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VERBUM SVD

Missio Dei in Context

- Healing Wounds
- Challenged by Postmodernity
- Learning from Cultures
- Inspired by Religions

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The participants of the International Conference on Mission (Rome, March 27-29, 2025) receive this issue of Verbum SVD with compliments from the Europe Central Province (ECP) of the Divine Word Missionaries.

EDITORIAL / VORWORT

The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) are preparing the commemoration of the 150 years since their foundation in September 1875. Such a commemoration invites to a wide variety of celebrations and reflections on the history but also demands a cautious view of future perspectives. All over the SVD communities worldwide, the 150 years have become an important reason for memory and vision.

The SVD Generalate suggested among many other activities the organisation of a mission-oriented conference. It was supposed to be an international conference in Rome, in a missiological and academic approach. This means that many different contexts are to be taken into account, and it certainly should be a moment for reflection on the practices "in the field," as it used to be called. The SVD Generalate commissioned the Mission Secretary Lazar Stanislaus SVD to set up a team for the preparation of such a conference. It is composed of Sam Agcaracar SVD (Philippines), Stephen B. Bevans SVD (USA), Ferdinandus Beki Doren SVD (Brazil), Andrews Obeng SVD (Ghana) and Christian Tauchner SVD (Germany) and started their consultations and meetings in May 2023.

The team worked on proposals to look at what the SVD may have contributed in the course of its history to the church and the world. The Society's scientific commitment to anthropology and missiology as well as the dedicated work of missionaries constitute an important legacy. So the conference is going to reflect on the more recent central insight that mission originates from God and refers to our present-day world with all its joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties. In missiological terms, the perspective of *God's mission* provides the central focus, as the SVD has taken this insight as its outline since the General Chapter 2000.

As a result, an "International Conference on Mission" is going to take place in Rome on 27, 28 and 29 of March 2025 (for further information, see the Generalate's website https://svdcuria.org). The conference theme is "Missio Dei in Today's World. Healing Wounds, Challenged by Postmodernity, Learning from Cultures, Inspired by Religions."

The Conference in Rome is going to be slightly different from many academic conferences. There are certainly going to be keynote conferences on the central topics of God's mission, postmodernity, cultures and religions. But there should also be reports on global experiences

and contexts relating to the wounded world requiring healing, on migrations and ecology, on hope and synodality, on ethics and the other, on interculturality and on religions and cultural developments. These reports should be the matter of exchange among the participants in the conference, and all of these reflections are going to be discussed further in different groups composed of SVD and SSpS (Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit) missionaries.

In preparation for the March Conference, the wider group of SVD and SSpS participants started their reflections and exchange on the conference topics in three virtual meetings in October 2024, January and February 2025. Each of the virtual meetings dealt with one of the main aspects relating to God's mission and setting the contexts. The papers of these conferences are published as the central section of this issue of *Verbum SVD*. They have served the participants already, but they are made available also to the participants at the Conference in Rome and obviously to the readers of *Verbum SVD*.

Die Gesellschaft des Göttlichen Wortes (SVD) bereitet Feierlichkeiten zu ihrem 150-jährigen Jahrestag der Gründung im September 1875 vor. Ein solches Gedenken lädt zu einer Vielzahl von Feiern und Reflexionen über die Geschichte ein, verlangt aber auch einen vorsichtigen Blick auf Zukunftsperspektiven. Überall in den Gemeinschaften der Steyler weltweit sind die 150 Jahre zu einem wichtigen Anlass für Erinnerung und Vision geworden.

Das SVD-Generalat schlug neben vielen anderen Aktivitäten die Organisation einer missionsorientierten Konferenz vor. Es sollte eine internationale Konferenz in Rom sein, in einer missiologischen und akademischen Ausrichtung. Das bedeutet, dass viele verschiedene Kontexte berücksichtigt werden sollen, und es sollte sicherlich ein Moment der Reflexion über die Praktiken „im Feld" sein, wie es früher hieß. Das Generalat der SVD beauftragte den Missionssekretär Lazar Stanislaus SVD, ein Team für die Vorbereitung einer solchen Konferenz zusammenzustellen. Es besteht aus Sam Agcaracar SVD (Philippinen), Stephen B. Bevans SVD (USA), Ferdinandus Beki Doren SVD (Brasilien), Andrews Obeng SVD (Ghana) und Christian Tauchner SVD (Deutschland) und hat im Mai 2023 mit seinen Beratungen und Treffen begonnen.

Das Team erarbeitete Vorschläge, um zu untersuchen, was die SVD im Laufe ihrer Geschichte zur Kirche und zur Welt beigetragen haben könnte. Das wissenschaftliche Engagement der Gesellschaft für Ethnologie und Missionswissenschaft sowie die engagierte Arbeit der Missionare sind ein beachtliches Vermächtnis. Die Konferenz wird daher

über die neuere zentrale Erkenntnis nachdenken, dass Mission von Gott ausgeht und sich auf unsere heutige Welt mit all ihren Freuden und Hoffnungen, Sorgen und Ängsten bezieht. In missiologischer Hinsicht steht die Perspektive der *Mission Gottes* im Mittelpunkt, denn die Gesellschaft des Göttlichen Wortes hat seit dem Generalkapitel 2000 diese Sichtweise von Mission in den Vordergrund gestellt.

So wird am 27., 28. und 29. März 2025 in Rom eine „Internationale Missionskonferenz" stattfinden (weitere Informationen dazu finden sich auf der Website des Generalats https://svdcuria.org). Das Thema der Konferenz lautet „Missio Dei in der Welt von heute. Wunden heilen, von der Postmoderne herausgefordert, von Kulturen lernen, von Religionen inspiriert".

Die Konferenz in Rom wird sich teilweise von vielen anderen akademischen Konferenzen unterscheiden. Sicherlich wird es Grundsatzreferate zu den zentralen Themen wie Mission Gottes, Postmoderne, Kulturen und Religionen geben. Aber es soll auch Berichte geben über globale Erfahrungen und Kontexte in Bezug auf die verwundete Welt, die der Heilung bedarf, über Migration und Umweltschutz, über Hoffnung und Synodalität, über Ethik und die Anderen, über Interkulturalität und über Religionen und kulturelle Entwicklungen. Diese Berichte sollen Gegenstand des Austauschs unter den Konferenzteilnehmern sein, und alle diese Überlegungen werden in verschiedenen Gruppen weiter diskutiert werden, die sich aus Steyler Missionaren und Missionsschwestern (Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes, SSpS) zusammensetzen.

In Vorbereitung auf die Konferenz im März begann die größere Teilnehmergruppe der Steyler Missionare und Missionsschwestern ihre Überlegungen und den Austausch über die Konferenzthemen in drei virtuellen Treffen im Oktober 2024, Januar und Februar 2025. Jedes dieser virtuellen Treffen befasste sich mit einem der Hauptaspekte im Zusammenhang mit der Mission Gottes und der Gestaltung der Kontexte. Diese Konferenzen werden als Hauptteil dieser Ausgabe von *Verbum SVD* veröffentlicht. Sie haben den Teilnehmern bereits gedient, aber sie werden auch den TeilnehmerInnen der Konferenz in Rom und natürlich den Lesern von *Verbum SVD* zur Verfügung gestellt.

Christian Tauchner SVD

*William Odeke Owire, SVD**

MISSIO DEI: HEALING WOUNDS

The article deals with a reflection on the implications of a mission perspective of God's mission for the treatment of wounds in our societies. Therefore, the author spells out some of the basic assumptions of the theological view of God's mission. The Bible grounds this perspective particularly with reference to a healing God, prominently visible in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The article indicates several aspects particularly in the African context which show the woundedness of contemporary society and world and points to indications from the church teaching and the African synods which are seen as helpful for the healing of the wounds, particularly through the inculturation of Gospel values in African contexts.

Introduction

This paper attends to the theological question of *Missio Dei: Healing Wounds*. The main thesis that I am advancing is that essentially mission is God's mission, God who is a healer and the church is called to participate in this mission of healing the wounded world in the various contexts in which we find ourselves. To unpack this central thesis,

* William Odeke Owire, SVD, is from Kenya. He joined the SVD in 1997. He holds a Master of Arts in Philosophy from Mysore University, India. He later proceeded to the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) for his Initial Masters, Advanced Masters and Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL) where he majored his research on Christology in the works of Gerald O'Collins. He later obtained a Doctorate in Sacred Theology (STD) from the same University. He taught Systematic Theology at Tangaza University, Nairobi. He has served as the rector for both Philosophy and Theology formation Houses in Kenya. He is currently the Provincial Superior of KEN Province. Some of his peer-reviewed publications include "The Ontological Grounding of Jesus Christ in God the Father as a Condition of Possibility for the Soteriological claim in the Christology of Gerald O'Collins" (*African Christian Studies* 32.3 [2016] 35-60); "'Called to Act Out What We Receive': The Interplay Between Scholarship and Discipleship in the Thought of Gerald O'Collins" (*Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 80, no. 6 [2016] 60-77) and "A Prophetic Encounter with the Youth and Family in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic" *(Ishvani International Journal of Mission Studies* [2021]: 70-80).

I shall proceed in four steps. First, I will briefly highlight the emergence and the meaning of the theological category of *Missio Dei*. Second, I attend to the Scriptural grounds of God as a healer. Third, I delve into the place of the church in making the Kingdom of God a present reality on earth in which I underline the role of the church in general and religious in particular in being the salt of the earth, the light of the world and a healer of a wounded world. Fourth, and more importantly, I identity the major wounds from within the African milieu, wounds which are not without universal significance since these wounds afflict many other masses in different continents. After which, I shall proffer some notable attempts, best practices and efforts currently being done in order to respond to those wounds.

1. The Emergence and Theological Significance of the Category of Missio Dei

The concept of *Missio Dei* can be traced back to a missionary Conference that was convened at Berlin in Germany in 1932. This found impetus and concretization at the Willingen Conference convened again in Germany in 1952. In the theological circles, the Protestant theologian Karl Barth is often referred to as among the pioneers to reflect on the theme of mission as essentially an activity of God himself. The category of *Missio Dei* emanates from the very nature of the Triune God who is understood as a personal, relational and a "sending" God, as it were. As a matter of fact, God sends the Son, and the Holy Spirit is sent or proceeds from the Father and Son. In like manner, each member of the church is sent by the Triune God to participate in this historic mission of spreading the good news, transforming the world, healing wounds and ultimately bring about the salvation of the world.[1] Stated otherwise, God is the very reason for the existence of mission.

The theological category of *Missio Dei* is better encapsulated by Christian Tauchner in the editorial to the *Verbum SVD* issue dedicated to the theme of *Missio Dei*. In it, he affirms that *Missio Dei* is "getting drawn into God's dynamics" which has to do with among other things, getting interested, participation, getting involved, in the action of God in the world that is wounded in many ways, in the society and entire creation.[2] According to the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity,

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1 José Boeing, "Missio Dei in Amazon," in *Verbum SVD* (Missio Dei: Remembering Willingen and Beyond), 63:2-3 (2022) 288-312, 288-289.

2 Christian Tauchner, "*Missio Dei* – Getting Drawn into God's Dynamics," in *Verbum SVD* 63:2-3 (2022) 141-145, 141.

Ad Gentes, the church is by its very nature missionary. As earlier noted, it is sent by the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.[3] Seen in this light, *Missio Dei* touches on the question of the processions of the Triune God. Accordingly, mission belongs to God and we are called to be active participants in it. This understanding brings about the decentring of the human being and the centring of God, a fact which according to vanThanh Nguyen, ushers in a missional approach that brings about a Copernican revolution. It relegates the traditional anthropocentric and ecclesiocentric perspective in favour of a theocentric and missional theological approach. In this paradigm shift, God plays the central role.[4] While citing David Bosch, José Boeing affirms that mission is God's initiative, and it touches more on the attribute of God and only secondarily does it become the activity of the church. Furthermore, he argues that our God is a missionary God and our participation in mission "is to participate in the movement of God's love towards people, since God is a fountain of sending love."[5] The upshot of the foregoing exposition is that mission has its origin and permanent ground in God, and the church participates in it so as to bring about the concrete realization of that mission in the world.

2. The Scriptural Grounds of God Who Ws a Healer

The Scripture is replete with episodes without number of people who went through the experience of woundedness but experienced the Triune God's gift of healing, wholeness, wellbeing and salvation.

2.1 Healing in the Old Testament

God is presented in the Hebrew Scriptures as God who is compassionate and just towards his people. The moments of this love are evidenced when He made a covenant with the chosen people, blesses them unfailingly and shows them unconditional love. God has his people close to His heart—so much so that when they were afflicted with infirmities, suffering and death in their life, they invariably looked up to God for assistance and ultimately healing. In his steadfast love, God would reach out to the afflicted people and heal them—healing that

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3 Vatican Council II, "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 7 December 1965," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press 1990, no. 1.

4 vanThanh Nguyen, "The *Missio Dei* as the Hermeneutical Lens for Reading the Bible," in *Verbum SVD* 63:2-3 (2022) 266-275, 267.

5 Boeing, "*Missio Dei* in Amazon," 289.

brought integration and communion with the self, others and with God.[6] God never forsook his people their woundedness. In the book of Genesis, woundedness, sickness and death are categorized as alien forces intruding into people's lives. They disrupt God's original design of harmony and communion. These intruding forces cause a threefold alienation from self, from others and from God. God did not abandon his people but continued to care for them. God prevails over those forces since he is the healer (Exod 15:26) who is concerned with the happiness of his creatures. Therefore, he comes to their aid when they call upon his name or seek healing.[7] In Deuteronomy, God is presented as one whom people run to with all their woundedness in order to experience the gift of healing. God's "dual" role is presented in the Old Testament as one who can *smite* and *heal* (Deut 32:39).

