

CHARLES W. POLZER, S. J.

KINO'S METHOD OF EVANGELIZATION

The presentations during this symposium have already considered Padre Kino from a variety of perspectives, both global and personal. When we raise the question of his method of evangelization, we are at once addressing a very specific issue – how did he accomplish his apostolic work, and a very controlling assumption – what was he trying to accomplish? The one is wholly dependent on the other.

I would not presume to recast the brilliant analysis of Kino's missiology by Father Charles O'Neill. However, it would be helpful if he painted a view of Christian mission with some very broad strokes; it will certainly assist in our understanding of the thought and practice of a sensitive man like Kino.

From the time of Jesus Christ and the Apostles the Followers of the Way, that is, the Disciples of Christ, accepted the challenge of the Master to «Go forth into the world and baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit». That baptism was the sign of inclusion in the Body of Christ, and the act was itself dependent on the individual's free-will acceptance of the Christian message calling for a change of life (*metanoia*). That change of life in its habits and customs was to be recognized, as St. John the Evangelist states, «by the way they love one another». Through the centuries the quality of love was measured more and more by conformity to abstract doctrine and Church precept. Love, it was felt, would be present if ideas were right and ritual or liturgical practice were relatively uniform. Thus the goal of much missionary preaching became dependent on doctrinal instruction and correct practice. This is a reasonable process if the criteria of the test of recognition are themselves diagnostic of the basic tenets of Christian living. As Padre Kino expressed it «*If every Christian were*

what he should be by example and through a disciplined life, the whole world would soon be Christian».

The case of Padre Kino is intriguing because he was born in Segno, not far distant. He was schooled in the Jesuit college here in Trent less than a century after the great Council clashed with Protestant Reformers throughout Europe. Curiously, the writings of Padre Kino dwell very little on the themes of the counter-Reformation, which so many people popularly think was a prime aspect of Jesuit training. If Kino was in the vanguard of polemical theology, one could never tell from his books and letters. He was very harsh on the English pirate, Francis Drake, for falsely depicting California as an island, but he expends little effort in refuting the theological positions of dissident Christians. Hence, we can deduce that Kino's theological concerns had little to do with combating unorthodox positions about Christian belief and practice.

His was a mission to the unbeliever; he was acutely aware that the persons he had come to convert were snared in paganism fostered by fear and ignorance. For him, Christianity was the great liberating force that gave them new promise and direction for life. Like St. John the Baptist, Padre Kino understood the following of Christ as predicated on a radical change of life (not necessarily custom), and like St. John the Evangelist, he put his converts to the test of love - in which he stressed peace and unity among peoples.

Placing Kino in his context requires that we place ourselves in the context of our own understanding of «mission». What Kino wanted to accomplish and what we think he ought to have accomplished may not correspond to the same criteria. As mentioned above, the notion of «mission» in the Church for centuries was simply the «sending forth», the apostolein, by which the followers of Christ made known to men-at-large that personal salvation depended on the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and on a radical change of life from the ways of sin. And here is where the missionary message eventually became hopelessly entangled in the web of cultures. What was one man's freedom was another man's sin. For those who were still too uneducated to be trapped in intellectual heresies over the nature of God, God-Made-Man, and the Trinity, there were still the pitfalls of immorality.

Again, Kino is characteristically silent on such issues. If one compares his *Favores Celestiales* with the *Historia de Sonora y Sinaloa* of Padre Andres Perez de Ribas, one is immediately struck by Kino's almost uncritical assessment of native peoples. Perez de Ribas dwells on the drunkenness, dancing, and superstitious practices of the Indians of the northwest; Kino occasionally refers to some individual sorcerers. By contrast, he stresses the gentleness, industry, and docility of the Piman peoples he came to convert; he

attributes the coarseness of the Californians to their isolation and near total poverty, calling them the most abandoned people of the New World. From other sources we know that these same peoples could have been railed against by Kino had he so chosen. But he *saw* what *he* saw, and chose what he considered important to record. Thus, one major aspect of Kino's methodology emerges almost imperceptibly - his positive and confident assessment of the native American. Kino did not come as a Reformer; he came as a missionary to present - The Way - for acceptance or rejection. His posture was one of profound respect. Would that many another missionary could have been the same.

