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# Advocacy and Lobbying as Imperatives of Mission today: A Theological Reflection

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## Introduction

In February 2004, in a remote patch of the Australian rain forest, an ageing rock star, a model and a former Royal correspondent – among others – were playing survival games - one the most recent versions of what is called Reality T.V., “I’m a celebrity get me out of here”. 11 million people in Britain alone were tuning into this programme regularly for weeks on end. In fact, it has nothing got to do with reality, as Melanie McDonagh, pointed out in a recent issue of *The Tablet* (7 February) as it is based simple on “fake tribulations of fake celebrities” – and all for the amusement of the bored and overfed citizens of a consumerist society. The programme could have been more fittingly entitled: “I’m a has been celebrity who will do anything to revive my career”.

Meanwhile, a real struggle for existence is going on in many parts of the world and as, as John Morrish points out, also in *The Tablet* (7 February) no one is watching. The difference is that it is not fake celebrities but real people who are caught up in this daily struggle, billions of them all over the world and it is with them and for them that we must be agents of hope and integral Liberation.

Christianity is basically a religion of hope. It is grounded in, and lives for, the promise of God’s future for humanity, and indeed for the entire order of creation. Christian mission flows from and gives concrete expression to this hope. It is, in the words of David Bosch, “action in hope.”<sup>1</sup> It is the means by which the future for which we hope is brought into a transforming relationship with the present in which we live. It is “God’s bridge to a world which has not yet come home to the

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<sup>1</sup> Transforming Mission, Orbis, N.Y., 1991, 498

place prepared for it.”<sup>2</sup> My presentation will focus on the imperative of mission as action in hope in the context of the world today with its stark contrasts and glaring injustices and highlight some strategies for implementing this mission. First, some remarks about the context of our mission.

## I. CONTEXT: A GLOBALISED WORLD

Though everyone speaks of the ‘globalisation’ today, there is little agreement on what it means or on how we should react to it. The IMF defines it as “the growing interdependencies of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services, and of international flows, and also through the widespread diffusion of all kinds of technology” (*World Economic Outlook*, May 1997). Peter Henriot, SJ, defines it along the same lines as “the integration of the economies of the world through trade and financial flows, technology and information exchange.” These definitions, however, fail to give us a sense of the enormous transformations being wrought in every area and aspect of our lives by the rapid development of what are called the new information technologies. As Anthony Giddens puts it: “For better or worse, we are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us.”<sup>3</sup>

The problem with globalisation is not so much the process itself. Globalisation can be good or bad depending on what becomes globalised. For example, globalisation could have been used for extending the benefits of socially responsible capitalism and a humanized science and technology to all peoples. Such globalisation could be welcomed. What are becoming globalised, however, are irresponsible liberalism capitalism (or what our present Pope has called “savage capitalism”) which benefits the rich at the expense of the poor, and a materialistic technology, which exploits and destroys nature. This is what is problematic and deeply disquieting. The dominant actor on the world stage today in this stage is the free market. The globe is conceived as one market directed by profit motivations of private enterprises that know neither national boundaries nor local allegiances.

Michael Amaladoss, a well-known Indian theologian, paints a grim picture of the abuses being perpetrated by this form of globalisation.

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<sup>2</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *The Flaming Centre*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1977, 43.

<sup>3</sup> BBC Online Network, Reith Lecture Series 1999, No 1, “Globalisation”, p. 1.,

The rich capitalists have now a global market-field to play in. The facilities of mass and rapid communications are made use of for increasing profits by looking for cheap labour in poor countries. The international markets are weighed in favour of the richer nations who control them. The commercial and service sectors are favoured while primary goods attract increasingly lower prices. People who wax eloquent about intellectual property rights ignore natural and human rights. The multi-national companies are more powerful than many nations. Politicians everywhere are at the service of business interests. The richer nations use their political and military power, even across their borders, to favour and protect their own economic interests. ... What we have therefore is not the globalisation of well-being and abundance, but the globalisation of poverty and injustice ("Global Homogenisation: Can Local Cultures Survive," on website. [www.sedos.org](http://www.sedos.org))

The negative effects of globalisation can be seen especially in Africa. The statistics show quite clearly that *globalisation is not working for the benefit of the majority of Africans today*. While it has increased opportunities for economic growth and development in some areas of the world, there has been an increase in the disparities, and inequalities experienced especially in Africa. Africa has 33 of the 48 Least Developed Countries of the world, according to a recent U.N report. It also has the highest debt to exports ratio; over the past decade the GNP of most African countries has been in constant decline, with the prices for its primary products in a state of freefall..

Globalisation has meant that poorer African countries have been opened up to foreign imports and firms which have led to the destruction of local enterprises. A process of "deindustrialisation" has taken place in many countries such as Zambia. Our once-flourishing textile industry has been wiped out by imports from Asia; several small industries such as tyre manufacturers and medical supply companies have folded in the face of competition from large South African firms.

The promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI) is hailed as the new engine for development. But FDI flows to Africa are very small, largely advantageous to only a few countries (such as South Africa), and tends to benefit the already privileged elite.

Furthermore the process of globalisation in Africa is a driving force behind the imposition of severe economic reforms under the structural adjustment programme (SAP). The burden of the transition from state-centred economies to free market economies has been borne unequally by those who already are suffering, the poor majority. SAP has meant increased prices of basic necessities, service fees for health and education, retrenchment of the formal employment force, and dismantling of local economic structures in the face of liberalised trade patterns. While neo-liberal

economists argue that there may be "short-term pain but long-term gain" in the implementation of SAP, it is increasingly clear throughout Africa that the *short-term* pain, for example, of social service cuts, ecological damage and industrial base erosion will in the *long-term* have truly disastrous effects upon any hope for an integral and sustainable human development.

One of the starkest consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programme in Africa today is *the rendering redundant of the African people*. Formal employment of the labour force had dropped to as low as 14% in recent years in many countries with no explicit employment generation policy included in government programmes. The simple definition of economy that appeals to me is: *women and men working together with the earth to meet basic needs*. But there is neither cooperation nor progress when local people are ignored except as factors in profit maximisation by outside interests. Women especially feel the negative effects of economic reform. Globalisation views Africa and Africans as components of a global free market, independent of considerations of livelihoods and integral human development.

**To summarise:**

- ❑ 88% of African countries are considered "high risk" due to political instability, corrupt leadership, violence and anarchy, tribalism and racism, greed for economic profit, and the disregard for human rights.
- ❑ 40% African countries are at war, resulting displacement of peoples, massacres, loss of life, child soldiers, plus the destruction of infrastructures, Health/Education facilities, and production of food, and affecting the lives of over 100 million Africans, the majority of them women and children.
- ❑ More than one third of all children are malnourished
- ❑ 28 million Africans live with HIV/AIDS (70% of those infected throughout the world)
- ❑ Over 300 million Africans live on less than US \$1 a day.

## **II. MISSION**

Up to relatively recent times, mission in the Catholic Church at least, tended to be focused on the extension of the Church as it existed to the ends of the earth rather than the transformation of the Church and the world in the light of the Christian hope of a new earth and a new heaven. However this was not always the case. The early Christian mission, especially as understood by St Paul, was

inspired and directed by Christian hope of a new creation. In Paul's vision, mission and hope are intimately linked. Mission paves the way and prepares humanity for the final stage of God's reign, when not only humanity but all of creation will be liberated and transformed on the model of Christ's resurrection. For Paul, mission means announcing the Lordship of Christ over all reality and inviting people to respond to it. It means the proclamation of a new state of affairs that God has initiated in Christ, a state of affairs that concerns the nations and all of creation and that climaxes in the celebration of God's final glory. But proclamation by itself is not enough. God's final victorious reign offers no justification for passivity. Mission invites and sustains an active participation in God's plan for the liberation of humanity in the here and now. In Paul's theology of mission, we find the foundation for a courageous protest against the oppressive structures of Sin and Death and a wholehearted commitment to the promotion of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. In the light of God's coming victorious reign, Christians are called upon and empowered to challenge oppressive structures and establish signs of God's new world.<sup>4</sup>

There are many definitions of mission today. Among those, the ones which appeal to me and seem in line with the teaching of Paul are the following:

- The transformation of the World into God's Kingdom (Sean Healy).
- The universal and joyful proclamation of the Resurrection of Jesus.
- The Outpouring of the divine Spirit of life and Love from the Risen Jesus into all human beings and the entire cosmos.
- Unlimited cooperation between God and human beings in shaping a world continuously freed from all types of sin and slavery, and continually recreated until it arrives at that fullness of love and life intended by God.

#### **Attitudes appropriate for Mission today:**

- Witnessing by deeds more than preaching words ("A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon." Gandhi, The Gospel of the Rose)
- Listening before speaking
- Doing things *with rather and for* people
- Learning over teaching

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis, NY, 1991, 175-176.