God, who is a healer, is not a solitary God. Rather, he reaches out to his people in need of healing by means of his emissaries or prophets. One revealing example is the healing of Moses' sister Miriam from leprosy (Num 12:13-15). She received healing through the instrumentality and intercessory role of her brother Moses. A couple of other telling instances of God the healer through his agents are: first, the healing of the son of the widow at Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:8-16), and second, the healing of Naaman the leper (2 Kgs 5:1-14) through the instrumentality of the prophets Elijah and Elisha respectively. When we turn to the book of Tobit, God's name is revealed as a healer. This comes out explicitly through the angel Raphael, a name which means *God heals*. As God's instrument of healing, he walks with Tobiah on his journey to Ecbatana.[8] The name Raphael signifies and carries the mission, which is to be carried out by the angel, namely, to be an agent of bringing healing to Tobith and Sarah. In a nutshell, God is presented as a powerful God who reaches out to his people in times of need and brings the gift of healing and wholeness. Another occasion that presents God as a healer that is worth mentioning here is when the Israelites were bitten by serpents, Moses was instructed by God to fashion a bronze serpent and place it on a pole so that whoever was bitten by a serpent, experienced healing upon looking at the bronze serpent (Num 21:6-9). This is a pointer to Jesus in the New dispensation who will be lifted on the cross for the salvation of humanity.

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6 Rinaldo Ronzani, *Christian Healing: The Anointing of the Sick,* Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2007, 30.

7 Antonio Magnante, *Why Suffering: The Mystery of Suffering in the Bible,* Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 1997, 10.

8 Ronzani, *Christian Healing*, 33-34.

2.2 Healing in the New Testament

Jesus' fame spread first in Judea, Galilee and the surrounding villages. This was because he healed all sorts of incurable illnesses, exorcised and hung around with the outcasts, tax collectors, sinners and the less fortunate. During Jesus' time, sickness was associated with demonic power (Luke 13:10-16) and sin (John 9:1-3). The exorcisms carried out by Jesus (Mark 1:23-28; 3:23-27) and his healings demonstrate the arrival of the reign of God which dispels the power of evil over human beings. The forces of darkness were being broken and God's salvific power was being experienced in the bodies and spirits of the people whom he healed. This theme is made manifest in passages such as Beelzebul and the advent of the reign of God (Matt 12:27), binding the strong man (Mark 3:27), and Jesus sending his disciples out with power over the demons (Mark 3:14; 6:7; Matt 10:7; Luke 9:1). It is through the finger of God that demons are being driven out and the Kingdom of God has come upon those who hear and are touched by Jesus' healing ministry.[9] Aligning the healing ministry of Jesus with the Kingdom of God, the evangelist Matthew records: "Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness" (Matt 9:35).

Perhaps one of the best summaries of the healing ministry of Jesus is presented in John Paul II's Apostolic Letter on *The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*. He writes:

> In his messianic activity in the midst of Israel, Christ drew increasingly close to the world of human suffering. "He went about doing good" and his actions concerned primarily those who were suffering and seeking help. He healed the sick, consoled the afflicted, fed the hungry, freed people from deafness, from blindness, from leprosy, from the devil and from various physical disabilities, three times he restored the dead to life. He was sensitive to every human suffering, whether of the body or of the soul.[10]

Something which is clear in the accounts presented in the Gospels is that Jesus had a predilection towards those pushed to the fringes of society, the poor, those who are isolated, marginalized and discrimi-

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[9] Thomas P. Rausch, *Who Is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology,* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2003, 86.

[10] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter on "The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering," *Salvifici Doloris,* Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 1984, no. 16.

nated against. Jesus challenged the traditional view that associated sickness and suffering with sin.[11] On the contrary, he interacted with them, touched them, ate with them—aspects that brought healing into the lives of those affected and afflicted. Fernando Domingues links the healing ministry of Jesus with his death and resurrection in these words: "The healing ministry of Jesus can be seen as a proclamation and a partial anticipation of the mystery of divine healing which he would accomplish in his death and resurrection."[12] Notably, Jesus carried out the ministry of healing not in solitary isolation, but he entrusted it to the Twelve as well as participants in the mission of healing. He had chosen them to be his close associates (Matt 10:1). They were tasked to make the light of healing shine from everywhere to everyone including "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:6-7). This is a task that the Church likewise is entrusted to do.

3. The Church at the Service of the Kingdom of God

Yves Congar, one of the greatest ecclesiologists of the twentieth century, in Richard McBrien's view, provides a profound definition of the church as "the whole body, of congregation, of persons who are called by God the Father to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, the Son, in word, in sacrament, in witness, and in service, and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to collaborate with Jesus' historic mission for the sake of the Kingdom of God."[13] As far as this definition is concerned, the most important thing is that for all intents and purposes, the church is an assembly called forth by God. It does not summon itself. Rather, it is an assembly brought together by God through the work of the Holy Spirit to participate and continue the mission that was ushered in by Jesus. Moreover, Congar captures succinctly what the mission of the church is. The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church (*Gaudium et Spes*) clearly maintains that "… the Church has only one goal, namely the coming of God's kingdom and the accomplishment of salvation for the whole human race."[14] For this reason, the church is not to be caught up in self-adoration but in the service of the Kingdom of God which is the very reason for its existence.

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[11] Ronzani*, Christian Healing*, 36.

[12] Fernando Domingues, *Christ Our Healer: A Theological Reflection with Reference to Aylward Shorter*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications 2000, 84.

[13] Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, rev. ed., San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco 1994, 723; Yves Congar, in "Church: Ecclesiology," cited in the original edition of *Catholicism,* published in 1980, 726.

[14] Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 45.

The Kingdom of God occupied the central place in the preaching of Jesus. The Kingdom of God has to do with values. The values of the Kingdom of God are but are not limited to truth, life, justice, love, peace, holiness and grace that guide us in our daily life. The values of the kingdom are like stars that illumine our lives and guide us concretely. More importantly, they are transformative. The church is called to participate in, continue God's mission and to be a custodian of the values of the Kingdom of God. As such everyone is called to be salt, light and leaven in a wounded world. The church and the religious are the salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt 5:13-14). Essentially, salt has healing properties, it adds taste to the food, it is white in color which is a sign of purity and holiness, and it is used as a preservative for food. These are the properties that a religious or at least each member of the church ought to bring along into mission. As far as light is concerned, from the Scriptural vantage point, light is related with revelation and faith. Light cannot be kept under the bushel. It must be seen, and it must influence people's lives and show them the way.

In his article *SVD and Missio Dei: Prospects and Perspectives*, Lazar Stanislaus combs through the Society's Chapter documents in order to demonstrate the centrality of mission in them. Particularly, the General Chapter of 2000 invited SVDs, members of the Arnoldus family, other faith communities and people of good will to actively participate in this mission, witnessing to the Reign of God through prophetic dialogue and the SVD characteristic dimensions.[15] The Prologue to the *SVD Constitutions* clearly affirms this invitation by its motto: "His life is our life, his mission our mission". This emphasizes that we share in God's mission with others and being faithful and committed missionary disciples is needed in the current wounded world.[16]

4. Wounds within the African Context and Attempts Made at Healing Them

In the estimation of José Boeing, the concept of *Missio Dei* emerges in a time of crisis, as it were, in the wake of a certain call for the abandonment of modernity and a drifting into a post-modern scenario with the share of wounds it brings.[17] This crisis and woundedness in its

[15] Lazar Stanislaus, "SVD and *Missio Dei*: Prospects and Perspectives," in *Verbum SVD* 63:2-3 (2022): 331-355, 333, referring to the General Chapter 2000, no. 44.

[16] Stanislaus, "SVD and *Missio Dei*: Prospects and Perspectives," 333.

[17] Boeing, "*Missio Dei* in the Amazon," 289.

various forms is felt in all contexts we find ourselves in. The Statement of the 19th General Chapter (2024) calls our attention to the wounds around us, our own woundedness and as faithful and creative disciples respond to them by bringing light.[18] What follows, is an attempt to identify some wounds from the African milieu but not without universal appeal since other contexts may experience the same.

4.1 The Dragon of Corruption and Poverty

Corruption is one of the major problems that affects most countries in the African context which leaves a huge gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and have-nots. Speaking about the rampant corruption in Kenya, for instance, in the years immediately after independence Mwalimu Julius Nyerere used to refer to Kenya as "a man eat man society" where the systems seem to perpetuate the unending gap between the rich and the poor. This situation leaves masses living in abject poverty. Many people cannot afford quality healthcare, a situation which is partly caused by historical injustices that make the rich grow richer by the day and the poor become poorer. The unbridgeable gap between the rich and the poor led J. M. Kariuki, a one-time politician and critic of the government in Kenya decry what he termed "a country of 10 millionaires and 10 million beggars." The situation is further aggravated by the high cost of living, unemployment, and heavy taxation which is a big burden to the people, and it breeds anger and wounds especially among the young people.

In such a scenario, the church has been a locus of solace, encouragement and comfort for those feeling hopeless with an assurance that they are not left alone. In their press release entitled "Let Us Restore Hope," the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops addressed among other things the rampant corruption and greed by the political class and over-taxation of the citizens.[19] Another recommendation I would propose in order to address this problem is an appeal to the contribution by the two African Synods in putting forward a model of the church as family of God. If this image of the church is to become a reality in Africa, it may be of help in addressing the cases of greed, poverty and corruption. Essentially, the image of the family encourages "care for others, solidarity, warmth in relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust" to mention but a few. The concept of family must

[18] XIX General Chapter, *The Documents of the 19th General Chapter*, in Faithful to the Word no. 6, September 2024, Rome: Generalate 2024, 15-43.

[19] The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, Press Statement "Let Us Restore Hope" (14th November 2024), 1-5.

inspire collaboration and not ethnocentrism.[20] This category can also encourage reconciliation and sharing of resources for the flourishing of all. In this way the wide gap between the rich and the poor could be reduced.

4.2 Divisions and Ethnic-Based Violence

Elections have been and continue to be a sensitive and highly emotive topic in most African countries that raises political temperatures. At times it leads to violence based on the tribal card and negative ethnicity leaving dark memories and lasting wounds among those involved. Such divisions are aligned on and lead to the "us" and "them" syndrome which breeds hostility. Kenya, for instance, faced post-election violence in 2007 which led to loss of lives, property and left deeply engrained wounds that still need healing. Rwanda came face to face with evil with the events surrounding the 1994 genocide, and there are many such cases in Africa and elsewhere in the world. As the late Congolese Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo put it, such evil perpetrated by human beings has an international passport. It happens in Africa and elsewhere—think of the wars past and present. According to Pope Paul VI, to ignore the existence of evil and wounds caused to our brothers and sisters would be to make evangelization incomplete.

Taking the above into consideration, doing *Missio Dei* in the African context must not be oblivious of the dehumanizing human conditions of suffering and woundedness. These situation cuts across the religious, social, political and economic spheres. According to Charles Nyamiti, the church has to get involved and concern itself with liberating and emancipating people from such demeaning conditions in view of a quest for a full humanity for all.[21] Similarly, the church needs to be involved in matters of justice and peace, poverty alleviation, provision of medical care, advocating democratic governments, heeding the cry of the refugees, and upholding the dignity of women.[22] In many of these cases, people are wounded and they need healing. The church continues to carry out its mission through constant support, advocacy, counselling, encouragement and education.

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[20] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa,* Nairobi: Paulines Publications 1995, no. 63.

[21] Charles Nyamiti, "Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions," in *Paths of African Liberation*, ed. Rosino Gibellini, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1994, 66.

[22] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 105-107; 115-121.

4.3 Cultural Wounds

Under the umbrella of cultural wounds comes a host of wounds but I will just single out a few. First and foremost is the phenomenon of male chauvinism. Most African communities are patriarchal, something which is sometimes overrated and pushed to lethal proportions. It breeds a certain form of preferential treatment for men in various fields of endeavour whereby men are considered capable of doing greater and challenging things than women. In some cases, women are relegated to doing menial and domestic chores and are not part to major decisions. Even more sadly is in some cases men own all resources and property and unilaterally decide how it is utilized when in fact in many cases it is women and children who help generate those resources. This becomes a form of discrimination against women, and it generates low self-esteem and a feeling of being helplessly trapped in this situation.

Second is the practice of polygamy. In a polygamous scenario, men marry many women, get more children so as to do more work, make work easier and grow more wealth. When girls are married off, the parents get dowry. In such a marriage, there mostly arise social disputes and it perpetuates unhealthy competition and harbouring ill feelings among the co-wives. It is characterized by a feeling of insecurity and being helplessly trapped on the part of women.[23] This practice is largely based on discrimination of women where women are seen as a source of labour and prestige.

Third, there is the cultural practice of arranged or forced marriages. In some cases, young men are forced to marry a woman of their parents' choice. Stated otherwise, people are forced to marry before they try to fall in love. This also includes early marriages which lead to high numbers of teenage pregnancies. Sadly, girls are married off to men whom their fathers have taken dowry from. As a result, men tend to marry a second wife of their choice perpetuating the practice of polygamy. Children born out of these forced marriages are at times not welcome as their birth and such unions are often characterized by bitterness, hatred and woundedness.[24] Teenage pregnancies bring untold problems and complications to young girls, problems and wounds they have to carry for many years.