Perhaps the deepest and most nagging of all problems in missiology is the role of culture. For generations many missionaries in the Church have seen themselves as converting unbelievers to Christianity, by which they understood a pattern of cultural assimilation. They evaluated *metanoia* with the criteria of cultural adjustment and acceptance. Although the point is rarely investigated, the Protestant Reformation was partially defused by the European contact with New World peoples; the Romanization of such divergent cultures was practically impossible. Only in recent decades has the assimilation of Americans reached a sufficient degree to permit Romanization once again to rise as an issue of orthodoxy in the Church. The fundamental problems of freedom and authority are cloaked by cultural differences. The Second Vatican Council made great strides in lessening the conflictive impact of Romanism in the world-wide Church, thus lifting the plane of Christian interaction above the limitations of language, language-bound metaphor, and preferential forms of art. Man, inexorably confronted by the wonders of creation, can only respond through stages of metaphoric expression and extension - much like the evolution of language itself. When Christ identified Himself as «the Way, the Truth, and the Life», he enunciated a meta-cultural principle, making salvation for every person meaningful *in* his own terms, but not *on* his own terms. Whether we, as ministers of the Church, have yet grasped this manifold movement of the Holy Spirit in modern times will only be known to history. Whatever we might be moved to say about our times is irrelevant, but whatever we can say about Kino is. His missionary method may just be as insightful as Vatican II; certainly we can see in him the record of an extremely successful missionary who knew in deeds what we struggle to dogmatize.

This is, in fact, our principal interest in delving into his method of evangelization. If he were unsuccessful, we would have no cause to be concerned. But, since he was a most effective and unforgettable figure, we can legitimately ask, why? A careful study of his

writings and remarks about him give no mention of any special technique.

The scientific savants of the 20th century have a penchant for «how-to» philosophies. They are convinced that success builds on a gnosticism of methodology. In the United States people pay money to learn Dale Carnegie's methods to win friends and influence people. If you believe the hucksters of influence peddling, there are ways worth the effort and expense. But if someone thinks that Padre Kino had a corner on method that might explain his success, he will be sadly disappointed. Kino leaned heavily on the basics of the interior life and the grace of God; in both of these he was greatly favored.

If Padre Kino had no special method, then what were, at least, the characteristics of his approach to native Americans? Kino listed his own agenda in six rules he attributed to the martyred Saeta: 1) Love of the Indian people in «charity unfeigned»; 2) Prayer - personal and fraternal; 3) Work - hard unstinting committment; 4) Discipline - self-discipline that issues in good example; 5) Patience; and 6) Confidence in the grace of God. I would add another dimension that probably escaped Kino because it was so close to his own personality he may never have recognized it - an addiction to nature. In my opinion this explains Kino's unparalleled success as a missionary in the New World. Please do not think that I have arrived at this conclusion to be simplistic, or that I discount Kino's staunch advice about asceticism. No. Having now lived in the light and shadow of this distinguished Son of Trent, I have come to know the subtlies of his person - each one traces back to his grasp of nature and the world. He was a genuine advocate of what some today call wholistic conviction. The spiritual and the temporal interpenetrate reality even though the human mind may divide them by rational distinctions. I strongly suspect that this deep personal trait developed early in his life while he was hiking through these exquisite mountains and valleys. Dualists come from deltas; wholistic men come from mountains where they are too close to God to desecrate His creation.

How do I arrive at this impression, you may ask? Well, if you remember the details of his life, he was drawn to the study of science and matematics, particularly cartographic geography. He was fascinated in the depiction of people and places on the face of the earth. Yesterday, Father Burrus dealt with the specific influence Kino had on the generation of maps that evolved after his time in northwestern New Spain. He superbly demonstrated what Kino did to mapmaking, to geography; my remarks really have to do with what geography did to him. For example, a primary tool in mapping is the art of astronomy; Kino learned to look into the heavens to

make measurements that would tell him more about the relationships of land masses and the seas. The stars of the Sonoran desert must be seen to be believed. The dark winter nights when he travelled most were for him a catechetical theater. (And may I add, that I have always hoped that the Republic of Mexico will name its great new observatory on the peak above Cananea in honor of this great hero of Mexico's past; the site looks squarely down on Kino's home mission of Nuestra Senora de los Dolores from where he studied the stars and prayed for the well being of Mexico's future).

