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TANGAZA COLLEGE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

THE SMA MISSION IN EGYPT; PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL
OF CHRIST OR DIALOGUE?

An Essay submitted to the Catholic University of Eastern Africa,
Faculty of Theology,
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (BA) (Religious Studies)

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NAIROBI

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I declare that this essay is my personal work, which I achieved through my personal experience, knowledge, as well as good ideas I acquired in Egypt. I hereby certify that it has never been presented in any institute.

All sources have been cited in full.

Signed 

Joseph Domfe, SMA.

Date:..... 7/2/2002

This essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the College Supervisor.

Signed:..... 

Name of the Supervisor: Fr. Fernando Domingues, STD.

Date:..... 7/2/2002

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This includes an assessment of the quality of

- ✓ a. The scientific soundness of information, statements and Christian Doctrine.
- ✓ b. The logic of the argumentation and development of ideas.
- ✓ c. The appeal of the thesis.
- ✓ d. The conclusions drawn.

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- ✓ a. The range of reading and the current nature of the reading
- ✗ b. The depth of the research.
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- ✗ a. Personalised integration of material
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Note that the total available mark is 80

Tim Redmond
Director of the Theology Programme

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my friend Vivian Andera, a student in the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, who made me feel at home during my years of studies in Kenya.

I highly appreciated her openness and the wonderful time we had together as friends.

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General Introduction

In this thesis I shall try to present my views on the mission of the Society of African Missions, (the SMA) in Egypt, and ask whether it is the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ or dialogue with the non-Christians in Egypt.

A number of Post-Vatican II Catholic theologians hold that non-Christian can be saved by acting in accordance with their own religious beliefs. However, these non-Christians, according to the theologians, have a much better chance of salvation within the boundaries of the church. The Catholic church, recognises that religions such as Hinduism, Judaism, Islam etc., possess at least rays of divine light, and therefore their members are not lacking the grace for salvation.¹ Again in the Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” of Pope Paul VI we are told that the first proclamation of the Gospel should be addressed to non-Christians. This is simply because they carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart. The Pope still reminds us that these non-Christians possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts in which they have taught generations of people how to pray.² But then the questions which arise are, if these religions provide genuine ways to salvation for their followers, is the Mission of the church to the nations still relevant? Is there a need for dialogue and proclamation, and if so why?

¹ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gadium et Spes*, 45; cf. also Council of Trent, *Decretum de Peccato Originali*, 3, DS 1513.

² Pope Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*”, (Apostolic Exhortation), on Evangelisation in the Modern World, Nairobi, St. Paul Publications), 53, 1975, p.37.

For my own society, the SMA, specifically founded for the evangelisation of the non-Christians, these questions are not merely of academic interest. They touch upon the very *raison d'être* of our existence. I chose this topic purposely to show the need and the novelty of the Christians' Mission to other religions especially Islam. In this work, I shall try to outline my views on the S.M.A Mission, specifically in Egypt where 90% of the people are Muslims, and ask whether it is the proclamation of the message of Christ or dialogue with non-Christians.

To begin with, I shall try to base my presentation on my pastoral experience in Egypt. In the first chapter, I intend to give a brief presentation on Egypt. Here I shall discuss briefly the history of Egypt, some relevant social facts about Egypt, some relevant economic affairs in the country, and some aspects of religious practice there.

In the second chapter I will endeavour to talk briefly about the presence of the S.M.A. in Egypt. This will be about the history of the S.M.A. there, and the methodology of its Mission. I shall also evaluate what the Christian Mission is all about, taking into account the biblical foundation of Mission, and the recent view of the Magisterium on Mission.

I will evaluate the pastoral challenges of the SMA Mission in Egypt in the third chapter.

Then the fourth and final chapter will cover the theological reflections and some insights into the S.M.A. Mission in Egypt, and I shall evaluate whether it is the proclamation of the Gospel or dialogue. The SMA Mission in Egypt, generally speaking, is not well accepted by many people. Most of our SMA members are not in favour of our Mission in Egypt. This is

simply because they do not see any fruit from the labours of the past hundred years. So I chose this topic for my thesis just to try and give some insights into our Mission in Egypt. I tried to put into words all my pastoral experience and knowledge as well as good ideas I acquired in Egypt in 1997-98. Hopefully, by reading this reflection, many people will see something or be enlightened even in a small way about the importance of our Mission in Egypt.

The Presentation of Egypt

1.1 A brief history of Egypt

For a long time, Egypt was considered as a fringe area of Black Africa. It is situated in North Africa, with coastlines on the Mediterranean and the Red seas at the intersection of the Near East. Its neighbours are Israel to the east, Sudan to the south, and Libya to the west. The official name of Egypt is the Arab Republic of Egypt. It became an independent monarchy in 1922,³ and it has twenty-six governates with Cairo as the capital city. Apart from Cairo, the other large cities are, Alexandria, Giza, Shubra al Khayma, Port Said, and Suez.

Egypt has a complex history, of which the primary characteristic is that it covers long arrhythmic periods with many foreign influences from the Pharaonic time down to the present.⁴ Due to universal contact with different nations, great civilizations were born and developed in Egypt. This ancient nation has many tourist attractions such as the pyramids, mummies, and Mount Sinai, to mention but a few. All these tourist attractions in fact, draw not less than three hundred thousand tourists per year.

The river Nile, which is the only river in the country, flows from Lake Victoria in East Africa to Egypt. The Nile plays an irreplaceable role in Egypt. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is this river that has enabled the long history of Egypt to continue over a long period of

³Coegaret Luc, African Continent, an Insight to its Earliest History, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 1995 p. 33.

⁴.Coegaret, African Continent, an Insight to its Earliest History, p.33.

time. There is a population pressure along the Nile valley, which forces the residents to organise its flow.

Geographically, Egypt has an area of approximately 386,095 square miles⁵. It is Africa's twelfth largest country. As I said, to the West of the country is found Libya or the Western desert which contains depressions, including Qathara depression in the north west, where the country's lowest point, 436 feet below the sea level is located.⁶

The Population of Egypt is about 60 million. The major ethnic groups are Arabs with Islam as the dominant religion practised by 90% of the population. Christianity is the second religion practised in the country. However, the majority of these Christians are Coptic with some few Catholics and Protestants. I shall not go deeply into this since I shall discuss some relevant aspects of religion in Egypt later.

1.2 Some Relevant Social Facts about Egypt

In ancient times, the Egyptian society was based on class status.⁷ This means that the society was hierarchic. The Pharaoh and his family formed the first class, the advisers of the Pharaoh were in the second class, while the slaves who worked for their masters formed the lowest class.⁸

⁵ Coegaret African Continent, an Insight to its Earliest History, p.19.

⁶ Coegaret African Continent, an Insight to its Earliest History p. 20.

⁷ Viaud Gerard, Petite Histoire de la Presse Francophone en Egypte, Cairo, p.13, 1993.

⁸ Viaud, Petite Histoire de la Presse Francophone en Egypte p.13.

Later on, with the coming of Islam in 640 AD, the social structure was changed⁹. In 969 AD, Egypt was conquered by a dynastic kingdom called "Fatimids", who established an absolute hereditary monarchy. The so-called infallible ruler ruled Egypt with pure Islamic laws for a long time. Later on, when the British took over the Egyptian administration around 1890, the country became Western oriented. Later, Abd al- Nasser steered Egypt on a secular nationalist course when he became the head of state in 1950. According to Gerard Viaud, Nasser's use of Islam was seriously challenged by the Islamic authorities in Saudi Arabia and eventually, they resented the reformed program of Nasser.¹⁰

At the moment, the Egyptian president, Mr Hosni Mubarak is pursuing a path of greater political liberalization and tolerance while at the same time responding firmly to those who resort to violence to change Egyptian society and its structure of authority. The president is also trying to crush riots made by the Islamic militants, and to intervene in clashes between the Muslims and the Christians in Egypt. Recently, through the experience I had in Egypt, I have come to realise that Egypt has the full array of Islamic revivalist activities as John L. Esposito put it.¹¹

⁹ Hornung, Erik, History of Ancient Egypt, Edinburg: Edinburg Press, 1999.p.40.