Lastly, another practice which leaves behind wounds on those affected is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This is based on female

[23] Anthony Parankinmalil, *You Are Not Rejected,* Nairobi: Vincentian Retreat Centre 2010, 93.

[24] Ibid., 94.

discrimination because traditionally the aim is to tamper with women's feelings so that they could be faithful to their husbands. This is a serious offense perpetuated against women since it runs contrary to God's original design who created the human body as beautiful and hence it is to be respected. Sadly, more often it also causes "chronic pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility"[25] in women.

In an attempt at responding to some of these practices of woundedness, Lawrence Muthee, a Divine Word Missionary working in Tanzania, organized a children's choir festival in which 21 choirs participated. The theme of the musical concert touched on the cry of the children to their parents to let them study and not be dragged into cultural practices that demean their human dignity and jeopardize their future dreams. It is reported that many adults shed tears, and one man sharing his experience agreed that he had been challenged by the message of the children and he would heed their plea and cry.[26] Among other initiatives towards ending these life-threatening practices he proposes are: empowering women economically, educating the young generation about the dignity of women and the disadvantages of polygamy, promoting the dignity of women through social interventions, diversifying economic activities to find alternative sources of income, sensitizing the community regarding psychological, emotional, and mental hazards connected with early marriages, pregnancies and Female Genital Mutilation.[27]

On the theological level, a robust inculturation process is needed which would guarantee that cultural values are in consonance with the original design of God and with the discipline of the church. The challenge of inculturation is how to maintain the dialectic tension between culture and faith in which people are able to "more fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values."[28] Benedict XVI's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* (2009) reiterated that the task of inculturation requires a robust discernment because of the dichotomy which can exist between certain traditional practices within African cultures and the Gospel message. In this process, identification should be made of those aspects that constitute a hindrance to the rooting of the Gospel message and those that

[25] Ibid., 91.

[26] Lawrence Muthee, "Christmas for Children," in *Jambo Ken-Tan Bulletin* no. 12/24 (December 2024) 1.

[27] Ibid.

[28] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 78.

promote it.[29] Stated differently, the Gospel of Christ needs to penetrate culture and ultimately transform it.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to discuss and evaluate the theological category of *Missio Dei* in light of the invitation and participation in healing wounds especially in the African context. The study has demonstrated that mission essentially belongs to God who is a healer, and the church is invited to participate in this mission of healing the wounded world. The concept of *Missio Dei* is grounded in the very nature of the Triune God who is a relational and a missionary God. For all intents and purposes, *Missio Dei* is "getting drawn into God's dynamics," getting interested and getting involved in what God does in creation. The exposition then proceeded to comb through the Sacred Scripture in order to support the view that God is a healer God. It confirmed that both the Old and the New Testaments present a God who prevails over evil forces since he is the healer (Exod 15:26). The healer God comes out more powerfully in the public ministry of Jesus who healed many people's illnesses and wounds of different kinds. I then inferred that Jesus' ministry of healing was not carried out in solitary isolation, but he appointed emissaries and close associates to help him.

The church is part of this mission and therefore it should not be caught up in self-adoration. Instead, it must continue this mission and be constantly at the service of the Kingdom of God which is the very reason for its existence. Finally, the paper recognized that the concept of *Missio Dei* emerges in a time of crisis in a world which is characterized by woundedness in many different forms. Particularly, it singled out four main wounds that afflict people in the African context and concerted attempts being made at addressing them. These wounds are corruption and poverty, polygamous marriages, arranged and forced marriages and female genital mutilation. These wounds require an ever urgent response and, from a theological level, a robust inculturation which integrates authentic African values with the Gospel values and challenge those cultural practices that impede the rooting of the gospel message in Africa.

[29] Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus,* Nairobi: Paulines Publications 2011, no. 36-37.

ABSTRACTS

Der Artikel befasst sich mit einer Reflexion über die Auswirkungen einer Missionsperspektive der Mission Gottes auf die Behandlung von Wunden in unseren Gesellschaften. Daher legt der Autor einige der Grundannahmen der theologischen Sicht der Mission Gottes dar. Die Bibel begründet diese Perspektive insbesondere mit dem Hinweis auf einen heilenden Gott, der im Wirken Jesu Christi deutlich sichtbar wird. Der Artikel weist auf mehrere Aspekte hin, die insbesondere im afrikanischen Kontext die Wunden der heutigen Gesellschaft und Welt zeigen, und verweist auf Hinweise aus der kirchlichen Lehre und den afrikanischen Synoden, die als hilfreich für die Heilung der Wunden angesehen werden, insbesondere durch die Inkulturation der Werte des Evangeliums in afrikanischen Kontexten.

El artículo aborda una reflexión sobre las implicaciones de una perspectiva misionológica de la misión de Dios para el tratamiento de las heridas en nuestras sociedades. Para ello, el autor expone algunos de los supuestos básicos de la visión teológica de la misión de Dios. La Biblia fundamenta esta perspectiva especialmente con referencia a un Dios sanador, prominentemente visible en el ministerio de Jesucristo. El artículo indica varios aspectos, en particular en el contexto africano, que muestran las heridas de la sociedad y de mundo contemporáneos, y señala indicaciones de la enseñanza de la iglesia y de los sínodos africanos que se consideran útiles para la curación de las heridas, en particular mediante la inculturación de los valores evangélicos en los contextos africanos.

L'article est une réflexion sur les implications de la *Missio Dei* pour panser les blessures de nos sociétés. L'auteur recense quelques fondamentaux de cette conception théologique. La Bible fonde cette perspective en référence particulière au Dieu qui guérit, rendu éminemment visible dans le ministère du Christ. L'article montre plusieurs aspects - principalement en contexte africain - qui soulignent combien la société et le monde contemporain sont blessés, et il relève des indications dans l'enseignement de l'Église et le synode africain présentées comme bénéfiques pour la guérison des blessures, spécialement par l'inculturation des valeurs évangéliques dans les contextes africains.

*Christian Tauchner, SVD**

MISSIO DEI — CHALLENGED BY POSTMODERNITY

The article deals with the meaning of both terms, the Missio Dei and postmodernity. Drawing on Lyotard's reflections about the possibilities of knowing on the basis of "grand narratives," faith, church and the missionary engagement are shown in their "modern" outline within such grand narratives. Missio Dei becomes visible as a major "grand narrative." However, the present social and cultural setting of post-modern societies poses major difficulties for a missionary and evangelising commitment. For the SVD, there are options to work within post modern frameworks of individual projects, even within the ever more fragile frameworks of the church institution, or to take on the risk of freedom in the missionary commitment within God's mission.

A reflection on *missio Dei* and postmodernity has to deal the difficulty of blurred concepts from the outset. Both *missio Dei* and postmodernity are not at all clear notions.

As far as I am concerned, the missionary perspective of *missio Dei* has become quite fundamental for the SVD but it is not very well articulated or well received. I observe that in the last 25 years, missiology has taken on this view of a *missio Dei* quite extensively and I read time and again that certainly, mission is God's mission from the outset, etc. A fine example of it is the recent SEDOS book on the new trends in mission.[1] But when I analyse the verbs related to this concept of God's mission, the perspective is not that clear any more. Verbs indicate the action a subject takes. So, to share in, participate, being drawn into are forms that point to God's activity—God, God's Spirit is the agent; to further, to do ("doing God's mission"), to promote, etc., shift the action towards the missionary, the church, etc. My difficulty with this

* Born in Austria, Christian Tauchner joined the Congregation of the Divine Word in 1974. After his studies in Austria, he worked in Ecuador, mostly in the field of communication, and later on as the editor of the missiological journal *Spiritus*. In 2005 he returned to Austria and in 2013 moved on to Germany where he works at the SVD Missiological Institute at St. Augustin.

[1] Peter Baekelmans, CICM, Marie-Hélène Robert, OLA (eds.), *New Trends in Mission. The Emerging Future. Essays from SEDOS Mission Symposium, October 11 – 15, 2021*, Rome, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 2022.

shift is the confusion of human action with God's action: It is too pretentious an attitude to assume that a human actor may equal God's action, that they act on the same level.

Postmodernity is a concept in use for the last fifty years. In principle, it does not say a lot, it is just a statement of something "after" and beyond modernity. Modernity itself is a rather complex view of a long history of developments mostly in occidental perspectives. This complex set of views, ideas and practices is being questioned, but the label "post" does not state anything proper, it is void. I participated in meetings to discuss the content of the "post" and to see whether we are in a situation post the "post," or what comes after the "post," and there was some consensus that we might not actually know.[2]

Modernity and Postmodernity

I think that the conception of modernity related very much to occidental perspectives and world views. It has characterised the history worldwide for centuries. This is not to deny that other places and cultures could show significant developments and gain importance in their places, but they were not taken into account, and for centuries there was little known about them. At most, there was an "orientalising" gaze on them[3] (and the contemporary discussions for example regarding museums and ethnographic collections in Europe point to this perspective).

> There is now a consensus that the development of this modernity has been extremely complex, even paradoxical. Within this paradoxical complexity lies the relationship between this modernity and what is known as post-modernity. In reality, we can't say that postmodernity is something completely different from modernity, or even something that comes after it. But neither can we apply to it the stricter characteristics of modernity, which have since fallen into crisis or been revised. In reality, post-modernity is the development of the internal paradoxes of modernity and is therefore still intrinsic to it.[4]

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2 See Christian Tauchner, SVD, After Post-Colonialism. A Conference, in *Verbum SVD* 59.4 (2018) 453-455.

3 See Edward Said's classic on the topic: Edward W. Said, *Orientalismus,* Frankfurt: S. Fischer 2009 [originally 1978].

4 João Manuel Duque, Transmissão da fé em contexto pós-moderno, in *Perspectiva teológica* 45, # 126 (Mai/Ago 2013) 205-217, 206 (all translations into English by CT).

A major characteristic of modernity could be seen in its capacity to offer a unifying system. It provides a coherent overarching conception—the "meta-narratives." These meta-narratives provide sense and meaning for the individual moments in history. In his famous *Report on Knowledge* (1979), Jean-François Lyotard analyses the conditions of how knowledge is produced, and he shows the increasingly precarious possibilities for it. The conditions to establish something as knowledge are deeply occidental:

> Legitimation is the process by which a legislator finds himself authorised to promulgate this law as a norm. Let's take a scientific statement; it is subject to the rule that a statement must present a certain set of conditions in order to be accepted as scientific. Here, legitimisation is the process by which a "legislator" dealing with scientific discourse is authorised to prescribe the so-called conditions (in general, conditions of internal consistency and experimental verification) for a statement to form part of that discourse, and to be taken into consideration by the scientific community.
>
> The comparison may seem forced. We shall see that it is not. Since Plato, the question of the legitimacy of science has been inextricably linked to that of the legitimacy of the legislator. From this perspective, the right to decide what is true is not independent of the right to decide what is just, even if the statements subject to the two authorities are different in nature. This is because there is a twinning between the kind of language called science and the other called ethics and politics: both proceed from the same perspective, or if you prefer, from the same "choice," and this choice is called the West.[5]

Modernity is characterised by the rule of legitimation processes for laws and procedures—the manner how knowledge is established. Lyotard understands these rules as accepted forms of linguistic conventions—the "language-games" of the "grand narratives." But in postmodern conditions, these games do not work any longer:

> Take a closed door. From *The door is closed* to *Open the door,* there is no consequence in the sense of propositional logic. The two statements come under two autonomous sets of rules, which determine different relevance, and therefore different skills. Here, the result of this division

[5] Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir* (collection „Critique"), Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit 1979, 19f.

> of reason into cognitive or theoretical on the one hand and practical on the other has the effect of attacking the legitimacy of the discourse of science, not directly, but indirectly, by revealing that it is a language game with its own rules (of which the a priori conditions of knowledge are Kant's first glimpse), but without any vocation to regulate the practical game (or aesthetic, for that matter). It is thus placed on an equal footing with others.
>
> If this "delegitimation" is pursued to any extent, and if its scope is extended—as Wittgenstein does in his own way, and as thinkers like Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas do in theirs—it opens the way to an important current of postmodernity: science plays its own game and cannot legitimise other language games. For example, it cannot legitimise prescription. But above all, it cannot legitimise itself, as speculation presupposes.[6]

The overarching established rules as expressed and functional in the language-games provide sense and legitimation. They are the "grand narratives," and I think it is worth while considering some of them with regard to our missionary engagement. I am aware that much of what I am going to mention is offensive to our present-day discourse with its emphasis on agency also by non-Western actors, but I think much of this list was operating in the 1950s and onwards for a long time:

- Control over processes and nature: It is in our hands and responsibility to make the world a better place. We have developed—or are able to develop—tools and procedures to improve situations. We are capable of shaping our world and societies.
- Progress: In the past, we lived under limitations and were conditioned by many restraints. Thanks to technology and creativity, we have been able to overcome many of the limitations. We will overcome further problems by technological innovation and creativity, progress is considered illimited. In the West, we have achieved advanced states of progress, and it is our task to share the benefits of what we have achieved with peoples and cultures in other parts of the world which have not yet reached our levels (this was actually quite literally the fundamental idea of the "decade of development" in the 1950s and 1960s by UNESCO etc.).

[6] Ibid., 66.

