and to help in a cooperative pastoral plan of reformation. *Pastors, pastoral councils and pastoral teams* can use the eight elements to discern the status of their parish and determine if the parish as a whole or certain parts of the parish are to be treated as a developing or developed church. Their condition may be distinct from that of the whole diocese and call for additional revision and planning within the context of the general pastoral plan of the diocese. If a parish is discovered to be a developing church, then missionary attention must be given with all its implications. An analysis may also reveal that certain cellular groups of the parish need missionary attention. A pastoral plan for these cells could have as its objective the revitalization of their faith-charity, giving attention to what may be lacking on the basis of the eight elements of a formed church. All missionary care calls upon the assistance of pastoral agents with a missionary vocation.

Communities or groups with a missionary identity can discover in all this a call not only to what is discerned as a developing church, but also to parts of developed churches which are in the process of development and need missionary attention.

The concept of "developing church" implies the concept of developed churches, their existence and mutual relationship. The richness of faith in developed churches and their material resources are shared with the churches in the process of formation. These developed churches may be of recent origin or those of old, long standing tradition with a glorious history of a faith preserved from errors. This important heritage is generously shared with the many sacrifices of its faithful to make possible the missionary work in developing churches. Developing churches, however, also have their riches which they must share with formed churches — a youthful spirit, creativity, new experiences in faith, new models of pastoral work and new ministries.

The dialogue and communion between both types of churches is a very rich experience. One presents its treasures of the past and the other its richness of the present. Their differences question each others life and actions, suggesting changes which assure their growth.

With all its limitations, the pastoral tool, touches the awesome gift of faith in a community, along with the multiple responses to that gift. It can move people from sinful neglect to cooperation with those fully committed to the work of God's kingdom. It promotes maturity, an imponderable fact difficult

to measure when applied to faith. It deals with community, people, none of which are alike; all reflect God's beauty in a different way. But we accept this challenge with all its risks, because Christ has asked us to build the Christian community and form a mature church. He is our support.

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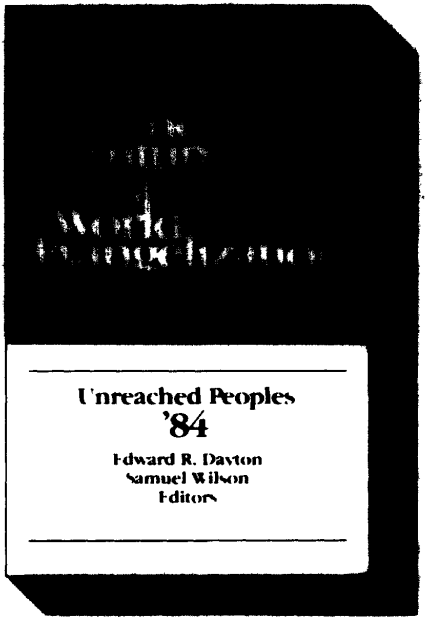

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