¹⁰ Viaud, Petite Histoire de la Presse francophone en Egypte,21.

¹¹. Esposito, John, Islam, the Straight Path, New York, 1998 p.167.

Human resources for new forms of cooperative actions are emerging in Egypt. Non - violent actions, local but with global import, are inventing a post-modern global consciousness to act against the violence that has marred the revolution of westernisation.¹² It is not an exaggeration to say that now Egyptian society is Western oriented and somewhat secular in orientation. At this time, there are influential people like Qasim Amin who are supporting social reform especially in issues related to women. Qasim focussed on the plight of Muslim women as a cause of deteriorating family and society. He continues to refute the anti feminist Quranic exegesis of some classical legal scholars, maintaining that their interpretations reflect not the meaning of Quranic texts, but are simply Arabic customs.¹³ In view of this, the Egyptian women and men have more rights than in any other Arab country. In my opinion, it is this which enables the average Egyptian to work hard for his or her living.

In short, this is the kind of social situation I experienced when I was in Egypt for my pastoral work. In the next section, I shall briefly discuss some relevant economic issues in Egypt.

1.3 Some Relevant Economic Issues in Egypt

The economic revival in Egypt began in 1969, and it is still continuing.¹⁴

¹² Esposito, *Islam*, p.115.

¹³ Information from an Egyptian lecturer in the American University in Cairo during a seminar about the social reform in Egypt held in Faghala, "Cairo", in 1998

¹⁴ Croegaert, *African Continent, an Insight to its Earliest History*, p. 33.

One thing I admired in Egypt during my stay there is that the people appreciate artistic splendour in the country. There are many examples of expert craftsmanship, which reflect the country's expansion and prosperity. The pyramids and the preservation of Egyptian mummies constitute one of the seven-wonders of the world. This actually attracts many tourists into the country, and it accounts for 45% of the Egyptian revenue.¹⁵

Egypt is 40% agricultural. Cultivation and domestication are practised. Crops such as wheat, barely, rice, citrus fruits, cotton, sorghum, sugar cane etc., are grown. Animals like donkeys, goats, sheep, cattle etc., are kept as well. Although there is only one river in the country, farming is made possible because of irrigation using water from the river Nile. The Aswan dam doubles the country's potential output of electricity.¹⁶

Apart from farming, other economic activities are mining, industrial ventures and trade. Oil, cotton, goods, engineering and metal products are exported. According to Croegaert Egypt is the second most industrialized country in Africa.¹⁷ Some of the most important industrial products are cement, fertilizer, chemicals, TV sets, etc. About 40% of the Egyptian population engage in agriculture, 22% engage in industry, while 38% in services. (Cf. The information given by the Jesuit rector in Cairo at a seminar held in the Comboni centre for Arabic and Islamic studies in Zamalek, Cairo, in 1998).

¹⁵ Information given by Father Christian Vanspen, the Jesuit Rector in Cairo at a seminar held in the Comboni center for Arabic and Islamic studies in Zamalek, Cairo, in 1998.

¹⁶ Legum, Colin, African Contemporary Record, Rex Collings, London, 1971.

¹⁷ Croegaert, African Continent, an Insight to its History p.33.

1.4 Some aspects of Religious Practice in Egypt

In the early back of the third century, many Egyptians were Christians. The languages in which the majority of the New Testament inscriptions appeared were Greek and Coptic. The history of Christianity in Egypt is exceedingly obscure. According to some church historians, the documentary evidence for Egyptian Christianity does not begin until the third century.¹⁸ It is accepted by many Egyptians and historians that Saint. Mark the evangelist was the founder of the church there. I shall not discuss deeply the legend of how St. Mark founded the church in Egypt. First of all, there is no evidence from the New Testament that the Egyptian church was founded by Mark though Mark is mentioned in a number of contexts in the bible. But what I know is that many historians and Egyptian Christians usually refer to Mark's activity in the country whenever they are talking about the origin of the church in Egypt. They also claim that Arian controversy divided the Egyptian church, and frequently refer to the efforts of Athanasius to defend the church.¹⁹

Basically, the Arian controversy led the Egyptian church to monophysitism, which is a Christological, heresy emphasizing a single nature in Christ.²⁰

¹⁸ Pearson, A. Birger, and Goehring, E. James, The Roots of Egyptian Christianity Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986, p.134-137.

¹⁹ Cf. Comby, Jean, How to Read Church History, Vcl. 1, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1985 p.108.

²⁰ Cross, F., L., and Livingstone, E., A., Gen. Eds. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 315.

As we hear from Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring, the church in Egypt started from Alexandria.²¹ But then it was split from the main line church due to the disagreement about the dogmatic definitions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.²² Briefly, I think, that in spite of all the controversies the church in Egypt encountered, Christianity existed strongly in Egypt till the Muslim invasion in 640 AD. After this Muslim invasion, Arabization was initiated in Egypt. Arabic became the main language of administration and also the language used in the church. In this regard, all missionaries were compelled to learn Arabic for the purpose of evangelisation.

As far as I know, the Christian churches, that is, Catholic and the Coptic, are very weak. Islam is the most dominant religion in Egypt. The lives of Muslims and Christians in Egypt have been shaped and evaluated by the Muslim laws and principles. At the social and religious level, the Sharia law elaborated the exact moral conduct of all Egyptians be they Christian or Muslim.²³ In brief, this was the religious situation in Egypt before the Franciscan Missionaries arrived in Egypt around 1870 to begin their evangelisation there. Again, our SMA Missionaries began their evangelisation in the same religious context in 1877. In the next chapter, I shall try to discuss the presence of the S.M.A. in Egypt. I shall endeavour as well, to tackle the history of the S.M.A. in Egypt, and the methodology the S.M.A. missionaries used for their evangelisation.

²¹ Pearson, A., Birger, and Goehring, E., James, The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, p. 137.

²² Cross, F., L., and Livingstone, E., A., The Oxford Dictionary the Christian Church, p. 315.

²³ Biallas, J. Leonard, World Religions, Chicago, West Publishing Co., 1991, p.123.

The Presence of the SMA in Egypt

2.1 History

The S.M.A. Mission in Egypt was initiated by the founder Mgr. Marion De Bresillac himself, when he was on his way back from India in the year 1857. However, the Mission was later brought into a reality by his followers. Having landed at Suez, he visited some interesting places in Egypt such as the Pyramids, before leaving for France, his homeland. It was the vision of the founder that the members of his society will one day establish a Mission in the Nile Delta in Egypt.²⁴ The S.M.A Mission in the west coast of Africa started by Mgr. Bresillac in 1856 was extended to Egypt because of two main reasons. --- The high-death rate of the S.M.A. fathers in West Africa, and, the Founder's vision of the Egyptian Mission. These reasons prompted his followers to establish a Mission in Egypt, which seemed to have a more healthy climate. Father Planque, the Founder's successor, applied for a Mission in the area of south of Tripoli, and also in Algeria. However his request was refused by Archbishop Lavigerie , the founder of the Society of Missionaries of Africa, (MAfr). Bishop Lavigerie objected on the grounds that there was no room for any French society in that region. To make a long story short, the Mission of the S.M.A. was established in Egypt mainly because of the interest the founder had in the Evangelisation of the Egyptian people and the desire to find a mission area with a climate more suitable to Europeans than West Africa had²⁵

²⁴ Viaud, Gerard, Histoire des Missions Africaines en Egypt, Cairo, Faghala Press, 1993, p. 5.

²⁵ .Gantly, Patrick, For this Cause, : Rome, S.M.A. Publications, 1992, p.85.