- Rationality: Progress and development are based on rationality. This rationality functions in concepts, it is binary (with the principle of non-contradiction and the excluded third).
- Freedom as a high value. Poverty, ignorance and the lack of *Bildung* are seen as obstacles to freedom, and progress is oriented towards reducing and overcoming the constraints and assure the person and all peoples freedom and self-determination at all levels.
- Subjectivity: The person is conceived of as an individual with a vocation of developing his (in modern times, it was his, not her) capacities and attain fulfilment.
- Hope as an expression of faith in progress.
- Solidarity and the unity of humankind. This is certainly a Christian inspiration, looking at the world as creation and thus with a common vocation and purpose.
- Further Christian characteristics of modernity might be seen in the possibility of forgiveness and salvation which overcome the problematic state of sin in the human race. Humanity is basically seen within a shared and common design, even if Christians are of course privileged due to revelation and their belonging to the church. But others outside of the church have the principal capacity and vocation to enter the church as well. This is one of the fundamental motivations for the modern mission movement.

It is quite obvious that this articulation of modernity contained a lot of internal contradictions which were analysed early on—take the seminal study of the "Dialectic of Enlightenment" by Horkheimer and Adorno already in 1947.

> "Reason, before whose tribunal *(Richterstuhl)* everything should have been accountable until now, is now under indictment itself… Faced with the dialectic of progress, modernity can no longer be sure of its rationality or its secularity" [Höhn 1996]. The denunciations of instrumental reason (Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas), of identitarian reason (Adorno), of one-dimensional reason (Marcuse), of functional or strategic reason (Habermas, Apel), of systemic reason (Luhmann, Habermas), above all by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, in an alliance of philosophical and sociological-political readings, led to an

> awareness of the dialectic, if not the aporia of enlightened reason. This led to the realisation that "modern reason itself cannot guarantee the orientations of meaning on which it actually lived and on which individual and socially mediated realisations of freedom depend" [Esser] […]
>
> From a cultural point of view, which is what interests us most here, we could locate the paradoxical dynamics of postmodernity in the following aspects, which are only pointed out here as the most significant: individualisation-massification, fragmentation-holism, secularisation-sacralisation.[7]

The manifestations of this individualising path become visible in the "identification of freedom with the possibility of (almost total) fulfilment of the individual will; in the identification of happiness or the meaning of life with the self-realisation of each individual, in the correspondence to their desires and aspirations; in the very identification of each person's truth with their internal authenticity, in the coincidence of themselves with themselves, in a kind of closed circle of meaning that is immanent and internal to each subject."[8]

A further paradox is that this culture with its emphasis on individuality is a "mass culture":

> The very notion of the individual and its concentration on oneself corresponds to a mass idea, which is increasingly globalised; at the same time, the dynamics of individual desire, which seem to be at the heart of individuality, are worked on by mass advertising processes, to the point where each individual desires, in the conviction that they are unique in this desire, the same thing as every other individual. At the same time, the absence of institutionalised social mediations leaves each individual much more vulnerable to the mass process of building desire, which leads to the paradoxical result of the mass construction of individual desires—or the (illusory) individual construction of mass desires.[9]

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7 Duque, Transmissão da fé em contexto pós-moderno, 207, with references to Höhn, *Kritik der Immanenz,* 1996; and Essen, "Und die Zeit ist unsere Zeit, immer noch". Neuzeit als Thema katholischer Fundamentaltheologie, 1998.

8 Duque, Transmissão da fé em contexto pós-moderno, 208.

9 Ibid.

Fashion is a showcase for this paradox.

The paradoxes of modernity became increasingly obstacles in the smooth performance of its development. They became even more visible in post-modernity when the grand narratives and legitimising structures could no longer be advocated and appealed to.

> The weakness of meaning in its nihilistic leaning that seems to mark post-modernity would be the full realisation of secularisation, through the abandonment of the very question of God, in indifference to the problem and in the permanent enjoyment of the immanent plural and limited reality that we have to live with. As an abandonment of the great ideals, post-modernity could be seen as the final stage of modern secularisation—the stage in which, finally, the reference to God—even as a negation—disappears from the horizon of thought and existence.[10]

The person falls out of networks of relationships and meaning and is forced—actually condemned—to construct his and her own universe of meaning, often a bricolage of bits and pieces of badly digested metaphysics and unreliable information—see the criticism towards the information bubbles through social media with their tendency to fake news and to political fundamentalism. It is an overwhelming task to perform. The impossibility and incapacity to manage freedom in a relational and responsive manner pushes the person into a desperate search for certainties, and maybe, what we see in the surge of right-wing political ideologies in the West is an indicator of the postmodern hopelessness.

Missio Dei

The perspective for mission as God's mission has become a basic insight in missiology over the last decades. Within the catholic context, *Ad gentes* at Vatican II has expressed it in the classical phrase:

> The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. (AG 2)

This view takes up insights from the early church fathers who spoke of "missio" in terms of Trinitarian theology, and inner life of the Trinity. With the European expansion since the 16th century, the concept of mission was redefined through the Jesuits and other missionaries

[10] Ibid., 211.

as the proclamation of Christian—actually Catholic, as the Jesuits engaged prominently against the tendencies of the Reformation—faith in other continents, cultures and religions. As a consequence of the historical difficulties with missions tied into the nationalistic and imperialistic enterprises of European nations, the World Wars and the subsequent crises of Christian faith and cultures, critical reflections on the appropriateness of articulating mission as a human or ecclesiastical engagement were formulated, notably following Karl Barth. Some of his insights became influential at the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council in 1952, and in the diffusion process of the conclusions after Willingen, Karl Hartenstein and Walter Freytag summarised the perspective as the "missio Dei."[11]

This view was not acknowledged in Catholic circles, not even in relation to the Vatican II statement (Congar, who was seminal in this formulation, does not hint on Willingen and the Protestants).[12] The *Ad gentes* formulation itself was somehow eclipsed in the subsequent Catholic discourse on mission by other fundamental concepts such as evangelisation (Paul VI)[13] or proclamation in the Christological emphases of John Paul II[14].

It was in the context of the 50-year commemoration of Willingen at the turn of the century that the perspective of "missio Dei" was taken up and has become prominent in the meantime.[15]

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[11] Regarding the vast literature regarding *missio Dei* see the monographical issue of *Verbum SVD* 63 (2-3.2022); the monographic issue of *IRM* 92 (4.2003) dedicated to the anniversary of the Willingen Conference; John G. Flett, *The Witness of God. The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community,* Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK.: Eerdmans Publishing Company 2010; Stephen Bevans SVD, Protestant Influences on Catholic Mission Thinking, in *Verbum SVD* 58.2 (2017) 150-162; Stephen B. Bevans, Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today* (American Society of Missiology Series N° 30), Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2004, Chapter 9 (286-304).

[12] See Yves Congar, *Mon Journal du Concile.* Présenté et annoté par Éric Mahieu. Avant-propos de Dominique Congar. Préface de Bernard Dupuy OP, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 2002; id., Theologische Grundlegung (Nr. 2–9), in Johannes Schütte (ed.), *Mission nach dem Konzil,* Mainz: Grünewald 1967, 134-172.

[13] In the perspectives on "evangelisation": *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 1975.

[14] See his seminal encyclical *Redemptoris missio,* 1990.

[15] As mentioned, the special issue of IRM in 2003. For me, it is also quite important to notice that the SVD made this perspective the central vision of their General Chapter statement in 2000; see the issue of *Verbum SVD* 2-3.2022 with abundant information on this topic.

As far as I am concerned, *missio Dei* means that whatever should be the task of disciples and believers, is related back to God. And actually, it is important to place this perspective in the right order: Mission is initiating from God, taking the perspective of *missio Dei* acknowledges God as the first and main actor. Within this dynamics, any human endeavour finds its reason and motivation in joining in with this dynamics.

Take Stephen Bevans' recent book on a missionary ecclesiology: He constructs the theology of the church starting from God's mission which becomes visible in a prominent way in Jesus of Nazareth and his message and embodiment of God's Reign. Around Jesus, a group of disciples gathers around this view of God taking care of his people, and this group of missionary disciples constitutes the church.[16]

Therefore, the moment of discerning where God is doing what is fundamental. In the view of the 2000 SVD General Chapter, this discernment is communitarian and it is the first step for engaging in God's mission. This is, by the way, the meaning of contemplation for missionary congregations and in missionary contexts: Contemplation is not at all a withdrawal from the world and its concerns, quite to the contrary: is it the serious engagement with the surrounding reality, even if not in action yet, but in finding out where God is acting already and demanding or inviting to join forces. This contemplation is fundamental, since it transcends the frontiers of cultures, churches and theologies and shows agents anywhere in the social field. From the shared commitment with these agents and actors in society, the relationship follows in the form of dialogue, the expression and formulation of "reasons of hope" (1 Pet 3:15), in the words of that General Chapter a "prophetic dialogue."[17]

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[16] Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, *Community of Missionary Disciples. The Continuing Creation of the Church* (American Society of Missiology Series Vol. 65), Maryknoll, Ny: Orbis Books 2024.

[17] The concept of a "prophetic dialogue" as mission was originally formulated at the SVD General Chapter in 2000. It has since been taken up in wider circles. See Stephen B. Bevans, Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue. Reflections on Christian Mission Today,* Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2011; José Antunes da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue. Identity and Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries.* Foreword by Stephen Bevans, (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD 119), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2021; Stephen Bevans, SVD, Theologies of Mission, in Kirsteen Kim, Knud Jørgensen, Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mission Studies,* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2022, 111-128; Christian Tauchner, SVD, The Basis for Prophetic Dialogue – Remembering the SVD General Chapter 2000, in *Verbum SVD* 63.2-3 (2022) 356-378; Roger Schroeder, Proclamation and Interreligious Dialogue as Prophetic Dialogue, in *Missiology* 41.1 (2013) 50-61; Wilhelm Richebächer, Prophetic Dialogue Based on

For the missiological discourse regarding *missio Dei*, the fundamental question is a question of faith: The idea of a *missio Dei* builds on the conviction that God is leading creation from its outset to a new creation in eschatological views. It is a fundamental conviction and trust in God, and such faith is actually not self-evident. Everyday experience everywhere in the world puts such a faith into deep trouble as there is so much contradiction and evidence that God is *not* in charge. It is little consolation that the question of theodicy remains unresolved in Christian philosophy and theology.

Now, certainly and in principle, faith altogether, the belief in God and creation, in salvation, in grace, in redemption, etc. are *grand narratives.* All of them have functioned in different formulations to motivate for mission and missionary engagement in different fields.

Challenges and Perspectives

Among the challenges, I'd like to state that there are large sections of peoples all over the world who are suffering enormous difficulties with just surviving. There are so many countries involved in wars and armed conflicts, there are populations exposed to the consequences of climate change and natural disasters. So, for many people, their main challenge consists in trying to survive (this is the sense of Agamben's "naked survival"[18]). This reality, however, does not mean that postmodern characteristics of culture and society are without importance for those people: they share our same world, they use cell phones and are exposed to information and propaganda.

For us as a missionary congregation, I think we are in a situation where survival normally is not at stake. We have taken and are tasked with taking options—hopefully for the poor and marginalised (though there are signs contradicting such an inspiration: The Generalate complains that young SVD missionaries shy back from mission assignments to "difficult" missions and prefer options for a mission in Europe or the US).[19]

Missio Dei Triunius. A Chance for Ecumenical Cooperation in Advanced Missiology and Ecological Ethics, *Verbum SVD* 64 (3-4.2023) 336-364; Idara Otu, MSP, Prophetic Dialogue: Ecclesiology for a Vital Church, in *Exchange* 52.1-2 (2023) 76-99.

[18] Giorgio Agamben, *Der Gebrauch der Körper.* Aus dem Italienischen von Andreas Hiepko und Michael von Killisch-Horn, Frankfurt: S. Fischer 2020 [originally published in 2014].

[19] See the reflections on "mission assignments" by Lazar Stanislaus SVD, SVD and *Missio Dei.* Progress and Perspectives, in *Verbum SVD* 63.2-3

In the actual context, we must seriously ask ourselves whether we see the possibility to stick to grand narratives. *Missio Dei* is without any doubt a grand narrative – actually, it is one with the widest implications as its horizon is the entire world and any society and culture. Postmodernity, on the contrary, means the negation of such a grand narrative.

Philosophically, the negation of the meta discourse "missio Dei" could be treated dialectically and negated itself etc., and that way one might establish it as its own meta narrative.

In practical terms, we could take cultures seriously, as a common ground for both *missio Dei* and postmodern perspectives. This offers the possibility of multiculturalism, as the coexistence of cultures without much interference. This is the postmodern perspective.

In the SVD, we have taken the option for interculturality. This means the relationship and interaction of people from different cultures in an intent of mutual enrichment and creativity. As far as I can see, to a large extent, interculturality remains a promise and a demand. In actual terms, in my context I observe the abuse of the term of interculturality, as it is used to bypass the demands of the *local* culture and to avoid the serious engagement with the local culture and a creative interrelation with others on the grounds of the local culture.

Related to this question of interculturality there is the articulation of mission as *mission ad gentes* and/or *inter gentes*. Since Vatican II for the Catholic Church—and for the SVD since Roscommon—it has become clear that Europe also requires evangelisation and mission. Particularly Germany and similar cultures are in a state of real "ethne," "gentes" in the NT sense. So SVD missionaries could rightly relate to the Germans in order to dialogue with them about Jesus and salvation grand narratives, obviously. However, this is a difficult task and we are taking rather options of sticking with our own groups—Vietnamese SVDs cater for Vietnamese communities in Germany, Filipino SVDs for Filipino communities, Keralites for Keralite communities, etc. As a matter of fact, there is a lot of work to do. But the relationship of ad gentes – Keralites in relation to Germans etc. – may be eclipsed.