- Not having all the answers
- Attending to the voice of the Spirit speaking to us in and through the other
- Finding Christ in the other and being converted to the other
- Realising that God's name is Yahweh, that is, "the One we come to know as we open our heart to others and to what will be." We don't possess God.
- Having the courage to be humble
- Being joyful in the midst of suffering
- Acting in hope in the midst of hopelessness

An obvious consequence of this understanding of mission is that commitment to justice is **not just one area or even one dimension** of the Church's mission to the world. It is, I would argue, **at the very heart of what all mission and ministry** in the name of Christ and his Gospel is all about. If concern for, and the active promotion of, a more just, peaceful and environmentally healthy world is not central to what we are doing in our varied apostolates, then we cannot in truth say we are witnesses and proclaimers of the integral Gospel of Christ. This means that commitment to the creation of a more just, peaceful and environmentally healthy world is an essential and integral dimension of the Church's witness to Christ and to God's reign in today's world. This is perhaps the major challenge for the leadership of Religious Congregations today. There are three fundamental and interrelated dimensions of this commitment which I wish to spell out: They are:

- a) Experiencing the world(s) of the excluded and marginalized
- b) Reflecting on, and understanding the world from the perspective of that experience
- c) Working in solidarity with the poor and marginalized in action programmes directed to the transformation of the world

While these three dimensions cannot be separated, they are distinct, each dimension having its own proper methods and goals. The first dimension (with the emphasis on experience) employs the method of **exposure** to the world(s) of the poor, the excluded, the marginalized, etc, and is directed to the goal of **empathy with the victims of injustice** and the ability **to see the world** from their perspective. The second dimension is more intellectual and analytical. It uses the methods of **intellectual enquiry, orderly research, and sustained reflection**. It aims at understanding the world from the perspective of the victims of injustice (and seeks out the root causes of injustice). The third dimension (solidarity) develops **appropriate action programmes** and is directed towards the transformation of the world or moving it in the direction in which God wants it to move.

## **A. Experience and Exposure**

Experiencing the world of the poor and the marginalized must be the starting point and constant point of reference for all JPIC commitment. This is very much in line with the “preferential option for the poor” adopted as the principal criterion of apostolic commitment by many religious and missionary Congregations more than thirty years ago. One does not hear much about this option today, but in my judgement it is just as relevant as ever. It is **an option that flows from, and gives expression to, God’s chosen path of loving involvement with his children.** It is a concrete living out of the beatitudes of Christ and an imitation of his missionary methods. It is from the standpoint of the poor and the excluded that we begin to perceive God’s ways and to align ourselves with God’s project for humanity. But there is no way we can experience the world(s) of the poor and excluded without being exposed to those worlds.

In the past most religious and missionary formation took place within secure, comfortable and tranquil centres of formation, far removed from the turmoil and scramble of most people’s lives, especially the lives of the poor. I am not sure that we have moved away from this kind of formation setting to any significant degree, and it is certainly not easy to do so. Even formation centres established in more recent times in Africa and Asia, have not chosen to break away from the traditional kind of formation setting. If anything today’s formation centres are more comfortable than they were in the past.

The principle of exposure to the world of the poor and marginalized entails **entering into the places they inhabit, identifying with their fears and hopes, their frustrations and struggles, their sorrows and joys** (just as Christ did). From such exposure we may learn to feel with (empathise with) those who live on the margins of society politically and economically, and to see the world from their perspective. In the early stages of formation, I believe the emphasis should be on this kind of exposure leading to empathy and solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

## **B. Reflecting and Understanding**

All experience requires interpretation. Experience of the world(s) of the poor and marginalized is no exception. While important, it is **not enough to feel empathy with the poor and marginalized**. It is vitally important **to learn how to read and understand the world from their perspective**. This reading is to be carried out, first of all, in the light of the Gospel and the Christian tradition and **also**, I submit, in the light of the specific charism and tradition of each particular Congregation or Institute. I emphasise **also**, because it is **the Gospel of Christ that is the primary hermeneutic key**, not the particular charism of the Institute.

Intellectual formation, especially in initial formation programmes, should aim at providing candidates not just with data nor with ready-made answers to the problems experienced, but with the tools, the methods that will enable them to interpret and understand the reality of the world they have experienced at first hand (i.e. the world, viewed from the perspective of the marginalized and excluded). At the same time, it is crucial that certain basic information is communicated, especially in regard to the critical imbalances that afflict our world in the areas of economics, politics, social relationships, gender relationships and our relationship with the natural environment. This is still not done in many centres of formation. Specific courses on these issues may be required to complement and concretise the usual programmes of theological, spiritual and pastoral studies. I would emphasise especially the need for a course in social analysis from the perspective of the Social Teaching of the Church. Furthermore candidates in initial formation must be encouraged and facilitated to carry their own research on specific issues (e.g. evaluation of a particular aid programme, treatment of refugees in a particular area, examples of conflict resolution, etc).

A merely intellectual understanding of the world, however, is insufficient. As Christians, we ought to have an understanding that unites heart and head, spirit and intellect. Hence, personal, spiritual and pastoral formation of candidates must accompany their intellectual formation and be integrated with it.

## **C. Action for Change in Solidarity with the Poor**

As servants of the Gospel of Christ, our mission is not just to understand the world but also to change it, to transform it in the light of, and in line with, the demands of God's advancing reign. Our faith in the Resurrected one leads us to **a prophetic discontent with the *status quo* for the**