After negotiating with Propaganda Fide, the SMA Mission in Egypt was officially started in 1877 by two missionaries, Father Augustine Duret and Father Leandre Gallen, both of them from the French province of the SMA. On arriving in Egypt, the two priests were welcomed by the Franciscan missionaries and the French consulate in Egypt. The first problem these two priests encountered was the problem of getting land to build their house. With the help of the French officials, the two fathers got a piece of land where they put up their residence and a small church for the small Catholic community around their residence. The fathers started teaching catechism and celebrated the liturgy in the evenings and on Sundays for the small group of Catholics in the area .

After a short time in Egypt, many problems arose. First and foremost, the Mission was shattered by the Islamic laws. The Muslim laws forbade the giving of land to Christians for the building of churches. This situation adversely affected the progress of the first S.M.A. Mission in Egypt, especially, in the places where there were mosques. The Egyptian Government at the same time was not in favour of the Christian Mission. In 1882 for instance, as the foundations of St. Louis College were being laid by Father Duret Leandre, SMA, in a parish in Tantah, a group of Egyptian army officers revolted against the Egyptian natives who collaborated with the Missionaries.²⁶

Apart from the problem posed by the Egyptian authorities, another problem came from the Franciscan Missionaries. According to Gantly, it was a difference of opinion between the Franciscans and Father Planque, who was the Superior General of the S.M.A. at that time. The whole problem was about Mission policy appropriate to Egypt. The Franciscans, with long

²⁶. Gantly, Patrick, Mission to West Africa, Rome, SMA Publication, Vol.1, 1991, p.316.

experience of the country, saw their ministry in terms of living the religious life of their Order and giving pastoral care to the existing Catholics.²⁷ They also had a few schools to which little attention was given. As Viaud sees it, they did not establish colleges, orphanages, or a clinic to care for the sick. Therefore, when the S.M.A fathers came with all these new ideas, the Franciscans' Mission seemed to be seen inadequate. This brought some tension between the SMA fathers and the Franciscan Missionaries.

The existing problems in Egypt at that time pushed the S.M.A. Missionaries to develop a methodology that enabled them erode the fanaticism, false notions, and prejudices of the Muslims. Their vision was that it was not enough to just have only churches. They realised that the future of their Mission greatly depended on schools, orphanages, colleges, and clinics for the sick. The detailed study of these ideas were presented to the Propaganda Fide, with a case for a separate Jurisdiction, so that the S.M.A. fathers would become masters in their own territory in order to choose the most suitable locations for their work.²⁸ In the next section I am going to discuss the plan of action, the kind of methodology our Missionaries used in Egypt to make their Mission fruitful.

2.2 The Methodology of the S.M.A Missionaries in Egypt

In this section, I intend to show how the S.M.A Missionaries went about their Mission in Egypt. The methodology of their Mission had four different dimensions. The first dimension is about the evangelisation through schools.

²⁷. Gantly, The Story of the SMA, p.317.

²⁸. Gantly, The Story of the SMA, p.137.

2.2.1 Evangelisation through schools.

The decree erecting the new territory, the Prefecture Apostolic of the Nile Delta, and entrusting it to the S.M.A. was issued in January 1886. In the first place, as soon as the fathers got their territory, they opened a French school for boys who wanted to flourish in the Egyptian society. The school was open to all Egyptians, irrespective of religion and background. At this time the great demand for education was a consequence of the Westernisation process initiated by the Napoleonic invasion of 1798 and the subsequent invasion by the British.²⁹ The Egyptians sometimes accepted the educational process, but at times bitterly resented it because they did not want Europe to control the entire nation with Western education, which they thought, could shatter the Islamic laws and rule. The SMA fathers vehemently tried to enforce the educational process because many expatriates as well, educated their children in the same missionaries' schools. Also, it was one way of extending their Mission to the expatriates.

2.2.2 Evangelisation through Churches

The second dimension of their methodology was building beautiful churches. In 1886, the SMA Missionaries opened many outstations in the Nile Delta, in Cairo, Zifta, Zagazig, Heliopolis, Tantah, and Shoubra el-Kobra where I did my Pastoral work in 1997. The churches were built to respond to the religious needs of the people, both the Egyptian and the foreign. The main action of our Missionaries was to enter into the lives of the Egyptians among whom our Missionaries lived, in order to experience their daily struggles for survival, to share their pains and celebrations, and to be in touch with their experience of God.

²⁹ Gantly, The Story of the SMA, p.315.

According to Michael McCabe, the SMA fathers in Egypt in 1877 saw that their missionary work was born in contemplation, as the missionary strives to recognize and discern the ways in which God has been active and present among the Egyptian people before the arrival of the Missionaries.³⁰ So in this listening and discernment, our SMA Missionaries tried to bring some Egyptians to a clearer awareness of the many ways in which God is touching their lives.

2.2.3 Evangelisation through Local Communities

The idea of establishing a local community was in the mind of the founder of our society right from the beginning of the society in 1856. The SMA fathers in this regard, did not invent the idea of the local community themselves. They followed Marion Bresillac, the founder, who in his life attached people to himself and trained them for ministry. The Mission for him was to build up true Christian communities, “a people set apart; God’s own people”, that in faith, hope, and love will serve and follow Christ.³¹

In order to be well acquainted with the people, the SMA fathers started to learn the Egyptian languages such as Coptic and Arabic. Their aim was to get to know the people better, and also to be able to share their faith with them wherever possible. They also tried in their little ways to live the Egyptian life as much as possible. When one of our fathers was sharing his experience with me, he said, “ It turned to be a profound experience for him. Having come to talk, I had to keep silence; having come to teach, I had to take instruction; having come to

³⁰ McCabe, Michael, Missionary Motivation Today, “SMA Bulletin”, No 101, Rome June 1998, p.56.

³¹ Society of African Missions, (SMA) “Constitutions and Laws”, No 19, Rome, 1990, p.31.

give, I had to learn how to receive, in order to find what was essential: the love of God, which is at the heart of the Gospel the fathers aimed to preach".³²

It is from this awareness that the fathers saw the need to create a local community for their ministry in Egypt. They brought a group of lay people together and trained them for Mission. Some were trained as teachers to teach in the schools the fathers established. They also trained some of them as nurses and later opened a clinic to respond to the needs of the sick. The clinic was not only for the Christians but also for the Muslims. To make a long story short, the schools, and the clinic became means for dialogue between the Catholics and the Muslims as Patrick Gantly put it.³³ The next section will evaluate the SMA mission in Egypt, that is, was it the proclamation of the Gospel and dialogue?

2.3 The S.M.A. Mission in Egypt; Proclamation of the Gospel or Dialogue?

To begin with, I shall explain briefly the notion of Mission, as found in the bible, and of the church, and in the recent statement of the Magisterium. The word "Mission" means sending out. In Greek, the notion of Mission is expressed by the verb "pemphein" (which is used in many times in the New Testament bible) and "apostellein", (which is used in the sense of sending someone). The word "Missionary" is expressed by the word "apostolos", meaning 'one sent' and "Missionary activity" is related to the "apostle". Therefore, the alternative words for "Mission and Missionary" are "apostolate" and "apostle" respectively.

³² Cf. Lebrun, Jean, Witness among the Egyptians, SMA Publications, Rome 1987.

³³ Gantly, Patrick, For this Cause, Rome: S.M.A. Publications, 1992, p. 71.

Theologians have interpreted the word "Mission" in different ways. For instance, Louis Retif sees Mission as the spiritual activity borne out of the Trinitarian movement, and consists in preaching the Gospel to non-Christians and instilling in them, in a local and permanent way, the whole Christian economy, with the aim of saving them, achieving the Mystical Body of Christ and obtaining the glory of the Father through the Son in the Spirit.³⁴

David J. Bosch argues that the Christian faith is intrinsically a missionary activity. So for him, it is not the only persuasion that is missionary. Rather it shares this characteristic with several other religions, notably Islam, Buddhism etc. David J. Bosch continues to argue that Christian Mission gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as this was portrayed, first in the story of the covenant people of Israel and then, supremely, in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ.³⁵

2.3.1 The Biblical Foundation Of Mission

In the era after the Second Vatican Council, there was a shift from the old notion of Mission, (making converts), to a more ecumenical notion. For example, Carroll Stuhlmueller and Donald Senior, present the biblical foundation of Mission as the God- given call to appreciate and share one's religious experience and insights, first within one's own community

³⁴ Retif, Louis, The Church's Mission in the World, New York, (The Twentieth Century Encyclopaedia of Catholicism), Vol.1, Hawthorn Books, 1962. p.120.