In our postmodern setting, among some European societies there is a growing ignorance of elementary religious knowledge.[20] I think it is

(2022) 331-355; Paulus Budi Kleden SVD, Kein Ende der Geschichte!! An den Herausforderungen wachsen, in *Steyler Missionschronik 2024,* Sankt Augustin: Steyler Verlag 2024, 9-14.

[20] In this context, I find Tomáš Halík's reflections and proposals quite interesting: Tomáš Halík, *Der Nachmittag des Christentums. Eine Zeitansage,* Freiburg: Herder 2022 (there are translations available).

growing analphabetism with regard to religions. It is not opposition, it is just that increasingly the enlightened contemporary person is not able to interpret religious symbols: In the museum, the person sees an almost naked man and woman standing near a tree, and it is fascinating to contemplate the painting by Durer etc., but what the label "Adam and Eve in paradise" means, remains without understanding, because such an understanding would require references to the grand narrative. Such an analphabetism renders dialogue with such people rather difficult. But in order to dialogue with such contemporary Germans, we missionaries are required to manage their alphabet.

This is also a major task for communication and language. Our way of speaking in church and community, our reference points, and language, rituals and cultural symbols are meaningless to growing portions of our people. Translation is very much demanded.[21] The SVD concept of a "characteristic dimension" of mission work as "communication" is situated in this context. Again, there is an option to stick to our traditional work in parishes and with communities which still understand parts of our concepts and narratives, but this is going to fade away.

Postmodernity also emphasises communication and relationships in digital mediations. These possibilities offer the promises of new contacts through social media. They provide immediate access and connectivity. Nevertheless, contrary to their name, "social" media drive users into passivity, individualism and loneliness. They simulate community and creativity, but since they are structurally conceived of as an entertainment industry for consumerist behaviour, they tend in a rather different manner.

How do we see the possibilities for social living together? Many particularly younger people are opting out of society, the social contract is not evident any more. This has to do with the growing burden of social

[21] See Lamin Sanneh's seminal work: Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message. The Missionary Impact on Culture.* Revised and Expanded (American Society of Missiology Series, No. 42), Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books ²2009; Jim Harries, Theory to Practice in Vulnerable Mission. An Academic Appraisal, Eugene: Wipf&Stock 2012; Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *De langue à langue. L'hospitalité de la traduction,* (Bibliothèque Idées), Paris: Albin Michel 2022; Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (ed.), *Translating Wor(l)ds. Christianity Across Cultural Boundaries,* (Collectanea Instituti Anthropos 51), Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag 2019; Lars Kirkhusmo Pharo, *Concepts of Conversion. The Politics of Missionary Scriptural Translations,* (Religion and Society Vol. 70), Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2018; Antje Flüchter, Rouven Wirbser (eds.), *Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures. The Expansion of Catholicism in the Early Modern World* (Studies in Christian Mission Vol. 52) Leiden: Brill 2017.

debts; the young are ever more charged with paying the pensions of ever larger sections of long-living old sectors in society while the labour force is diminishing. One possibility of going along is to delve into a consumerist culture and lifestyle, centred on entertainment and individualism. On the other side, there is a growing sentiment of anguish and fear about the future. Young people feel they have no perspectives for a future that may make sense to them. They are pushed into loneliness, a situation particularly applying to children and youngsters who were condemned to stay on their own during the pandemic and have not learnt how to relate to others in creative manners. In the UK, the government has established a Ministry for Loneliness in the Secretariate of State for Culture, Media and Sport.[22]

The challenge for the SVD reads, in my opinion: What options do we see for collaborating in shaping society in our contexts? Are we interested in shaping our societies at all? What could be our contributions to shaping a society?

The alternative would be seen in going on with the care of individuals within the realm of religious contributions. This may take on different forms, such as entertainment formats through social media, or the production of events and the offer of religious consolation. It might consist of catering to the individual needs of people. Maybe this could also consist of engaging in the traditional parish structures, doing the same sacramental and ritual performances, even if the numbers of parishioners are dwindling and dying out. It should be noted that the actual church policy points in this direction, giving up pastoral care and trying to keep up the sacramental offers.

What does it mean practically to "join in" working with God, given the infinite difference between the divine and the human agent? Is there an option to contribute that God reigns in our given society? This may be widely different from traditional political perspectives like some of Christian and conservative political parties or neo-pentecostal movements. What possibilities are there available for collaboration with others or even among ourselves for projects furthering and supporting social structures which are open to divine intervention and that God actually reigns?[23] Are there any images and perspectives of a

[22] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/loneliness-annual-report-the-fourth-year/tackling-loneliness-annual-report-march-2023-the-fourth-year#ministerial-foreword

[23] In his latest book, Stephen Bevans suggests that "church" be a verb, not a noun (Bevans, *Community of Missionary Disciples,* 11 and throughout the book). Similarly, I'd suggest to use God's kingdom rather as a verb: God reigns.

Kingdom of God available to direct and articulate our communal action?

This demands, yet again, the urgent and fundamental attitude of a communitarian discernment of the spirits. Its place is missionary contemplation in order to look at the world around us from a perspective of the Spirit. This goes beyond many of our established frontiers at all levels, but it would offer us the freedom of limitless engagement for the reign of God, beyond the constraints of ecclesiastical order systems.

Postmodernity also places a lot of importance on experience. What do we experiment with *missio Dei*? How do we perceive God's mission taking place and inviting us to join in? Sharing this experience would be an interesting way of relating to others. Of course, this requires our self-awareness of such experiences, and it demands a high capacity of finding an understandable language and expressions for it. The SVD characteristic dimension of communication might be a field where such questions are dealt with.

Concluding

I set out from the statement that both *missio Dei* and postmodernity are somehow blurred concepts and perspectives. Regarding postmodernity, this is no problem because we can't escape it. We live in all-pervasive postmodern situations and settings, no matter if we accept or understand them. We might find ways of taking advantage of some of its characteristics, like finding pleasure in the offerings of the entertainment industry (even if we can afford only the spoils of it).

This is quite different with *missio Dei*. It requires dedication and commitment, humility and the risks of freedom. It requires faith and trust in a God who might reveal ever new and surprising perspectives. It is certainly a grand and overarching narrative and therefore means a long-time dedication. Of course, there are alternatives such as sticking with the institution and its internal policies. This has been the lifetime dedication of many of our confreres and they were happy with it.

In my impression, the perspective of *missio Dei* is quite central to Jesuit spirituality. As far as I can see, Jesuits follow such ideals in discernment and missionary commitment (at the conference on *Missio Dei* we held in November 2022, a Jesuit friend somehow warned us from being overoptimistic as to the Jesuit practice of such ideals).

I'd like to finish with this well-known Jesuit question: All that you have and are happy with, in any of the perspectives pre-modern, modern or postmodern, do you think it is enough? Could there not be

something more (the famous "magis")? For me, this "magis" might lure us into what *missio Dei* calls us to.

Abstracts

Der Artikel beschäftigt sich mit der Bedeutung beider Begriffe, der *Missio Dei* und der *Postmoderne*. Ausgehend von Lyotards Überlegungen zu den Möglichkeiten des Wissens auf der Grundlage von „großen Erzählungen" werden Glaube, Kirche und missionarisches Engagement in ihren „modernen" Konturen innerhalb solcher großen Erzählungen dargestellt. *Missio Dei* wird als eine solche „große Erzählung" sichtbar. Das gegenwärtige soziale und kulturelle Umfeld der postmodernen Gesellschaften stellt jedoch große Schwierigkeiten für ein missionarisches und evangelisierendes Engagement dar. Für die Steyler Missionare besteht die Option, im postmodernen Rahmen individueller Projekte zu arbeiten, selbst innerhalb des immer brüchigeren Rahmens der kirchlichen Institution, oder das Risiko der Freiheit im missionarischen Engagement innerhalb der Mission Gottes auf sich zu nehmen.

El artículo aborda el significado de ambos términos, la *missio Dei* y la *posmodernidad*. Basándose en las reflexiones de Lyotard sobre las posibilidades de saber a partir de "grandes relatos", la fe, la iglesia y el compromiso misionero se muestran en su contorno "moderno" dentro de dichos grandes relatos. La *missio Dei* se hace visible como una de las principales "grandes narrativas". Sin embargo, el actual entorno social y cultural de las sociedades posmodernas plantea grandes dificultades para un compromiso misionero y evangelizador. Para la SVD existen opciones para trabajar dentro de los marcos posmodernos de los proyectos individuales, incluso dentro de los marcos cada vez más frágiles de la institución eclesial, o asumir el riesgo de la libertad en el compromiso misionero dentro de la misión de Dios.

Cet article traite de la signification des deux termes – *Missio Dei* et postmodernité. A partir de la réflexion de Lyotard sur la possibilité de connaître sur la base de « bons récits », la foi, l'Église et l'engagement missionnaire sont replacés dans leur cadre « moderne » à l'intérieur de ces grands récits. La *Missio Dei* devient visible comme un « grand récit » majeur. Cependant, le contexte actuel des sociétés post-modernes pose des difficultés pour l'engagement missionnaire et d'évangélisation. Pour les SVD, il est possible de travailler dans le cadre postmoderne de projets individuels, même dans le cadre toujours plus fragile de l'institution Église, ou de prendre le risque de la liberté dans l'engagement missionnaire dans la mission de Dieu.

*Sr. Anna Damas, SSpS**

MISSIO DEI – LEARNING FROM CULTURES

The encounter with other cultures normally is a great opportunity for learning new ways of understanding and for becoming aware of one's own culture. The author refers to her experience particularly from her time in Papua New Guinea. This refers particularly to approaches to biblical texts and to widening theological horizons and the knowledge of God. With regard to mission, the perspective of God's mission and taking cultures seriously allow for more daring steps in inculturation.

Prayerful Insights

I received my training in inculturation and intercultural theology not at the universities in Germany and the Netherlands where I did my theological studies; instead, my teachers were the students of two catechist training centres in Papua New Guinea.[1] I worked there as a teacher together with other expatriate and local staff. The students were men and (fewer) women, mostly from villages in remote areas. Most of the students had only primary school level education. Therefore, the language we used was not English but Pidgin. Pidgin has a very limited vocabulary and is thoroughly descriptive; it hardly operates with abstract words. Take any theological textbook, erase all abstract concepts from it such as "redemption, freedom, responsibility, symbolic," etc., and you will have a fair idea of how different our teaching style had to be.

One day, I entered the kitchen of the catechist training centre. The two catechists on kitchen duty had already dished out the lunch on plates, one for each person. The moment I came in, I saw them making

* Anna Damas is a Holy Spirit Sister (SSpS). She holds a Master's Degree in Theology from Nijmegen University/Netherlands and worked as a pastoral assistant in the Diocese of Aachen/Germany. From 2006 to 2019 she lived and worked in Papua New Guinea (biblical apostolate, catechist training, adult faith formation). She currently serves in the SSpS Generalate/Rome, as a resource person for the spirituality and history of her Congregation, and is a member of the SVD/SSpS Resource Committee for Interculturality.

[1] At Par in the Highlands diocese of Wabag, and Alexishafen, Madang diocese, on the coast.

the sign of the cross and praying over the plates. I must have looked puzzled, because they offered an explanation: "We usually bless our lunch here in the kitchen so that when the other catechists arrive at table, they can start eating right away without having to say grace first."

Their comment started a whole series of reflections for me. The two catechists taught me something that was new to me. In my individualistic culture in Germany, prayer is conceived as something personal: I myself must thank God for the food; it is not good enough if someone else does that for me. For the catechists, however, saying grace over the food is not just a prayer, but it is an act of blessing; and this blessing comes with the power of God. The traditional Melanesian cultures perceive the world as inhabited by spirits. These spirits are not supernatural beings living in an otherworldly realm from which they occasionally interfere with human affairs. On the contrary, they are a natural part of the world. The world, in fact, is permeated by *mana*, a magical power that can manifest itself through spirits, but also in people, objects and events.[2] In the context of this worldview, a prayer of blessing confers divine power (*mana*) on the person or object blessed. The food that has been blessed by a prayer is, therefore, now charged with divine blessing and has been given a new quality. As a consequence, a personal act of prayer is not needed anymore; whoever eats of the food, will have a share in the blessing contained in it.

This insight shed new light for me on a number of biblical stories. For example, the story of the blessing stolen by Jacob from his brother Esau (Genesis 27): The dying patriarch Isaac blesses the wrong son, but when he realizes his mistake, he cannot take the blessing back again. A powerful blessing once pronounced sets the divine work in motion and cannot be revoked by a human word. Another example is the blessing given to Abraham. Through him are blessed all who believe in all generations to come (Gen 12:2-3; 22:17-18). The blessing is like *mana* running down the ages, unstoppable.

My highly individualistic society taught me the values of standing on my own feet, of mastering my life, having my own opinion and making my own decisions. In Papua New Guinea, I learned what it means to belong to a tribe or clan. It is the group that defines who someone is, and the individual lives by the grace of the community. This collective identity concept unlocked for me many aspects of the sociocultural world of the Bible and their theological significance. In the biblical

[2] First academic description in 1891 by Anglican missionary Robert Henry Codrington in his book *The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*.

world, a person never stands alone; he or she is always and in all aspects part of the community. Whenever someone acts, the person does not act on his or her own behalf only, but always as a part of the community; therefore, private actions by individuals will have repercussions on the whole community. This is especially true for those who by their status or office represent the people. If King David sins, the entire people of Israel is affected (2 Sam 24). If parents commit a grave sin, the progeny might have to suffer the consequences. Some of the prophets turned their own lives into an allegory, embodying in their person the fate of the people of Israel. Hosea, for instance, contracted a marriage with a prostitute and so enacted the drama of God's faithfulness to his unfaithful people.