During his prolonged delay in Spain while awaiting passage to the Americas, Kino observed the coming of Halley's comet that captivated us this very year. To him that celestial spectacular explained several epidemics and near catastrophes; he was still enough influenced by the medioeval mentality to adhere to the idea that heavenly bodies influenced the affairs of earth. Thus convinced, he strode confidently into the buzz-saw of scientific debate by confronting Don Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora over the role of the comet in human affairs. His position is now discredited, but still it reveals Kino's deep conviction about the integrative character of creation. He was no philosophical dualist; spirituality and temporality were tightly intertwined. Sometimes we do not reflect enough on the influence of science on the Church whereby many of its thinkers have been forced into rigidly dualist positions in an attempt to keep the fields of science and theology separate. It was a good corrective when modern science defined theology as the Queen of the Sciences; it was a moment much like the young man who asserts his freedom over an overweening mother. Each serves a purpose in the growth of human knowledge, namely the discovery of truth and new relations. Without fully realizing it, we are still trying to twist out from the twin ties of spirit and matter that were irrevocably split in the ascetical heresies of the 18th century and after. Like his Indian neophytes, Kino was close to nature; he was every bit *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

The utterly typical Kino encounter with native peoples was to preach the Word of God on first contact. He made this intelligible to potential converts by drawing a map to explain where they were, from where he had come, and where Jesus had lived and taught so that all men might be saved everywhere. His initial explanations were global; they invited the Indian mind to reach out into the unseen, the unknown, but still along paths of logic and acceptable metaphor. He rarely challenged their native biases - for example, the Hellenic fascination with three, thus the Trinity, versus the native preference for four, thus the cardinal directions. Some missionaries insisted on immediate confrontation, demanding an intellectual assimilation of the Triune God; Kino adroitly empha-

sized the coming Christ into a four dimensional world akin to their preferences. Like St. Paul, Kino entered their door, and came out his own. He commonly met the Indians on their turf. He rode by day, preached by night. Time and again his diaries tell us the Indians sat around the campfire well into the night listening to the Word of God and answering his questions about their lands and their peoples. Kino was gentle and slow to vilify.

The words he put into Saeta's mouth are revealing: *«If a missionary expects to succeed with these Indians, he... must go where they are and sit on a rock among them. He can then preach about Christ the Savior»*. This may not seem very profound, but you must realize that many missionaries demanded Indian obedience first, an organized entry into catechetical classes, and the prior imposition of discipline and strict rules of conduct. Kino, however, was casual, yet he captivated the native American. Kino was graphic, to conform to the Indian imagination. Kino knew instinctively that conversion was not cultural assimilation but a freely accepted metanoia, a radical change of life.

Whether by instinct, insight, or sheer chance Kino employed one of the strongest native convictions in his program of evangelization - the Indian proclivity to the natural. Nature and environment were, and are still, absolutely sacred to the native American. For Europeans this is tantamount to paganism. What was sacred to the Israelite had to be contained; what is sacred to the Roman must be contained. Mediterranean peoples have long demonstrated a possessive and protective stance toward the sacred; often it is representational - statues, reliquaries, tabernacles, and temples. The Holy of Holies; sacred objects; enclosed shrines. Even the Eucharist had to be celebrated under a canopy. The native American by contrast reveres almost the exact opposite; the most sacred acts are performed in the open air, under the over arching heavens. In fact, sacred acts performed at ground level are simply unsatisfactory; temples must be raised with platforms open to the sky; dances must be held in open fields; nothing ought to be enclosed or contained. When Kino first encountered the people of a village, they received him on the trail with arches of flowers and columns of cross-bearers. He was escorted to open air ramadas, to feast, to celebrate, and to sleep. He preached under the canopy of sharp desert skies. It was the Indian way, and although the message of salvation seemed unusual, it came in a totally acceptable context. When Kino began construction of large churches at various mission sites, he was swimming against the tide of native preference, but he always continued to permit substantial, outdoor activity as a part of acceptable ritual. He consciously worked against the influence of tribal hechiceros, the shaman leaders of the villages, by entering

their key settlements to erect small churches and centers of catechetical instruction. He sustained the instruction of children and willing adults through the use of resident temastians or trained catechists. He never feared to beard the lion in his den, but his strokes were calculated and invariably effective.