³⁵ Bosch, J., David, Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, New York, 1991, p. 9.

and tradition, and then with people and communities of other cultures, social and religious traditions.³⁶

The biblical foundation of the Mission is born from the command of Jesus Christ and is fulfilled in the course of the centuries in the proclamation of the mystery of God, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus, before ascending into heaven, commanded his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world and to baptize all nations: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned". (Mk 16:15-16, Mt 28:18-20, Lk 24: 46-48, Jn 17:18,20,21; Acts 1:8).

Although the New Testament biblical scholarship for a long time appeared to have been less interested in the "Great Commission", as David J. Bosch put it, there is still more to discover about the "Great Commission".³⁷ The bottom line is that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Mission in the church, although we see some traces of Mission in the Old Testament (Gen 12:1-8, 13:18, 14:18-20). The truth remains that Jesus and the Kingdom of God are the starting point and the context for Mission (cf. Mk 1:14-15).

St Paul in his mission theology was convinced that through the same crucified and risen Christ, God was offering salvation to all, both Jew and gentile (Cf. Gal 1:11-12, 1 Cor 15: 3-11). So in his world- view, Paul believed that Jesus Christ exercised his messianic function through his death and resurrection. In other words, through the crucifixion, death and

³⁶ Senior, Donald, and Stuhlmüller, Carroll, The Biblical Foundations for Mission, New York: Orbis Books, 1983, p3.

³⁷ Bosch J. David, Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, New York: Orbis Books, 1991, p.56.

resurrection of Jesus, all humanity was offered the possibility of moving from death to life from sin to God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-24). Briefly, mission for Paul is limitless, because prior to Christ, everyone is basically in the same situation, that is, everyone who responds through his or her belief has access to salvation (cf. Rom. 3:9, 21-26; Gal 2: 15-16 & 3:15-19).

2.3.2 The Church and the Recent View of the Magisterium on Mission

The teaching authority of the church (Magisterium), has recently made a move from the narrow ecclesiocentric focus of the mission to mission Ad Gentes. For example, the Ad Gentes affirms, “ the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified”.³⁸ This recognition impels the church to enter into dialogue and collaboration with the people from other religions.³⁹

In the course of the centuries, the church has proclaimed and witnessed with fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. At the close of the second millennium, the Mission of Christ is still incomplete as Pope John Paul II put it.⁴⁰ The Magisterium and the entire mother church are now convinced that Saint Paul’s words are now more relevant than ever: “Preaching the Gospel is not a reason for me to boast; it is a necessity laid on me: woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1Cor 9:16). This explains the Magisterium’s particular attention to giving

³⁸ Ad GentesN.11.

³⁹ Nostra Aetate, n 2; also Gadium et Spes, ns.92-93.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio, 1: AAS 83, 1993, pp. 249-340.

reasons for and supporting the evangelising mission of the church, and above all, in connection with the religious traditions of the world.⁴¹

In considering the values to which the other religions witness and offer to humanity, with an open and positive approach, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the relation of the church to non-Christian religions states: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and teachings, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men".⁴² Continuing in this same line of thought, the Church's proclamation of Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 24:6), today also makes use of the practice of inter-religious dialogue. Such dialogue does not certainly replace, but rather accompanies the "missio Ad gentes" directed toward that "mystery of unity", from which "it follows that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit".⁴³ Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi", reminds us that the witness that the Lord gives of himself and which Saint Luke records in his gospel "I must proclaim the Good

⁴¹ Second Vatican Council, Decree Ad Gentes 9, and Declaration Nostra Aetate, 2 cf. also Paul VI Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi AAS 68, 1976, pp.5-76; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Redemptoris missio, Nairobi, Paulines Publication, 1990.

⁴² Second Vatican Council, Declaration Nostra Aetate, No .2.

⁴³ Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Instruction on Dialogue and Proclamation, 29: AAS 84, 1992, p424; cf. also Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, 22.

News of the Kingdom of God”, (Lk4: 18), without doubt has enormous consequences, for it sums up the whole Mission of Jesus.⁴⁴

2.4 The S.M.A. Mission in Egypt, Proclamation of the Gospel and Dialogue

This particular section will deal with the S.M.A. Mission in Egypt, that is, the proclamation of Christ and dialogue. I did my pastoral work in Egypt and so most of the things I will talk about here will be based on my own experience there. The S.M.A. is a Society of Apostolic Life whose principal aim is to respond effectively to the missionary vocation of the Church. The Mission of the Church as Vatican II sees it, is to bring the mystery of the love of God, manifested in Jesus Christ, nearer to human beings (nations, generations and to each person).⁴⁵

Following the same line of thought as the Church, the S.M.A. Mission in Egypt is described in a nutshell as first and foremost, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ as a message of total liberation and as a response to the transformation of Egyptian society. And Secondly, it is to enter into dialogue with the Muslims so as to bring all the Egyptians be they Muslims, or Christians to the knowledge and love of God.

2.4.1 Mission as Proclamation of The Gospel of Christ

To begin with, it is worthwhile to explain briefly what proclamation is. The word “Proclamation” simply is the communication of the Gospel message, that is, the mystery of

⁴⁴ Pope Paul VI, “Evangelii Nuntiandi”, (Apostolic Exhortation), on “Evangelization in the Modern World”, No 6, Nairobi, St. Paul Publications, 1975.

⁴⁵ Ad Gentes No 2,

salvation realised by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. Proclamation is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Christ and entry through baptism into the community of believers, which is the church. Proclamation can be solemn, public, private, or by way of life, but then it leads naturally to catechesis which aims at deepening the faith of the believer. Proclamation basically, is the foundation centre and summit of evangelisation.⁴⁶ Proclamation is not optional for the church. In proclaiming the word of God, the church knows that she can rely on the Holy Spirit, who both prompts her proclamation and leads the hearers to obedience or faith.⁴⁷ It is from this view -point that Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" no 51, tells us that to reveal Jesus Christ and his Gospel to those who do not know them has been, ever since the morning of Pentecost, the fundamental programme which the church has taken on as received from her founder. The Pope explains that the whole of the New Testament, and in a special way the Acts of the Apostles, bears witness to a privileged and in a sense exemplary moment of this missionary effort which will subsequently leave its mark on the whole history of the church.⁴⁸

The S.M.A. Mission in Egypt is first and foremost the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. According to my own observation, and what some fathers of the SMA told me in Egypt, this proclamation of the Gospel is done in four different ways. As a society founded to continue the Mission of Christ, the S.M.A. Missionaries in Egypt define themselves in relation to the Kingdom, which is meant to embrace all human beings.

⁴⁶ Pope Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, 27.

⁴⁷ Congregation for the Evangelization of People and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious dialogue, Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflections on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel, no.64, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 1996, p.28.

⁴⁸ Cf. Pope Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi (Apostolic Exhortation), on "Evangelization in the Modern World" no. 51, Nairobi, St, Paul Publications, 1975.