United We Stand

Continuing my reflection on the understanding of prayer that the catechists had opened up for me, I discovered more hidden depths there. Indeed, if I shift my perception of prayer as an individual act to prayer as a collective event, I understand that prayer takes part in the pro-existence of Jesus. Jesus lived, believed, suffered and died not only for us but in our stead; likewise, Christian prayer is vicarious. We can pray, not only *for* others but also *for* others in the sense of *in others' stead*. Praying is not so much an act originating in myself, but rather a participation in the prayer of the church. Her very existence *is* a never-ceasing prayer in the presence of God, and I, as it were, join the choir and unite my voice to the prayer of the church.[3]

What the two catechists made me realise about prayer enriched my one-sided individualistic point of view. A socio-centric (collectivist) culture affords a much easier access to the concept of vicariousness because the individual is never only one; the individual person always represents and embodies the group he or she belongs to. In the course of European history (Reformation, Enlightenment, Modernity), Christianity in the Western world has adopted an individualised approach to faith. The relationship with God, what and how one believes, is personal, interiorised, and often private. While this anchoring of faith in the interiority of the individual person has certainly been a necessary and beneficial development, it needs the other pole of the continuum as a corrective balance. We stand before God, not only as individuals but also as the community of God's people. Faith is not only an individual act but something shared, and indeed something bigger than

[3] This insight into the vicarious nature of prayer is embodied in the Benedictine monastic tradition.

ourselves. The process of the synod on synodality has been a powerful reminder that our Christian faith unfolds between these two poles: while the act of faith is fully grounded in and taken responsibility for by the individual believer, our faith is at the same time shared and can only be lived in and as the community of the people of God.

Divided We Fall

The human-made ecological crisis that is threatening the whole planet challenges highly individualistic societies to change perspective and to comprehend ourselves as a collective body. If we fail to learn this, humanity will not survive. Ecological movements and advocacy sometimes refer to indigenous cultures as a model of a holistic and ideal relationship with the natural world, supposedly marked by a deep understanding, respect and integrity. In my view, this is romanticism. The longing of (post-)industrialised societies to restore the lost connection with the natural world is projected onto indigenous communities. There, supposedly, complete harmony of humankind and nature is to be found. This is not what I saw in Papua New Guinea. The relationship with nature is one of intimacy, yes, but also of struggle: human life is exposed to natural forces (including the spirits) and is in constant danger. The respect that people show for nature (trees, rivers, animals) is not so much based on love but on fear. In places and circumstances where people discover nature as a capitalist resource, the same pitiless exploitation as in industrialised nations sets in. To put it in a nutshell: While people in post-industrial societies long for a romanticised pre-industrial past (that never existed), the people in Papua New Guinea long for the (dubious) achievements and material benefits of industrialisation and capitalism.

We are aware of the danger of projecting our fears onto strangers, the culturally other; we are less aware that we also tend to project our hopes and wishes onto them. Both ways, we do not take the other seriously but use him or her as a mirror for our own concerns—with the result that from the mirror no one else but we are looking back at us. "We don't see the world as it is, we see it as we are" (Anaïs Nin).

Cultural learning does not consist in cutting off one's own cultural roots and exchanging them with another culture instead. Rather, it is a matter of critically understanding one's own worldview in its wisdoms and its limitations, and allowing it to be challenged and transformed by the wisdom of other cultures. The cultural transformation cannot consist in transplanting elements from another culture into one's own. Cultural learning must take the whole "cultural universe" of the other seriously, and not just elements of it. Only then, as in the

context of the ecological crisis, can we learn together to explore new and alternative pathways.

Intercultural Encounters as Locus Theologicus

With the term culture, I do not mean so much an assortment of customs and practices bound to an ethnic group in a certain geographical area. Rather, I follow the approach to cultures as patterns of meanings (as developed by Clifford Geertz[4] and others); meanings that are communicated by means of symbols, both synchronically among the participants of the respective culture, and diachronically between generations. Cultures are not something that exists in itself, but culture subsists and is actualised in those who live it. The participants of a culture weave this web of meaning (worldview, values); they share and communicate meaning using cultural symbols, thus keeping the web vibrant and alive. That is why cultures, by their very nature, cannot be static but are constantly evolving.

Cultural symbols cover a wide range: from language, social institutions such as schools or the government system, to body language, rituals, social stratification, norms and laws, etc. Religion, too, is part of the symbolic structure. But religion can also be seen as a culture in itself: a pattern of meaning that expresses itself in symbolism. Because both culture and religion are, at their core, concerned with meaning, Paul Tillich[5] developed a theology of culture that studies culture as a *locus theologicus*. Every culture in its uniqueness offers unique insights and approaches to the mystery of God. While this is certainly true, I would like to dwell here on the encounter between diverse cultures as a privileged place of evangelisation.

In our classes in the catechist training centre, the catechists often surprised me both with their questions and their insights. They reconnected me to our rich Catholic tradition. Theological concepts that I believed to be medieval and somewhat outdated came to light and to life by the questions that the catechists brought up. For instance: How is it possible that Jesus, being a person of white skin, was able to redeem also people of black skin colour? Must not black people be redeemed by their own black Saviour? (The background of this question was a cargo cult that had arisen in the Madang province at that time. A local man had declared himself the Black Saviour; he alone could save the Papua New Guinean people with their dark skin colour.) At

[4] See his *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973.

[5] 1886–1965, German-American theologian and philosopher. See his *Theology of Culture,* 1959.

first, the question sounded weird to me; but then I remembered the ancient theological adage: Kind must be redeemed by kind; and only what has been assumed can be redeemed. On the basis of this principle, ancient and medieval theology answered the question *Cur Deus homo?* Why did God become a human being? According to the principle, God could redeem humankind only by taking on the form and existence of a human being. The catechists' question, therefore, was not weird after all; on the contrary, is was highly philosophical. In our discussion, we reached the following answer: It is not Jesus' skin colour (or, for that matter, his maleness) that is decisive for his work of redemption, but the fact that he was human. Jesus took on our humanity that is common to all of us beyond race or sex. – It is easy to see that this ancient theological adage remains significant even today.

Encountering the cultural Other made me reexamine my own world of thought and the foundations of my faith. The experience confronted me with the same question that Jesus asked his disciples: "But you, who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:29 par) The Christian faith and way of being church that I had learned in my society and in Western theology appeared to be contingent. I needed new answers to new questions. Exposing oneself to another culture (or, for that matter, to another religion) is sometimes beset with fear of losing one's identity. Indeed, the complete strangeness of the Papua New Guinean culture, in many aspects diametrically opposed to my culture of origin, put a question mark behind many of my beliefs and values. But—as will have become clear from the examples given above—the encounter did not make me lose my cultural identity. It did not prompt me to make a choice against my own culture and adopt the other culture instead. On the contrary, I experienced it as a deepening of my cultural values and beliefs.

Jesus, too, learned to believe in intercultural and inter-faith encounters. He marvelled at the faith of the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10 par). With his background of military culture, the soldier put absolute trust in Jesus' authority and power: an order is an order and will be obeyed. Jesus learned from the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30).[6] While Jesus understood his mission to be limited to the Jewish people (the "children"), the woman argued from her religious and cultural outsider-position (the "dogs") and made Jesus realise that God's grace is without limits and offered to all. These encounters certainly did not weaken Jesus' Jewish identity, let alone cause him to lose it; instead, they reaffirmed and deepened it.

Intercultural encounters are a privileged way to encounter God because God is the Other. The Other who meets me in the cultural other

[6] In Matthew 15:21-28 she is called Canaanite; in any case she is pagan.

and asks me to expand and transcend my culturally conditioned limitations. Edward T. Hall[7] describes culture as the medium through which all of life's events must flow. We cannot exist without culture, and nothing we think or do happens without culture. Our faith, too, is always mediated and expressed through our culture. Using computer language, Geert Hofstede[8] compares our biological body to the computer hardware while culture is the "software of the mind," our operating system. The limits of our culture are the limits of how we can be in the world and towards the world. The limits of our language are the limits of our knowledge and understanding of both the world and God.[9] Intercultural encounters therefore have the capacity to widen the boundaries set to us by our cultural programming.

Facing My "Cultural Shadow"

I have described the encounter with another culture as a process of transcending the boundaries of one's own culture. In order for this to happen, these boundaries and limitations must first be acknowledged and critically examined. One's culture must be "deconstructed" in the sense proposed by Jacques Derrida. The encounter with the cultural Other deconstructed my cultural identity. It broke open the construction of my beliefs that I mistook for truths, my values that I thought to be universal and my cultural practices that I considered normative.

While preparing for a mission assignment, and during the first period in the country of destination, the new missionary's attention is usually focussed on the host culture. There are fascinating things to learn and discover. Soon, however, it dawns upon him or her that the biggest discovery is not that of the host culture, but of one's own cultural identity. I never knew I was German until I lived in a completely different culture. "γνῶθι σεαυτόν" (gnōthi seauton), Know Yourself, is the first commandment for a missionary. The discovery of one's own cultural make-up is not always pleasant; indeed, it can be painful. Looking into the mirror of a foreign culture, I discover my own cultural

7 1914–2009, American anthropologist, recognised as founding father of intercultural communication; he introduced new cultural concepts such as proxemics (cultural space), monochronic/polychronic time, and high-context and low-context cultures.

8 1928–2020, Dutch social psychologist.

9 This epistemological insight is called the "linguistic turn," cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein and others.

shadow.[10] To give just one example: In Papua New Guinea, I perceived a lot of leisureliness around me, if not outright laziness. People spent entire days at the marketplace chatting away. They work if they feel like working; and the pace of work is generally slow. Usually, there is no plan for the day or a list of what one wants to achieve. With this attitude, not much can come of it, I thought. And by my standards, it didn't. What I failed to see, however, was the value behind the people's behaviour. They invest a lot of time in relationships. People find it important to be together and talk to each other; what they talk about is less important. Spending time together is more important than getting a lot of work done quickly. What I was proud of about myself—my fast work performance, my efficiency, my knowledge and critical mind—all this made very little impression on the people around me. At first, I was frustrated; but then I suddenly saw myself through the people's eyes. And I beheld someone with a fixation on work, someone constantly pressed by time, someone lacking in sensitivity for relationships. It looked pretty ugly. I was facing my cultural shadow, the downside of my cultural achievements.

Cultural Dilemmas

Looking into the mirror of a different culture, I discovered that the set of values that I acquired in my culture of origin is only one possible set of values; there are other sets of values on which other cultures are based, and they are equally valid. Different value constellations lead to different cultural preferences. As in the example above, my culture prefers performance and efficiency, which comes at a cost for the energy and time spent on community and relationships. Claude Lévi-Strauss speaks in this context of cultural dilemmas. Every culture has to choose; no culture can realise all values at the same time and to the same extent. To name only a few examples: A society cannot prioritise the group and at the same time the individual. It is not possible to regard time as a valuable and limited resource, and equally as something that is always available in abundance like the air. A society cannot value in the same measure ancient traditions on the one hand, and innovation and change on the other.

I remember a discussion in our Sisters' community in Papua New Guinea. We had to decide how we wanted to celebrate the profession anniversary of the first indigenous sisters. The local Sisters were in

[10] I am using here the concept of shadow of Carl G. Jung. The shadow represents the unconscious parts of the personality that the conscious ego does not identify with.

favour of a lavish celebration: hundreds of guests and plenty of food for everyone. After all, this is how one celebrates life in Papua New Guinea and honours the celebrants and guests. The European Sisters could not agree. They argued in favour of a more modest celebration, citing the vow of poverty and the testimony of a simple lifestyle. However, the local Sisters also referred to our Rule, which commits us to inculturation of religious life in the respective culture. And generous hospitality inclusive of a great number of people is a value in Melanesian culture. We faced a dilemma, and we were stuck. Someone ventured, "If we cannot agree, then let us consult the Bible. What were the values that Jesus lived?" We did a brainstorming and looked up Scripture passages. As it turned out, the Jesus of the Gospels is a colourful figure. The itinerant preacher with no place to lay his head (Matt 8:20 par Luke), who was depending on well-to-do women to fund his movement (Luke 8:3), was also a "party guy": not really given to fasting and fond of accepting dinner invitations, so much so that some people denounced him as a glutton and a drunkard (Matt 11:19 par).

When it comes to cultural dilemmas and cultural conflicts, sometimes the "Gospel culture" is invoked. The Gospel culture is hoped to serve as common ground, yardstick and referee for the competing cultural values and bring about a solution of the dilemma. I have several issues with the term Gospel culture. Firstly, the term Gospel is of a different order than the term culture. Gospel refers to the act of God's revelation and communion with his creation as communicated in the life and salvific death of Jesus. The term culture can therefore be used at most in the figurative sense for the Gospel. Secondly, "Gospel culture" implies that the biblical texts convey certain values and that these values are normative for Christians of all cultural backgrounds. However, neither faith nor culture can be reduced to a set of values. A culture is an organic whole of beliefs and value-based practices; but these beliefs and values cannot be stripped of their cultural embedding, "distilled" from it as it were. Jesus certainly lived the values of freedom, inclusiveness, solidarity, etc.; but all these words are a bloodless nothing if we do not know how Jesus expressed them in his life and in the context of his culture. A mere list of values, as long as it may be, will never be able to describe the "Jesus event." Thirdly, if "Gospel culture" is to be taken to mean the culture of Jesus, no one would hold the opinion that Jesus' Jewish-Palestinian culture of 2000 years ago is normative for Christians today.[11] Besides, the Gospels and New Testament writings, insofar as they were written decades later

[11] Although this sometimes does happen when Jesus' cultural behaviour, e.g. the choice of male representatives for the circle of the Twelve, is taken to be normative and dogmatically relevant.

and in places outside the Roman province of Palestine, originate in an already different cultural context than the cultural world of Jesus.

