

Redemptoris Missio

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Pope John Paul II's eighth encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (RM), issued on Dec. 7, 1990, celebrates the 25th

anniversary of *Ad Gentes* (Vatican II's decree on missionary activity) and the

15th anniversary of *evangelii nuntiandi* ([Paul VI \(/people/philosophy-and-religion/roman-catholic-popes-and-antipopes/paul-vi\)](#)'s apostolic exhortation on evangelization). RM has the significant subtitle: "On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate" the pope sounds a clarion and urgent call to all Church sectors to renew their enthusiasm and commitment to evangelize the world. Composed of eight chapters plus an introduction (nos. 1–3) and conclusion (no. 92), RM has a "doctrinal" section (nos. 4–30) and a "pastoral" section (nos. 31–91), respectively treating the "why" and "how" of contemporary mission.

The pope begins by stating his conviction about "the urgency of missionary activity" (no. 1). The pope asserts: "Missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations' (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning ... a fact which must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ" (no. 2). Missionary evangelization remains urgent because "it is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world" (no. 2).

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RM's doctrinal section of three chapters affirms the foundations of mission theology from Vatican II; it also clarifies specific "doubts and ambiguities regarding missionary activity *ad gentes*" (no. 2). Chapter 1, "Jesus Christ, the Only Savior," treats core elements of dogmatic theology in relation to mission (e.g., revelation, faith, christology, and soteriology). Chapter 2, "The Kingdom of God," is biblically based and describes the intimate relationship of Kingdom to Christ and the Church. Chapter 3, "The [Holy Spirit \(/philosophy-and-religion/christianity/christianity-general/holy-spirit/\)](/philosophy-and-religion/christianity/christianity-general/holy-spirit/), the Principal Agent of Mission," examines the role of the [Holy Spirit \(/philosophy-and-religion/christianity/christianity-general/holy-spirit/\)](/philosophy-and-religion/christianity/christianity-general/holy-spirit/) in the Church's life and its mission. In his strong reaffirmation of these basics of Church teaching, the pontiff continually links mission and faith: "Mission is an issue of faith" (no. 11); "It is only in faith that the Church's mission can be understood and only in faith that it finds its basis" (no. 4; see also nos. 2, 36, 49).

A holistic vision of evangelization underlies all of RM, particularly its second section on concrete approaches to mission. This vision is in continuity with *Evangelii nuntiandi* (nos. 17–24) and emphasizes what contemporary missiological terminology calls "integral evangelization." "Jesus came to bring integral salvation" (no. 11); "evangelical witness ... is directed toward integral human development" (no. 42); "action on behalf of integral development and liberation ... is most urgently needed" (no. 58).

By viewing mission with its various complementary and mutually enriching elements, evangelizers are able to appreciate fully that "Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways" (no.

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41). "This mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity" (no. 31). Indeed, integral evangelization is an interpretive key to linking harmoniously the numerous themes and subjects treated in RM.

Several topics are insightfully discussed in RM as they directly relate to mission: Christian family (nos. 42,80); personal conversion (nos. 47, 59, 60, 81); missionary institutes (nos. 66, 67, 72); youth (nos. 82, 86, 89); local church (nos. 26, 39, 48–52, 62–64, 83–85); interreligious dialogue (nos. 55–57); mission vocations (nos. 32, 65, 66, 79, 84); women (nos. 70, 71); inculturation (nos. 25, 52–54, 76); basic ecclesial communities (no. 51); proclamation (nos. 44–46); mission spirituality (nos. 87–91). This enumeration is much more than a random listing of topics; underlying it is a broad, practical, integral vision for effective evangelization.

The encyclical has several strengths: RM presents solid traditional and biblical theology along with the thought of Vatican II and *Evangelii nuntiandi* and offers several trult original insights, e.g., the threefold situation of mission (nos. 32–34); mission in various "new worlds" (no. 37); paschal mystery and mission (nos. 6, 10, 28); and pneumatology and mission (nos. 21–30).

RM opens many avenues of theology, spirituality, mission vision, and concrete responses to contemporary problems, as the Church faces the challenge of "bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations" (no. 92). The missionary Church accomplishes its evangelizing task as it "proceeds along *the path* already trodden by the Virgin Mary. (</people/philosophy-and-religion/early-christianity-biographies/virgin-mary/>)" (no. 92).

Bibliography: For the text of *Redemptoris missio*, see: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 83 (1991): 249–339 (Latin); *Origins* 20, no. 34 (Jan. 31, 1991): 541, 543–568 (English); *The Pope Speaks* 36 (1991): 138–183 (English). For commentaries on *Redemptoris missio*, see: w. burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation* (Maryknoll, NY 1993). j. kroeger, *Living Mission: Challenges in Evangelization Today* (Maryknoll, NY 1994). There are also commentaries to be found in *Omnis Terra*. They are written by degrijse (Feb. / Mar.1993); kroeger (Dec. 1991 / Jan. 1995); laverdiere (Sep.–Oct.1991); odorico (Feb. 1994 / Jul.–Aug. 1994); wolain (Dec.1994); zago (Feb. 1991 / Nov. 1991 /Nov. 1992).

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