2.4.1.1 Solemn Proclamation

The first dimension of the S.M.A. Proclamation of Christ, as I saw it, was solemn proclamation. This solemn proclamation takes place daily in the parish in Shoubra, Cairo. This involves the daily celebration of the Eucharist for the faithful. There are often times infant baptisms, which involve instruction and teaching of catechism in the church, which aims at deepening the faith of the parishioners. From the view -point of the SMA fathers, the church does not have to extend its membership to every single person in Egypt. They believed that "the sacramental significance of the church may be fully achieved among the Egyptian people even though not every single Egyptian will accept to be a member".⁴⁹ In Egypt, the missionary implications of the SMA fathers, that is, seeing the church as sacrament of salvation has been comprehensively and cogently elaborated by Eugene Hillman in his book "The Wider Ecumenism". For Hillman, the church is necessary for salvation. But this necessity belongs not to any juridical but to the sacramental order.⁵⁰

2.4.1.2 Public Proclamation

The second dimension of proclamation is the public proclamation. In Egypt to give birth to a disabled child is seen as a curse. This curse is meant for the entire family. In this regard, the disabled children and their parents are abandoned in Egyptian society. The S.M.A. fathers in this regard, have opened a school for such people, who are both Muslims and Christians. Regularly, public masses are celebrated for the Christians among them, and these are also occasions for the priests to preach about the love of God, and above all else, share their

⁴⁹ Cf. "The Church and Mission" "SMA Bulletin", No.90, June 1993, pp.54-71.

⁵⁰ Hillman, Eugene, The Wider Ecumenism, Herder and Herder, New York, 1968, p.49.

faith experience as Christians with the other people. The parents of the Muslim children also often attend the celebration also to experience how God is with the people who are not Muslims. At this point, in the process of seeking to transform the Egyptian culture, and to be involved in the ongoing struggle for the outcast, the S.M.A. fathers see that they are not alone in doing that. With their focus clearly on the Kingdom of God, they are made to see the Muslims as collaborators rather than adversaries.

2.4.1.3 Proclamation by Day-to- Day Life

Another dimension of the S.M.A. proclamation is the proclamation by day-to-day life. Every year the S.M.A. fathers in Egypt invite some S.M.A. students to do pastoral work there. The students, sometimes with the fathers, work in collaboration with the sisters of Charity in a hospice taking care of the most abandoned, the sick, the aged and the dying. I was there for my pastoral experience, we used to go from one street to another looking for such people to feed, wash, and clothe them. This work involved very hard physical work for two mornings per week.

The most interesting thing is that we helped these people without considering their religious background. Any time we were helping Muslims the first question was, "ent muslimin?" This means, are you a Muslim? They ask this question simply because it is rare to see a Muslim giving help to a Christian. These Muslims are very much aware of the Christian atmosphere of the hospice, and that the care and attention we gave them were given for the sake of witnessing to Christ and not for any social or secular motive.

2.4.1.4 Proclamation through Private Conversation

Lastly, proclamation is done through private conversation. In Egypt, Christians cannot proclaim Jesus Christ outside the church. There are certain areas where public proclamation of Jesus Christ can lead the person to trouble or even to death. In this case, if the SMA Missionaries get any opportunity to share their faith in the Muslim quarter, they do it privately in the form of a conversation. A case in point is, that I used to do shopping in a certain Muslim shop. I became so close to the owner of the shop who was a Muslim that we became friends. Eventually, he became interested in Christianity. Then he began to visit our parish from time to time. He never became a Christian but at last he became aware that there are many good things in Christianity. From this time, any SMA student who goes to Egypt becomes a friend of that shopkeeper.

This is just only one example but our S.M.A. fathers have many Muslim friends who are interested in Christianity although they do not want to be converted to it. This is a very great achievement because in Egypt the Muslims used to tell me that it is “mamnw”, meaning “forbidden” for a Muslim to associate himself or herself with a Christian.

Now I shall look at another aspect of the S.M.A. Mission in Egypt, which is dialogue.

2.4.2 Mission as Dialogue

Apart from proclamation, another aspect of the S.M.A. Mission in Egypt is dialogue. The Webster’s New Collegiate dictionary defines dialogue as a composition representing two

or more persons as conversing or reasoning.⁵¹ I prefer this definition because it best describes the dialogue that the S.M.A. fathers engage in with the Muslims in Egypt. The S.M.A. dialogue with the Muslims in Egypt is rooted in the demand of the Pontifical Council for the Inter-religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of peoples. The instruction issued by them on dialogue and proclamation states: "Inter-religious dialogue, which is part of the church's evangelising Missions requires an attitude of understanding and a relationship of mutual knowledge and reciprocal enrichment, in obedience to the truth and with respect for freedom".⁵² As John Paul II rightly put it, in exploring the dialogical process, we must ask if the covenant that God made with various nations of the world prior to the Incarnation of Jesus are still operative? Pope John Paul II states that the covenant of Moses for the Jews and that of Abraham for the Muslims are still ways of salvation for them. If this is the case then according to the Pope, we must dialogue with them in order to learn from them and vice versa⁵³

With regard to the SMA dialogue with the Muslims in Egypt, even though our Missionaries do their best to bring it into reality, the Muslims show little or no interest in it. Thus the fathers experience great difficulty in this dialogue, which they are very careful and take only hesitant steps to it. It is true that dialogue with Muslims is difficult. At the outset, we present dialogue as an ideal within our communities.

⁵¹ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, G. and C. Meriam Co. U.S.A., Riverside Press, 1961.

⁵² Cf. Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Instruction on Dialogue and Proclamation, 9, AAS 84, 1992, 417.

⁵³ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution Gadium et Spes 92.

Dialogue can only be the fruit of a long encounter, patience and love as Jacques Dupuis put it.⁵⁴ The SMA Mission of dialogue was a learning and receiving of rich insights of God from the Muslims. Generally speaking, what we strictly call the SMA.- Muslim dialogue is almost impossible because of the Muslim faith and the mentality it has formed. Following the conferences I attended in Cairo, I realised that much of the popular Muslim literature about Christianity is selective, and Muslims choose to publish that which reflects badly on Christianity from outdated sources. They also tend to take isolated texts rather than dealing with the bible or its writers as a whole. From my own experience, one Muslim professor told me that the dialogue between Muslims and Christians is “Mamnwo”, in other words it is forbidden.

The S.M.A. dialogue with the Muslim brothers and sisters in Egypt is carried out at the grassroot level that is, dialogue specifically on social issues, sharing of life experience, and cooperative ministry. This is what Cardinal Francis Arinze calls “the dialogue of action”. This is an inter-religious dialogue within the reach of anyone who lives or interacts within a population of a different religion.⁵⁵

In our parish in Shoubra, (Cairo), the S.M.A. fathers stay in the same quarter with both Muslims and Christians. This kind of experience demands the emptying of oneself in order to find what is essential, that is, the love of God, and the love of neighbour, which is the heart of

⁵⁴ I got this information from Fr. Jarlath Walsh from the class notes he got from Dupuis Jacques, on a course entitled Jesus in the Meeting of Religions Gregorian University, Rome, 1976.

⁵⁵ Cf. Arinze, Francis, Meeting Other Believers, Paulines Publication, Nairobi, 1997, pp. 10-11.

the Gospel that the fathers preach everyday. In our parish, day-to-day life dialogue goes on slowly between the Muslims and the S.M.A. Missionaries. For instance, in "Matrariya" school in our parish, there is a centre run by our fathers. The students in this school are both Muslims and Christians. Missionaries spend four hours per week there teaching French and English. This work provides a valuable occasion for the Missionaries to meet, relate, and share their life experience with the young Egyptians, both Muslims and Christians.

Apart from this encounter with the Muslims in the school, I saw a kind of dialogue going on unofficially between even some Egyptian Christians and the Muslims. This is through lectures, seminars, and the S.M.A.-Islam commission, which has a sporadic encounter with some Muslim scholars like Amin Qasim and Ibrahim Mustafa. These Muslims are invited from time to time to our parish to a talk on the encounter between Islam and Christianity in Egypt. Although there is no room per se for official inter-religious dialogue, the occasion provides an opportunity for the S.M.A.s to come into close contact with the Muslim experience, thus building up everyday relationships.