As previously mentioned, Kino's comprehension of astronomy was strongly theological. He held that heavenly bodies had distinct influence over the earth which conformed to the native evaluation of the heavens. A talk under the stars was the same as a talk under the sun - only a lot cooler in the desert climate! Frequently he would inquire about local land forms and particular resources. He was always on the look-out for bezoar stones, similar to the ambergist from whales. It was thought that these stones had special curative powers. To the native this was similar to shaman's small kit of feathers, rocks, and bones which were used to work special cures. In some ways the missionary and the hechicero appeared close indeed. For completely different reasons the priest and the shaman associated themselves with the sick and the dying. The priest focused on the salvation of souls; the shaman on the cure of the ill. The priest baptized the dying. If the person died, the Christian community rejoiced that a soul had gone to heaven. If the person lived, the community rejoiced in the curative powers of the grace of the sacrament. The shaman worked his magic. If the person died, the shaman's power was questioned. If the person lived, which was seldom, the shaman was vindicated. The difference in social effect was the ability of the Christian missionary to win in either case. Little did the infidel populace know that the missionary was laboring under stringent rules never to baptize anyone without proper and adequate instruction; the rules were relaxed only in the case of the sick and dying! This will help to explain, if you read through Kino's Memoirs, why he records the baptism of so many sick infants and adults.

In the matter of catechetics Kino did not differ much from his contemporaries. He held doctrinal classes morning and afternoon for the children whenever he stayed sufficiently long in a village. The sessions were the customary repetition of doctrine, prayers and songs; there was a strong emphasis on memory and recitation. Adults, on the other hand, were taught more frequently at night or on mission holidays when they were free from the ordinary labors of the day. Only after prolonged periods of indoctrination and observation were adults invited to baptism because the Church demanded a clear perception of the tenets of the Faith before admission would be granted. In this Kino was as careful as any other minister on the frontier; it was not a game of counting souls; it was the serious business of salvation and the change of life.

In perusing the *Favores Celestiales* in which Kino records the events of almost nineteen years on the frontier, a pattern emerges which is both fascinating and diagnostic. Almost without exception Kino recounts that on visiting a particular village, he immediately preached the Word of God and that the people responded with gifts of produce from their fields. In one case he mentions that after preaching he was given a small pony which had been lost on an expedition the year before. Kino is very clear; preaching brings response. He saw the material response from the Indians as a sign of their acceptance of his message of salvation. Throughout many years I have listened to non-believers who have studied the life of Padre Kino, and they admired this native reaction because it was clearly a sign of trust, generosity, and friendship. By contrast I have heard many Catholics who are inclined to criticize Kino as being «too materialistic» because he so quickly records their response in terms of food, cattle and clothing. Critics expect Indians to react in abstruse «spiritual» fashion whatever that may be. Elements of survival and the good life are contradictory to their criteria of Christian response. God forbid. But this does point up the difference of perspective in Kino's methodology; he saw the world as integrated in God's plan of creation and salvation, for all men. He was as deeply committed to Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady of Loreto as to the quantity and quality of watermelons on the Colorado. The Mother of God and the sweetness of melons were equally a part of God's plan for man in the mind of Eusebio. I don't know your personal preferences, but believe me, many who are created in the image of God want readily to deny associations with material prosperity. Not Kino. He was a Tyrolese who loved the beauties of God's creation; he loved the varieties of God's creature; he loved the message of salvation he learned in the Jesuit school here under the shadow of the great Council of Trent. Kino's method was clearly nothing unique, nor singular, nor magical; it was universal, variable, and deeply theological.

Let me add just a few comments about prosperity and poverty. In his famous little work on Saeta Kino pointed at three essentials for missionary success. In the first place he puts love – «in charity unfeigned» by which he meant a genuine respect for and acceptance of the Indian as person no matter how uneducated, different or destitute. In the second place he ranked gifts and generosity – clothing, food, and even trinkets. The cynical critic will point to this as evidence of buying the conversion of the native, but Kino equally saw the sharing of material wealth as a sign of Christian conversion. This is why he so closely records the fact of his preaching and the response of Indian generosity. In the third place he stresses the need for the missionary to go among the rejected,

the abandoned, the poor. This calls for consummate patience and forbearance. Kino's mandates for the missions were long since in advance of the contemporary «preferential option for the poor» we hear about in the modern Church. In this Kino was totally Ignatian - «To give and not to count the cost».