The Next Level

There is no easy solution for cultural dilemmas. There is no normative Christian or Gospel culture to be our referee and tell us who and what is right. There is no golden centre where two opposite cultures can meet halfway. Cultural learning is not merely a social skill enhancing training that, once it is mastered, enables us to bridge any gap. Nor is it a matter of combining the best of two worlds or finding a balance between two opposites. This would result in a mere compromise. Intercultural encounters do teach us new communication skills; they invite us to bridge cultural divides and learn to understand the world of the other through the eyes of the other. This is certainly a tremendous shift and achievement; but it is not enough. It might suffice for cultural encounters on a personal level that are limited in time. In my case: I learned to function and communicate effectively in a socio-centric culture. But when the interaction is sustained over a long time in a group of people from diverse cultures, it might be necessary to reach a new level of interaction. For such a group, it would deplete the members' energies, at least in the long run, to constantly negotiate cultural differences while the individuals continue to adhere to their own cultural views and practices. A culturally diverse group that closely lives and works together has the opportunity to create a genuinely new space, an alternative space that can be inhabited by individuals from diverse cultures. At this point, intercultural living might become transcultural. In a deep and transformative encounter, different cultures each have to do their own process and transcend themselves to reach new levels of insight and meaning.

Let me take again the example of our discussion how to celebrate the jubilee. Unfortunately, we did not reach the point where the interaction of our diverse cultural values resulted in something creatively new. Instead, we settled for a shallow compromise: a big celebration with many guests according to Papua New Guinea style, but in a scaled-down version from the original grand plans. What would a genuinely new "third way" have looked like? Maybe it would have been a lavish feast of simplicity, a feast of the poor for the poor. Perhaps it would have been a feast open for all—but in this case "all" meaning not only the usual invitees (family, friends and dignitaries) but also the unexpected guest, the forgotten misfits hiding behind the hedges (Luke 14:21ff).

Enduring Perplexity

Cultural dilemmas and struggles that arise when people from different cultural backgrounds meet are not meant to be solved quickly. That would mean to miss their potential as a catalyst for change and learning. Intercultural encounters deconstruct us, they place a question mark behind our convictions. The temptation then is to replace our lost constructions by new ones and quickly mend our torn web of meanings so that all is safe and homely again. Living in Papua New Guinea made me understand how people there perceive their world, and I grew convinced that their worldview and the values they hold are equally valid though different from mine. This, however, means that I have to put up with a considerable cognitive dissonance because I am not easily able to decide what behaviour, what choices and even moral judgements are right or wrong. For instance, my culture taught me that a lie is not telling the truth, and the truth are the facts. In Papua New Guinea, however, I learned that the truth is not to be found in the facts but in relationships; as a consequence, true words respect and preserve the good relationship but are not necessarily true to the facts.

The tension created by the experience of cultural difference is one of suspense. Cultural differences and dilemmas are for us a call like the one that prompted Abraham to leave home and reach beyond (Gen 12:1). This "beyond" is like the desert in which the people of Israel wandered for forty years: Egypt was no longer home, and a new homeland was not in sight. Indeed, the Promised Land would always remain utopian, even when the new land was reached. The same, I think, is true for the transcultural, genuinely new space, the "third way" I spoke of earlier. I think that a good measure of lasting cognitive dissonance in intercultural living is beneficial. It leaves the question mark in power. A person with answers stops learning. "Suspend judgement" is a good piece of advice for missionaries, and probably not only for the first few years but for all our life to come.

This sounds like relativism. I do subscribe to relativism but not in the sense of "anything goes" but rather in the sense of "anything must be seen in its cultural symbolic horizon." This does not mean that cultures cannot or may not be compared, and that an ethical judgement is not possible. But it does mean that a possible judgement is very complex and relative to many factors.

This sounds postmodern. It is postmodern. I am convinced that postmodernity is the contemporary culture that the Christian message and the church is called to inculturate into. Postmodernity should not primarily be perceived as a threat to Christianity but as an invitation

to grow. For too long the church has resisted modernity, to its own detriment. And when the church finally did open up to modern ideas at the Second Vatican Council, modernity was already coming to its end. Modernity has presented us with the gifts of personal and intellectual autonomy, of a critical mind and scientific advance. But modernity had too many answers, intellectual ambitions and "metanarratives" (Lyotard). They fail to convince and satisfy us today, not least because of their innate potential for violence as they make absolute claims.

Back in colonial times when our SVD and SSpS Congregations were founded, mission meant leaving one's country and proclaiming the Christian faith to pagan people in other parts of the world. In comparison, the concept of *missio Dei* and the insight that the church is missionary by her very nature, is so much richer. Contemporary approaches and concepts of mission are numerous. Whatever understanding of mission one prefers, though, it always implies the notion of movement, of leaving one's own familiar space and setting out to enter someone else's space: someone who lives differently, thinks differently, believes differently. Mission is an endeavour that involves crossing multiple borders: geographical, social, class, cultural, religious, language borders, etc. Of these, the cultural borders are crucial because they are so fundamental for our being-in-the-world. That is why intercultural faith encounters are a privileged path in our quest for God.

I wish to end with two quotes. The first is from Saint John Henry Newman: "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." The second is from the Dutch novelist Cees Nooteboom. In his novel "Rituals," one of the protagonists expresses his regret that the word "God" sounds like an answer; instead, there should be a name for God that sounds like a question…

Abstracts

Die Begegnung mit anderen Kulturen ist in der Regel eine große Chance, neue Wege des Verstehens zu lernen und sich der eigenen Kultur bewusst zu werden. Die Autorin verweist auf ihre Erfahrungen insbesondere aus ihrer Zeit in Papua-Neuguinea. Dies betrifft vor allem den Umgang mit biblischen Texten und die Erweiterung des theologischen Horizonts und der Gotteserkenntnis. Im Blick auf die Mission ermöglichen die Perspektive der Mission Gottes und das Ernstnehmen der Kulturen mutigere Schritte der Inkulturation.

El encuentro con otras culturas suele ser una gran oportunidad para aprender nuevas formas de comprensión y para tomar conciencia de la propia cultura. La autora se refiere a su experiencia en particular de su estancia en Papúa Nueva Guinea. Se refiere sobre todo a la aproximación a los textos

bíblicos y a la ampliación de los horizontes teológicos y del conocimiento de Dios. En cuanto a la misión, la perspectiva de la misión de Dios y la toma en serio de las culturas permiten dar pasos más atrevidos en la inculturación.

La rencontre avec d'autres cultures est en général une grande chance pour s'ouvrir à de nouvelles façons de comprendre les choses et pour prendre conscience de sa propre culture. L'auteur se réfère à son expérience, en particulier lors de son séjour en Papouasie Nouvelle Guinée. Cela concerne nommément l'approche des textes bibliques, l'élargissement de ses horizons et la connaissance de la volonté de Dieu. Quant à la mission, le point de vue de la *missio Dei* et la prise au sérieux des cultures permettent des démarches plus osées en inculturation.

*Anthony Le Duc, SVD**

MISSIO DEI INSPIRED BY RELIGIONS: THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION DIMENSION

The concept of missio Dei *is an overarching perspective on mission. This article deals with the relationship of God's mission to other religious traditions, particularly from Asia, and their implication for the promotion of the integrity of creation. The author analyzes approaches to the elaboration of ecotheology under different epistemological premises arising from Asian religions. The reflection in the context of the Asian Bishops' Conferences plays an inspirational role. In the last section, the author delves into proposals of prophetic interreligious communication in different aspects in order to outline a creative engagement with present-day societies in order to arrive at ecological safeguarding as an element of* missio Dei *inspired by Asian religions and the overarching practical collaboration with believers of all faiths.*

1. Introduction

Missio Dei is a complex, multi-faceted reality with multiple components. According to Stephan Bevans and Roger Schroeder, contemporary mission is comprised of at least six key elements. First, it centers on bearing witness to and proclaiming the gospel of and about Jesus Christ. Second, mission is enacted through liturgical celebration, prayer, and contemplative practices. Third, justice, peace, and integrity of creation constitute an essential aspect of mission. Fourth, interreligious dialogue is integral to participating in God's global mission. Fifth, mission also entails adapting the gospel message to specific cultural contexts, a process often termed contextualization or incultur-

* Anthony Le Duc, SVD, is the Executive Director of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication at St. John's University, Bangkok (Thailand). He also serves as the chief editor of the Center's peer-reviewed journal, *Religion and Social Communication*, and lectures in the Faculty of Christian Studies at Saengtham College, Thailand. Le Duc's extensive writings cover religious environmentalism and the intersection of religion with contemporary issues such as digital development and migration.

ation. Lastly, mission necessitates the challenging task of reconciliation at all levels.[1] These elements are, of course, not isolated but intertwined and reinforcing of each other in various ways. For example, the work of building peace is also about working toward reconciliation between individuals and groups. Oftentimes, it requires not only interreligious dialogue but also persistent prayer and contemplation to undergird the work. Similarly, advocating for justice involves proclaiming the Good News of Jesus about the Kingdom of God characterized by peace, harmony, love, and justice. It also requires the advocate to be able to adapt or translate that message into the cultural context and social life-realities of the people affected by the advocacy.

In this essay, rather than discussing how religions inspire the *missio Dei* (or rather the church's participation in it) in general terms, I will focus on one key element of contemporary mission—promoting integrity of creation. In particular, I will discuss the effort at constructing an ecotheology in the Asian context. While the interest is on integrity of creation, we can already see that it involves multiple elements mentioned above. Specifically, this concerns the elements of contextualizing theological reflections to the ecological situation as well as the Asian religious and cultural milieu. The latter is done primarily through interreligious dialogue, in which insights from other Asian spiritual and religious traditions serve as profound inspiration for constructing an Asian ecotheology. Ultimately, Asian ecotheology aims to establish justice, peace, and reconciliation among humans and between human and non-human creation. The promotion of these values is integral to the task of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus about the nature of the Kingdom of God.

2. Toward an Asian Ecotheology

Ecotheology emerges as a discipline dedicated to exploring the theological foundations for comprehending the intricate relationship between the divine, humanity, and the totality of creation.[2] By synergizing theological reflection with lived experiences, this field acknowledges the profound influence of diverse cultural and religious perspectives on the formulation of effective responses to ecological challenges.

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1 Stephen B. Bevans, Migration and Mission: Pastoral Challenges, Theological Insights, in *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology,* edited by Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 162.

2 Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2008), xii.

In *Models of Contextual Theology*, Stephen Bevans asserted that theologies in the Praxis Model "take inspiration from neither classic texts nor classic behavior, but from present realities and future possibilities."[3] This model posits that theology is not merely an intellectual pursuit but a catalyst for social change. It emphasizes a cyclical process of reflection on the world, followed by action to address its injustices, which then leads to further reflection. Ecotheology in Asia, therefore, develops through dialogue with the region's contexts, namely, religions, cultures, and the social life-realities of its people. Incidentally, this reflects the triple dialogue proposed by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) as the primary modality for doing mission in Asia. In this essay, I will only focus on the first of the triple dialogue—dialogue with other Asian religions—in the process of constructing an Asian ecotheology.

2.1. Ecotheology Inspired by Asian Religions from the West

When speaking about ecotheology in Asia, we can think of two distinct possibilities of understanding the concept. On the one hand, it may refer to the prominent and popularly accepted ecotheology that has come to Asia, usually from the West where ecotheology emerged in the mid-twentieth century. Names most often mentioned include Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Paul Tillich, Jürgen Moltmann, Thomas Berry, and later on, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Sallie McFague. Most of the articulations, therefore, contain distinctly non-indigenous epistemological frameworks. Conversely, the phrase "ecotheology in Asia" can also refer to a distinct theological discourse organically developed within the socio-cultural milieu of Asia, thus constituting an indigenous mode of ecological reflection. In this essay, I will highlight both "imported" and "indigenously constructed" ecotheologies, but only in so far as they pertain to how they are inspired by Asian religions or have some affinity with Asian religious worldviews.

In reality, ecotheology in Asia is still very much influenced by the "imported" kind as can be seen in the citations of academic papers. When writing on the topic, Asian scholars in the region often draw upon the works of Western theologians for foundational insights. In addition to these notable scholars, for Catholic writers in the region, papal and other magisterial documents play a prominent role in their understanding and presentation of theological and spiritual principles for creation care.