Many people in our S.M.A. congregation do not see this encounter between the Muslims and our fathers as a dialogue. I personally see our Mission in Egypt as proclamation and dialogue because this experience of living in the predominantly Muslim milieu, as we find it in many parts of the world, brings religious conflict sometimes. But since our fathers established our Mission in Egypt, the most serious clashes we have had so far were between the Coptic Church and our Missionaries. In spite of the violence that arises from time to time in Shoubra, the quarter where our parish is located, the fathers live with the Muslims and at the same time share their Christian faith experience wherever possible without any hindrance. The

Muslims have, step by step, come to recognise whom the S.M.A. fathers are and have gained a better understanding of the S.M.A. presence in that quarter.

One day all the inhabitants in Shoubra, Muslims and Christians, together with the S.M.A. fathers had a clean up exercise in our residence. One of the Muslims told us: "You are people of God, because you have enabled us to come together and do things we did not think we could do". Another old Muslim man, when he learned that I was a Seminarian said, "You Catholic fathers are those who repair the world for us. You have come to Egypt to bring all of us together". Then and there, I discovered that there was a dialogue going on through the work of the Holy Spirit. This confirms what John Paul II stressed during the World Day of Prayer. In his address to the Roman Curia after the World Day of Prayer for peace in Assisi, the Pope stressed once more the universal presence of the Holy Spirit, stating, "every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person", Christian or otherwise. The Pope also articulated the main elements, which together can be seen as constituting the theological basis for a positive approach to other religious traditions and the practice of inter-religious dialogue. John Paul II sees that the fruits of the Spirit of God in the personal life of individuals, whether Christian or Muslim, are easily discernible.⁵⁶ I also discovered that the call and the exact sign of our vocation among the Muslims in God's name is by the grace of Jesus Christ- even if they are unable to recognize him as Lord and Saviour to repair the world, bring about healing among people, reconcile, bring together, create unity, prepare the ways of the Lord, and make the Kingdom come.

⁵⁶ Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Dialogue and Proclamation, "Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel", No. 27, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 1996, p.15.

In concluding this chapter, I would say that the S.M.A. Mission as I found it among the Muslims in Egypt, is very different from all that I could imagine in other Muslim countries. It is true that in the strict sense of the term, there is no possibility of an inter-religious dialogue. But at the same time there is a sign of religious freedom in Egypt, especially in Shoubra where our Missionaries are working. This situation makes individuals free to compare their religion with that of the other. They are also free to discuss religion in a good atmosphere and to accept their differences, which of course, is the essence of the inter-religious dialogue the church is advocating to bring peace and tranquillity in the world.

Jacques Dupuis argues on the same line of thought that the Catholic Church has rejected Christian exclusivism in the sense that she does not claim the monopoly of salvation for Christians. He argues clearly that the church believes that every sincere religious person receives salvation because God offers His grace to every one and confers it efficaciously on whoever opens himself or herself to His gift. However as Christians, he said, we claim that salvation still comes through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12) who is the fullness of God's revelation to the world and the only mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5). So even though we have to respect the other religions, Dupuis said, Christianity occupies a privileged place in the order of salvation.⁵⁷

It is on this ground that the S.M.A. Mission in Egypt is the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and dialogue. The Missionaries have developed an attitude, based on a deep commitment to Christ, because through him they can learn from the Muslims in Egypt.

⁵⁷ Dupuis, Jacques, Jesus Christ and His Spirit, India, Theological Publications in India, 1976 p.142.

The Pastoral Challenges of the S.M.A Mission in Egypt

In this chapter I will reflect on the pastoral challenges facing our Missionaries in Egypt. The challenges are many but my reflection will only be on the serious ones. To enter into dialogue with the Muslims in Egypt and proclaim Christ to them is to be willing to listen, accept, and respect them. The SMA fathers do not take decisions in their ministry without consulting the Muslims they encounter. The fathers share their life experience of the Gospel through their life style. Even so, they encounter many challenges such as religious, political, and social.

3.1 Religious Challenge

The main religious challenge they face in their Mission in Egypt is related to the Muslim faith, The relationship between the fathers and the Muslims in the SMA parish in Cairo is not encouraging because of the Muslim faith and the mentality it has formed. The guardians of the Muslim faith do not look favourably on the action of the SMA Mission in Egypt. These religious guardians are convinced of the superiority of Islam and its worldwide mission. Often, in Egypt, the Muslims celebrate the conversions of Christians to Islam, publicly, which our Missionaries and the Christians find difficult to take.

When I listened to some Muslim friends in Cairo, the quotation I was often given was that from Quran 7:112. This verse refers to the covenant concluded between God and humanity. Some Muslims' interpretation of that verse is that to be born human is to be born a Muslim.

Christianity in this context is judged negatively. Without doubt, Christianity for them has its origins in a revelation. They accept that it comes from God and that it also conserves something authentic, not falsified or revised by its partisans. But then it is either taken, adopted, and continued by Islam or it is abrogated, corrected and transcended by it.⁵⁸ This mentality is the big challenge that blocks dialogue. This does not make it easy for our fathers to tackle anything regarding the inter-religious dialogue. At the same time it also looks down upon the Christian religion.

3.2 The Political Challenge:

Another challenge of the SMA mission in Egypt is related to politics. The Egyptian constitution is based on the Islamic and Arabic laws. The Islamic law per se, encourages community building and support for each other even though the Quran does not give precise directives for the administration of the Islamic community. The Arabic laws on the other hand, give room for and tolerate violence. Even though the Egyptian society is Islamic, it is not the ideal Islamic community that the prophet Muhammad created. The ideal Islamic community, which the prophet had in mind, was a peaceful one devoid of violence and disorder. It was a community that was to promote unity among the Muslims and the “people of the book”, that is Christians and Jews, in case they decide to live together.⁵⁹

In Egypt, if you are not a Muslim, there is little or no possibility of getting a job in a public company. Most, if not all the politicians are Muslims. The most terrible issue is that if a Muslim infringes in the rights of a Christian, the Christian party has to be quiet in order to save

⁵⁸ Pere, Abd el, Jalil, L'Islam et Nous, Cairo, Faghala Press, 1992, pp57-59.

⁵⁹ Jomier, Jacques, How to understand Islam, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1989, pp 102-109.

his or her life. One of the SMA priests lost his job as a journalist simply because he had a dispute with a Muslim politician. Again, the Islamic laws do not permit the Missionaries to be involved in the political affairs of the country. For example some SMA students were sent to Cairo for pastoral work. These students were working with the sisters of Charity in Cairo. At one time, as they were working in the hospice of the sisters, some army officers led by Mustafa Pasha, revolted against them. There was massacre of Christians in which one of the sisters lost her life.⁶⁰

The students were forced to escape to Alexandria, where they remained until the end of the pastoral year. The main complaint I often heard from the Egyptian Christians was, "Egypt is for Muslims, we are here helping them to live".⁶¹ The Muslims, who form the majority of the Egyptian population, control everything including Christianity in the country. One strange thing I noticed was that apart from the Muslims, hardly anyone got employment in the civil service. One of our SMA Missionaries tried to intervene through diplomatic means to help some Christian intellectuals to get job in the government but the idea was not successful. He even became an object of suspicion. Some government officials thought that he was sabotaging the efforts of the Egyptian government. Since the eyes of the government officials were on him, our Superior General asked him to leave Egypt in order to save his life.⁶²

The SMA human right commission in Egypt finds it difficult to tackle anything to do with human rights there. This in fact, is a serious challenge facing our Mission there. I saw the

⁶⁰ Information given by father Gerard Viaud, SMA, during the time I was in Egypt for pastoral work in 1997- 1998.

⁶¹ A comment from Nagla Amelik, an Egyptian female teacher in the home of the mentally retarded children in 1998 when I was in Egypt for pastoral work.

⁶² Viaud, Gerard, Histoire des Missions Africaine en Egypt, p 8.

desire for power on the part of both the Christians and the Muslims there. During my stay in Egypt, I realised that the major reason for the misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims is that there is no “give and take” between the two communities as far as politics is concerned.

They all live together as Egyptian citizens. The only dialogue you can see is the “dialogue of life”, that is, they all see themselves as Egyptians and so they have to stay together and defend their country. But this is marked by ignorance of one another’s beliefs and faith commitment, which in turn leads to fear and prejudice, which often results in hostility.