Lastly, let me mention one more aspect about Kino's work among the Piman peoples. From the viewpoint of modern churchmen, Kino went among these pagan tribes to convert them to Christianity. From the viewpoint of the Spanish crown he went *primarily* as a missionary to pacify a potentially hostile populace. Precisely at the moment Kino was assigned to the frontier of the Pimeria Alta, scores of Spaniards feared open rebellion by the Indians whom they have been enslaving for almost forty years. Military patrols had regularly penetrated into Piman country anticipating hostile encounters that would justify their taking prisoners - later to be sold to miners and ranchers in the interior. The coming of Kino, however, spelled an immediate end to these long-standing, lucrative endeavors. Conversion for the Indian meant safety, and Kino was bold enough to defy those who had grown accustomed to slaving. Without question one of the cornerstones of Kino's method was the firm protection of Indian rights against illegal and immoral servitude. Kino was known to ride through the night to save Indians from cruel and vindictive punishment.

One of the superb instances of Indian devotion and reliance on Kino's character came after the Pimas were the object of a campaign of Spanish vengeance for the murder of Padre Saeta. The military officers had declared a policy of fire and blood, like the Nazi policy of a scorched earth. When the combined Spanish presidial forces reached the point of frustration in apprehending the murderers of Saeta, they announced an awesome policy of destruction - of villages, fields, and people. The Pimans, for the most part innocent, made their way through a horribly hot desert in the midst of summer heat and torrential rains to reach Kino's mission of Dolores well behind Spanish lines. The journey was circuitous, over 250 miles! They appealed for peace and forgiveness. And Kino personally rode into the open desert to announce, not plead for, peace. The Spanish generals were confronted with a *fait accompli*. They were angry, yet relieved. They were frustrated, yet uplifted. And Kino came across as peacemaker perhaps the greatest role he ever played as missionary to the unbeliever. He knew how to bring men to compromise. He knew how to weave union among dissidents. He may have been a gruff German to some critics, but to most he was an accomplished diplomat from the high mountains of Europe. He was not a man of the Court, but he was a man of the campo.

I have tried to concern myself with the methods of Kino's evangelization. The more I have studied the evidence, the less I find anything special or spectacular. It was not the method that made the man, but it was the man that explains the method. Kino was the success, not his method. When the General of the Society Thirso Gonzalez compared Kino to St. Francis Xavier, it was not because he had discovered a new formula for conversion; it was because this man was an effective and spectacular Christian. In no way does he fit the mold of 18th century, Jansenist piety. He was a tough man of the mountains; he was a man of God to match the mountains of his birth. He was a man of the desert who found the presence of his Creator in the stillness of strange life forms, in the garble of languages, in the power of indescribable storms, in the awesome danger of unexperienced trails across unknown horizons. He was a dedicated Jesuit astride a horse, posed between God and creation. He moved with certitude in God's good graces; he reached out unselfishly for the abandoned peoples of the New World. History may have denied him the dream of the Orient, but history gave him the greatness of Mexico and the Californias. Without him, and Salvatierra from Milan, there would be no California of today. Their vision immeasurably shaped the New World; they carried the spirit of truly converted Christians into a world thirsting for new horizons and new hopes.

What were Kino's methods? Who can say? Perhaps only the Indian converts who recognized in him unsuppressible faith, courageous confidence, irrepressible hope, and an unfailing love for those of God's people who were born with less advantages than he had known from his youth in Trent.

Sometime this next year His Holiness Pope. John Paul II will journey to America to honor Fray Junipero Serra, a deserving servant of the missionary Church. The people of the United States will be thrilled to see him raised to the honors of the altar. Padre Eusebio Francisco Kino, a humble Son of Ignatius from Segno, may never receive such special honors reserved for the very few. But you, the people of Trent, should know that for over 275 years since Kino's death in Magdalena, Sonora, the Indian peoples and their Mexican descendents continue to make an annual pilgrimmage to his grave, ostensibly to honor St. Francis Xavier, Kino's special patron. He was their special friend. And although his Holiness may travel to Carmel, California, to visit the grave of Serra, the *cognoscenti* of California history will tell you that without Kino, without Salvatierra, and the behemoth Juan Ugarte of Honduras, there would have been no California to celebrate. Serra will deserve his honors, but like anyone who achieves anything in life, we know we stand on the shoulders of giants. And we who are here today at your

invitation acknowledge that we stand on the shoulders of the giants of northern Italy - from Columbus to Kino. Whether three hundred years or five hundred years, we of today thank you for your yesterdays!