3.3 Social Challenge:

The Egyptian society, as I said earlier, is based on the Islamic and Arabic laws. In the Quran the relationship between a man and a woman is viewed as complementary, reflecting their different capacities and dispositions. The principles of equality and justice for all, proclaimed in Quran 3:36, was not really put into practise by the many Egyptian Muslims. Quran 3:36 shows that human rights are part of divine law. The laws have a spiritual base, and obedience to divine Islamic law, commonly known as Shariah. The Shariah itself promotes respect for human rights. But the Arabic laws, which are masculine in character, could be said to have distorted the original laws given by the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), in the Quran. It is very difficult to see how one can speak about equality of men and women in that country. At times women are seen only as sexual objects in Egyptian society. For instance, many Egyptian women had to leave their job, if at all they were working, before getting married. After marriage they are limited to only household duties, cooking, producing children,

and escorting them to school. I witnessed a situation where many women were abused. Some were impregnated and sent away by their husbands who violated the limits set by God in Quran 65:1, which says, “do not divorce women without counting their menstrual periods”. Again women could not give public witness. If at all they were allowed to do that, the witness of one man was equivalent to that of three women.⁶³

In reality when I was in Egypt in 1997 I noticed that many women there had no place in the country. The SMA fathers tried to organise a seminar in some schools to educate the students on men-women equality but when the students go home the reality is different. The structure of Egyptian society does not give room for this idea of our Missionaries. For example, in the American University in Cairo where I used to go for Islamic studies, there was often a debate on “whether there should be an equality among women and men in Egypt”. The response of many women in the University was negative. The simple reason they give is that you should not fight for what you will not be given. Owing to this many women are compelled to accept the inequality between men and women there.

In pastoral work this also is a big challenge for the SMA priests as it makes it difficult for them to tackle marital issues. Many times they fail to help couples to solve some family problems.

⁶³ This information was given by Father Basil Babatunde, the director of my pastoral work in Egypt, during the missionary orientation course in Cairo in 1997.

Some Theological Reflections on the SMA Mission in Egypt

This chapter will be a theological reflection on the SMA Mission in Egypt. Given a better understanding of the fundamentals of both Christianity and Islam, their similarities and differences, many people question whether dialogue and proclamation of the Gospel of Christ are possible in Egypt. The Catholic Church encourages proclamation and dialogue as important parts of Christian witness in the modern world.⁶⁴

But many Christians, especially some Missionaries, speaking from their own local situations and often with bitter experiences, would conclude that proclamation and dialogue with Muslims is not possible. One important thing Christians would need to accept is that religious pluralism and respect for other religions are in fact indispensable. They are part of human freedom within modern cultures and human societies. In the context of such a pluralistic world, how do Christians look at themselves in relation to people like Muslims?

In Egypt, the SMA Missionaries encounter many conflicts during their encounter with Muslims. Although there have often been misunderstandings between them and the Muslims which leads to fear as well as indifference. However our Missionaries are still open to Muslims in spite of the bitter experiences they meet daily in their encounter with them in Egypt.

⁶⁴ Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "Evangelisation in the Modern World", nos.51-53.

The SMA Missionaries respect, love and listen to the Muslims because they see that this forms part of the gospel teaching, which was elaborated by Saint Paul. When Saint Paul was in the Areopagus in Athens, and proclaimed the God whom they worshipped unknowingly, his message was that the religions of the nations find in Christ the fulfilment of their deepest aspirations. (Acts 17:22-31). So Paul seems to be recognizing a true relationship between God and the Greeks who thought they had a different God. Jacques Dupuis put it clearly that, today we should believe that wherever people commit themselves to God in faith and in love, they are saved, no matter how imperfect their concept of God may be. Salvation according to Dupuis depends on the response given by sinful individuals to the personal communication, which God makes of himself to them.⁶⁵ From the same line of thought Reverend Dr. Fernando Domingues, Mccj, affirms that both proclamation and dialogue are oriented towards the communication of salvific truth, and so for him, further work is necessary on the knowledge of the specific religious traditions of humankind.⁶⁶ We are also told that even the foundation of the church's commitment to proclamation and dialogue is not merely anthropological but theological. God in an age-long dialogue has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind. In fidelity to divine initiative, the church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cf. Dupuis, Jacques, Jesus Christ and His Spirit, Theological Publications in India, 1976 p. 142.

⁶⁶ Cf. Domingues, Fernando, "The class notes on Dialogue and Proclamation" on the course entitled "Christian Theology of other Faith, 2000.

⁶⁷ Cf. Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflections on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel, no 38, Nairobi, Pualines Publication, 1996, p.18.

Christians should therefore be acquainted with the Quran. According to Pope John Paul II, Christians have to come to terms with Muslims through dialogue. John Paul II spoke about the common faith heritage of both Christians and Muslims. He invited these two religious groups to work for respect and dignity of the human person in its multiple cultural, social and religious aspects. He said both Christians and Muslims bear the responsibility of finding roads and avenues, which can bring collaboration and togetherness in our modern society.⁶⁸

The Quran, after all, also recognises the existence not only of the Muslim community but also of different communities. Muslims like Christians, believe that God remains a mystery "ghayb". Here one cannot but call to mind St. Paul's exclamation: "how rich are the depths of God, how deep his wisdom and knowledge, and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods". (Rom. 11:33). Our own church document, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, puts us on the right track when it states:

"Not by force of blows does Christ's rule assert its claim. Rather, it is established by witnessing to the truth and by hearing the truth and it extends its dominion by the love where by Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws all people to himself".⁶⁹

The major aim of our SMA Missionaries now in Egypt, is not to convert, except when there is a clear possibility for that. Their aim is to help dissipate prejudices, encourage mutual understanding, stimulate co-operation and deepen faith. Michel Thomas said that often the difficulty Christians have in accepting other believers stems from ignorance of the beliefs of

⁶⁸ Cf. John Paul II, "Documents for Muslim- Christian Understanding" in his Speech to the Young Muslims in Maroc, 9th August, (Pontificio Instituto di Studi Arabie D'Islamistica Viale di Trastevere Rome). 1985.

⁶⁹ Dignitatis Humanae No 11, English Translation, 691.

those people, their practices, and as well as half-truths we have picked up over the years. Michel Thomas therefore calls for education of other creeds to form part of the basic training for Christians.⁷⁰ It is my conviction that if the SMA- Muslim encounter is to continue to be a true proclamation of Christ and dialogue, it must be firmly grounded on faith in God, sustained by a spirit of prayer, and flow into common action as John Paul II rightly put it.⁷¹

Proceeding further, we see that Jesus Son of God, bears witness not only to himself but also to God the Father, and the Father as well bears witness to Jesus through the works he empowers him to do (Jn 5:31-37). The SMA Missionaries and all Christians are invited to associate with the Muslims. "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you".(Jn.20:21). In the power of the Spirit, all Christians are called to be Christ's witnesses to the ends of the earth, (Acts 1:8).

The SMA encounter, with the Islamic spirituality in particular, and the Christian encounter with Islam in general, is a mega trend for our secular age as Thomas Michel put it.⁷² Pope John Paul II invites the Catholics especially the Missionaries to seek the "seeds of the word of God" in the other religions and discover the treasures of human spirituality in them.

⁷⁰ Cf. Michel, Thomas, "Islam- Christian Dialogue: Reflections on the recent teachings of the church", Bulletin, Secretariat for non-Christians, 1985- XX/2, no. 59, p.179.

⁷¹ Cf. John Paul II, "Documents for Muslim- Christian Understanding), in his Speech to the Young Muslims in Maroc in 9th Aug, 1985.

⁷² Michel, Thomas, Reflection on Islamic Spirituality, in Come Closer, Know and Love Your Muslim Neighbour, Vol 4 No3 July- September 1996, p.14.

The Pope strongly affirms the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the church for this salvation.⁷³

According to the SMA Missionaries in Egypt, Muslims should be seen as our fellow believers who also claim like us, spiritual descent from the faith of Abraham in the One God.⁷⁴ If we look back to the history of Islam and Christianity up to our present time, the Holy Land (Jerusalem) is equally dear to the two monotheistic religions (Islam and Christianity). Jerusalem has a special value for both Christian and Muslim believers who reside there, as well as the members of these two traditions who live all over the world. In this regard, as Mr. Sherif Fawaz Shref said, “there should be a better understanding between the Muslims and Christians in order to promote freedom of conscience and freedom of religious belief and practice, and an ever greater respect for each other to foster development of peaceful relations and co-operation between the followers of these two religious groups.”⁷⁵

Moving away from the narrow ecclesiocentric focus of the salvation motivation for Mission, several Catholic theologians today argue that the fundamental task of Mission is to proclaim and promote the Kingdom of God and when necessary, to engage in dialogue with different religious groups. The Mission of the church is the Mission of Christ. Now as John

⁷³ Cf. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, 9 cf. also Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi Paulines Publication, 1994, p. 846-847.

⁷⁴ Michel, Thomas, Reflection on Islamic Spirituality, in Come Closer, Know and Love Your Muslim Neighbour, p. 14.

⁷⁵ Cf. the Letters of Credence Presented by Sherif Fawaz Shref, “The Ambassador of Jordan” to Pope John Paul II, on 23 May 1996. (Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabie D’Islamistica Viale di Trastevere, Rome).

Fuellenbach has pointed out, the central purpose of Christ's life was proclamation of God's Kingdom.⁷⁶

The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of freedom, fellowship, and love. It is an order of integral liberation, communal, spiritual and material. And so as a community of those chosen to continue the Mission of Jesus, Christians, especially all Missionaries, must define themselves in relation to the Kingdom, which is meant to embrace all human beings and the whole of creation. The church as Michael Amaladoss remarks, is a symbol and the servant of the Kingdom of God. And so for him, the task of all Christians is to be a light to the nations, to give a clear witness to the values of God's Kingdom in the world, discerning the signs of the times and collaborating with all those graced movements by which the Holy Spirit is bringing about the realisation of the Kingdom in and for the world.⁷⁷

In the process of seeking to transform the world, Christians are not alone. With their focus on the Kingdom of God, they are brought to see the followers of other religions as collaborators rather than adversaries.

Dialogue with other religions in general and Islam in particular, becomes a vital element in promoting the Kingdom. Great benefits to our faith can be gained from learning about how God speaks to people from other religions. This will help Christians to search for ways in which they can learn more about God and lead them on a mutual journey to the ultimate truth. The dialogue the SMA fathers try to engage in among the Egyptians, prompts

⁷⁶ Fuellenbach, John, The Kingdom of God: "The Central Message of Jesus Seen in the Challenges of Today", New York, Orbis Books, 1996.

⁷⁷ Cf Amaladoss, Michael, Les nouveaux visages de la mission, "SEDOS Bulletin", Vol. 30 No.1, Rome, 15th February 1998, P.45.

the followers of Islam who may feel called by the Holy Spirit to become disciples of Christ in a more profound way. However, as Michael Amaladoss again remarks, the purpose of the dialogue is not to make converts to the church. If it happens through the Spirit that there are converts, it is fine; but the Kingdom should be promoted first.⁷⁸

While the SMA Missionaries try to accept the existence of positive values in Islam in Egypt, and affirm the possibility of salvation for these non- Christians Egyptians, it is also very necessary to proclaim vehemently that the church is the surer way to salvation.

In concluding this chapter, let me quote from the great papal encyclical “ Redemptoris Missio” which dealt with the permanent validity of the church’s missionary mandate.

“ I recently wrote to the Bishops of Asia: although the church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim, without fail, Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel

⁷⁸ Cf. Amaladoss, Michael, Les Nouveaux Visages de la Mission, p. 45. Cf. also “SMA Bulletin” No101, June, Rome, 1998 p.48.

the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people".⁷⁹

To accept Islām and the other religions in our societies is to accept that the Spirit of God is at work in the whole of creation. To accept the need for religious freedom is to accept that God speaks to all humanity and that they respond in their own way, which may be different from ours. If they have a right to do so, we also must be given that same right wherever they are in the world".

79. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, no. 28.

General Conclusion

I began this thesis with a question, "The SMA Mission in Egypt; is it the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ or dialogue"? I end by answering that the SMA Mission in Egypt is first and foremost the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ and wherever it is possible dialogue is done. It is now understood by many Christians that salvation can be realised outside the church. It follows that the Muslims in Egypt, could also be saved by acting in accordance with their own religious beliefs. On the other hand, it will be gravely irresponsible for the SMA Missionaries in particular, and Christians in general, not to afford them better way to achieve this salvation.

Despite the positive values the church and her Missionaries have acknowledged in the non-Christian religions, their situation is still precarious and less favourable to salvation than an explicit faith in Christ and visible membership in the church as Paul de Surgy put it.⁸⁰ In Ghana, there is a common saying among the Ashantis that if it is difficult for a tall man to pluck pawpaw from the pawpaw tree, how will it be for a very short man? What I want to put across here is that if it is difficult for a devout Christian who knows God and has at his or her disposal all the means of salvation, what must we say about the member of other religion who is deprived of these means and has an imperfect knowledge of God?

It is incumbent on SMA Missionaries to put at the disposal of the Muslims, those same means of salvation to make their task of salvation easier, and their way and future more

⁸⁰ Surgy, Paul, de, Mystery of Salvation, London, Sheed and Ward, 1966, p.199.

favourable. As Jacques Dupuis put it, Christians must know the people in whose midst they live, and strike up a conversation with them in order that they too may learn in a sincere and patient dialogue, what riches God has dispensed to the nations.⁸¹ The SMA Missionaries in Egypt should not neglect the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ in Egypt. If they do, salvation is not only endangered for the Muslims, but also for the Missionaries as well. Charles Davis in his short article I came across in Cairo makes it clear that non-Christians are capable of “implicit faith”. He continues, “but this implicit faith remains mutilated faith of cripples in the life of faith”.⁸²

The SMA Missionaries in Egypt, and Christians in general, have a serious apostolic responsibility to give the Muslims and the non-Christians the opportunity of the full knowledge of God so that they can be saved. Again, the Ashantis of Ghana say, “When God created the poor people he also created their helpers”. In other words, if our Missionaries think that the Muslims and the other non-Christians have less chance of salvation, then it is the responsibility of the Christians to help them reach the right way to God. I think that the best way to do this is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and wherever possible dialogue should be done.

Finally, I would like to say that the SMA Mission in Egypt, from my own point of view, is proclamation of the Gospel of Christ and dialogue although the dialogue is done in a very subtle manner. I would like to end with what Pope John Paul II stated in his great encyclical letter, “Redemptoris Missio”. He said, “ While the task of the church is to promote the reign of God, the task is not to be reduced to working for secularized, humanistic visions of

⁸¹ Cf. Dupuis, Jacques, Jesus at the Encounter of World Religions, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, p. 211.

⁸² Cf. Davis, Charles, Can unbelievers be saved? London, Sheed and Ward, 1964. p. 24.

the world. Nor does it mean serving a common religion, which would combine the ideals and values of all religions".⁸³ On that note I conclude by saying that the SMA Missionaries should continue to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in a dialogical way, wherever possible. After all God is One and the same for all religious believers. Jesus came for all. But how can people call him if they have not believed in him? And how can they believe in him if they have not heard the message? How can they hear if message if it is not proclaimed (Rom.10: 9-15)? Our Mission should begin with proclamation and where it is possible, we should dialogue with the people from other religions. In John's Gospel Jesus states, "There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them too (Jn. 10:6)". It is therefore the SMA Missionaries and Christians in general, who will bring this flock to Jesus Christ through Proclamation and dialogue.

⁸³ Cf. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio no. 19.

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