[3] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 70.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the nuanced interplay between Western and Asian thought within ecotheology. While most Western ecotheologians indeed employ foundational principles and frameworks that reflect their Western background, there are some whose articulation of ecotheology also reveals significant influences from Asian philosophical and religious traditions. For instance, Thomas Berry's work exemplifies this interpenetration, as he early recognized the value of multiculturalism in his book titled *Five Oriental Philosophies*, first published in 1968: "Diversity is no longer something that we tolerate. It is something that we esteem as a necessary condition for a livable universe, as the source of Earth's highest perfection… To demand an undifferentiated unity would bring human thought and history itself to an end. The splendor of our multicultural world would be destroyed."[4]

Confucian thought significantly impacted Berry's understanding of the cosmic and human interconnectedness. Berry observed that "Confucian thought originates in the experience of an all-embracing harmony of the cosmic and human orders of reality. This intimate relationship between the cosmic and the human is expressed and perfected in an elaborate order of ritual and etiquette."[5] According to Mary Evelyn Tucker, a student of Berry, he recognized the human as the "understanding heart" of the universe within the Confucian cosmological order, emphasizing the importance of living in harmony with nature. Furthermore, the Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation, education, and societal improvement aligned with Berry's vision of ecological ethics and spirituality. He saw Confucianism as offering a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of all life and the continuity of being across various levels of reality. While acknowledging the gap between Confucian ideals and their implementation, Berry valued Confucianism as a dynamic tradition with the potential to inform contemporary environmental philosophy and ethics.[6] It is noteworthy, however, that Confucianism was not the sole Eastern tradition that influenced Berry's intellectual trajectory. His commitment to environmental ethics arose from decades of studying all major Asian traditions alongside Western intellectual history, ultimately culminating in his articulation of the "Universe Story."[7]

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4 Thomas Berry, *Five Oriental Philosophies* (Albany: Magi Books, 1968), 45-46.

5 Ibid., 21.

6 Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Biography of Thomas Berry," *Human and Nature*, March 13, 2016, https://humansandnature.org/biography-of-thomas-berry/

7 Ibid.

Thomas Merton, a contemporary of Thomas Berry, also exhibited a profound affinity for Asian spiritual traditions, particularly Buddhism and Taoism. Examining Merton's writings, Berry saw that they had a significant contribution to the sacralization of the cosmos, thereby facilitating a holistic understanding of the world.[8] Merton's integration of Eastern spiritual insights into his own theological reflections was recognized by Berry as a pivotal step toward a more inclusive spirituality capable of promoting a profound and authentic human existence. While Merton's work does not explicitly articulate a contemporary ecotheological paradigm, his writings nonetheless communicate a profound ecological consciousness and a spirituality deeply attuned to the interconnectedness of all beings.

Although explicit citations of Asian religious thought might be scarce among Western ecotheologians, some present ideas that resonate deeply with Asian spiritual sensibility. Ecofeminists like Sallie McFague and Rosemary Radford Ruether exemplify this phenomenon. McFague emphasizes the profound interconnectedness between humans and all life forms, both living and non-living.[9] Similarly, Ruether's ecological theology seeks to counteract dualist thinking by stressing the importance of community experience derived from the understanding of "the transience of selves, the living interdependency of all things, and the value of the personal in communion."[10] Instead of domination over nature, Ruether advocated for interdependence, mutuality, and a sense of kinship with the ecological world.[11] She argued that human efforts at self-aggrandizement disregard the reality of our interconnectedness and dependence on the natural world. We fail to recognize that our very survival hinges on aligning ourselves with the flourishing of the entire ecosystem.[12]

McFague and Ruether's ecological perspectives exhibit remarkable parallels with Asian spiritual worldviews. Their emphasis on cosmic interconnectedness and interdependence aligns with the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination that espouses that all phenomena in the universe arise in dependence upon other phenomena, forming an

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8 Thomas Berry, *Riverdale Papers* (Riverdale: New Riverdale Center for Religious Research, 1978), 17.

9 Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 108.

10 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 251.

11 Ibid., 256.

12 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Politics of God in the Christian Tradition," *Feminist Theology* 17, no. 3 (2009): 329-338. https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735009102362, 337.

intricate web of cause and effect. While McFague's framework is ostensibly grounded in scientific cosmology, the underlying principles of interdependence and mutual causality resonate deeply with Eastern thought. The unique position ascribed to humanity within this interconnected web, as a self-conscious entity capable of both profound connection and destructive impact, echoes the Buddhist understanding of human nature. This perspective acknowledges humanity's pivotal role in the cosmic order without granting it a central position with undue privileges. As McFague stated, "we are not the center of things by any stretch of the imagination, although in a curious reversal, we are becoming increasingly very important."[13]

In essence, these Western ecotheologians, even without explicit references, demonstrate how core Asian spiritual values can find expression within ecological thought. Contemporary theologians can make this more explicit by pointing out ways that Asian religious worldviews can enrich Western ecological articulations through converging notions and concepts.

2.2. Ecotheology Inspired by Asian Religions from Asia

Four decades ago, Taiwan-born Protestant theologian Choan-Seng Song, in his book *Theology from the Womb of Asia,* advocated for the expansion of the traditional theological imagination by incorporating the thoughts and experiences of the people in Asia.[14] This entails theologians, especially those of Asian background, being inspired and informed by their own indigenous resources. This endeavor, therefore, demands an active dialogue with Asian traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Taoism. And indeed, such dialogues have been taking place across various sectors of Asian Christianity.

Dialogue has long been the standard practice of the Christian Church in Asia, especially as delineated by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). Since its formal establishment in 1972, the Asian bishops have embraced dialogue as a key approach to engagement. During the First Plenary Assembly in 1974, the bishops affirmed that the church would maintain "continuous, humble, and loving dialogue" with the region's diverse traditions, cultures, and religions—in other words, with the entire fabric of life in Asia.[15] This

[13] McFague, *The Body of God*, 108.

[14] Choan-Seng Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

[15] James H. Kroeger, "Dialogue: Interpretive Key for the Life of the Church in Asia," FABC Papers 130, https://fabc.org/document/fabc-papers-130/, 2.

approach later became known as the *Triple Dialogue* or *Threefold Dialogue,* and it remains central to the Catholic Church's mission in Asia today. Notably, this method of engagement is not unique to the Catholic Church but reflects the broader attitude of Christian communities across the continent.[16] Christian mission in Asia continues to be shaped by the Triple Dialogue in its interactions with the poor and marginalized, its commitment to contextualization and interculturation, and its involvement in interfaith efforts.[17]

Therefore, the development of ecotheology in Asia is rooted in a dialogical approach. Some theologians have advocated for the creation of an interreligious ecotheology. Indian Catholic theologian Felix Wilfred noted that "today it is the earth that holds the prospect of bringing the religions together and so leading them to a meaningful dialogue on God and humanity."[18] He emphasized that a continuous dialogue centered on nature and the environment can broaden our understanding of human beings, creation, and God. Interreligious ecotheology seeks to cultivate a sense of interconnectedness and empathy across humanity, encouraging each religious tradition to examine how its values and beliefs contribute to the ecological crisis. At the same time, these traditions can offer insights and solutions by drawing attention to teachings that promote ecological harmony.[19]

Although creating a comprehensive interreligious ecotheology is a challenging goal, focusing on an ecotheology within a single religious tradition—such as Christian or Hindu ecotheology—may offer a more practical and impactful path. This is especially true in the growing area of Asian ecotheology, which frequently integrates Christian theological ideas with indigenous Asian religious and cultural perspectives. The following sections will delve into some ecotheological concepts that have arisen from this ongoing process of reflection and dialogue.

FABC's Theology of Harmony

The concept known as the "theology of harmony," as articulated by the FABC, has been applied to various contexts across Asia, addressing social, political, and ecological issues. The FABC noted that "harmony seems to constitute in a certain sense the intellectual and affective,

16 Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

17 Ibid., 257.

18 Felix Wilfred, "Toward Inter-Religious Eco-Theology," *Concilium* (2009), 43.

19 Ibid., 53.

religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia."[20] Examining the large body of documents that have come out of the FABC, we can see that an underpinning idea in its theological efforts has consistently been that of harmony.[21] Drawing on Asia's cultural-religious worldview, the FABC affirmed that "there is an Asian approach to reality, a world-view, wherein the whole is the sum-total of the web of relationships and interaction of the various parts with each other, in a word, *harmony*, a word which resonates with all Asian cultures."[22] The Christian God can be described as the "Lord of Harmony" or "Ultimate Harmony,"[23] actively working in a continent marked by a vast "diversity of beliefs, cultures, and socio-political systems" and riddled with conflicts.[24] The FABC highlighted harmony as a central focus because it represents both an authentically Asian and Christian value, offering a unique perspective on life.[25]

> Harmony can be perceived and realized at various levels: Harmony in oneself as personal integration of body and mind; harmony with the cosmos, not only living in harmony with nature, but sharing nature's gift equitably to promote harmony among peoples; harmony with others, accepting, respecting, and appreciating each one's cultural, ethnic, and religious identity, building community in freedom and fellowship; harmony in our collaboration as a means of promoting harmony for all in the world; and finally harmony with God or the Absolute or whatever we perceive as the ultimate goal of life.[26]

Thus, at the heart of this worldview is the Asian deep respect for mystery and the sacred, a spirituality that recognizes the sanctity of life and finds the presence of the Transcendent and its blessings in everyday matters, whether in moments of triumph or hardship, in

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[20] BIRA [Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs] IV/1 in FAPA I [Gaudencio B. Rosales, C. G. Arévalo SJ (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991,* Manila/Maryknoll, NY: Claretian Publications/Orbis Books 1992], 249.

[21] Edmund Chia, "Thirty Years of FABC: History, Foundation, Context and Theology," FABC Papers, no. 106 (2003), 16.

[22] FABC Papers 75, "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony," 1995, 66.

[23] Ibid., 6.

[24] "Journeying Together Toward the Third Millenium," July 17-27, 1990, Bandung, Indonesia. FABC V, 4.2. In FAPA I, 282.

[25] Grzegorz Wita, "Theology of Harmony in Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Documents," *Roczniki Teologii Fundamentalnej i Religiologii* 5 (2013): 139-155, esp. 140.

[26] 4 BIRA V/2 in FAPA II, 151.

fragmentation or completeness. This profound sense of interiority leads individuals toward harmony and inner peace, embedding a sense of ethics throughout all of creation.[27]

The FABC outlined Christian views on harmony as follows: First, the creation of the world signified the triumph of harmony over chaos. However, this original harmony was disrupted by human sin. Despite this, God's plan to restore harmony began with Christ, addressing the disharmony that had entered the world. This process of restoration was initiated through God's covenant with the people of Israel and ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Christ proclaimed the reality of peace and harmony in the Kingdom of God. Through His Paschal Mystery, Christ reconciled humanity with God, freeing them from sin and establishing them as children of God. Furthermore, through His Paschal Mystery, Christ brought about reconciliation among all people, uniting them as brothers and sisters under one divine Father. Christ accomplished this through His Church, which served as a sacrament of the Kingdom of God and its harmony.[28]

In the framework of the theology of harmony, ecotheology is not taken as a separate field but as integral to the Asian understanding of reality. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of all elements, where each part exists in relation to others. It highlights the mutual dependence among these components, wherein the whole is shaped by their interactions.[29] Consequently, the ecological crisis is viewed as a breakdown of the "triple harmony"—the relationship between the divine and humanity, between humans themselves, and between humanity and nature.[30] To address this, Christians are called to work with God as co-creators in actively contributing to the renewal of the universe and fostering the participation of both humanity and nature in this spirit of harmony.[31]

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27 7 Final Statement of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly. "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life." In FAPA II, 5. Cf. Jonathan Yun-ka Tan. "A New Way of Being Church in Asia: The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) at the Service of Life in Pluralistic Asia." *Missiology: An International Review* 33 (January 2005), 78-79.

28 FABC Papers 75, 36-40.

29 Ibid., 44.

30 FABC Papers 146, "Towards Responsible Stewardship of Creation: An Asian Christian Approach," June 2015, 57.

31 Ibid., 64.

Qi and Ecotheology

In addition to the work of the FABC, other scholars have explored various Asian concepts for insights into ecotheology. For instance, the Confucian idea of *qi* can be utilized to support a pneumatological approach to ecotheology. In his book *The Holy Spirit and Ch'i (Qi): A Chiological Approach to Pneumatology* (2012), Korean American theologian Koo Dong Yun advocated for understanding the Holy Spirit through this Asian concept.[32] In Confucian cosmology, *qi* plays a vital role, animating and sustaining all forms of life. It flows through humans, animals, plants, mountains, rivers, and even inanimate objects. *Qi* forms the essence of fundamental elements such as air, earth, fire, and water. The Chinese character for *qi* evokes the image of steam rising from rice, symbolizing its nourishing and transformative nature. For humans, *qi* is the life force that unites body and spirit, energizing the mind and heart in harmony.[33] This comprehensive view of *qi* breaks down dualism while upholding the deep connection between humans and nature, body and mind, and matter and energy.[34]

In classical Confucianism, *qi* was seen as the life force that connects and sustains everything in nature and humanity. Neo-Confucianism further developed this idea, describing *qi* as the fundamental energy and essence of all living things, present throughout the universe in both materialistic and energetic forms. Neo-Confucianists saw the universe as organized into different levels and domains of *qi*. The flow of *qi* is closely linked to the interaction between *yin* and *yang*, two opposite but complementary forces. These interactions have a universal impact, influencing everything from simple to complex aspects of life, where heavenly and earthly elements, the high and the low, and movement and stillness all blend together in harmony. This duality helps explain the ongoing changes and transitions in the world. The constant flow and balance of *yin* and *yang* create an interconnectedness among all things, maintaining a delicate balance and continuity that forms the essence of existence itself.[35]

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[32] Koo Dong Yun, *The Holy Spirit and Ch'i (Qi): A Chiological Approach to Pneumatology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publication, 2012).

[33] Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Confucian Cosmology and Ecological Ethics," in *Living Earth Community: Multiple Ways of Being and Knowing*, ed. Sam Mickey, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2020), 111.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Brasovan Nicholas S., *Neo-Confucian Ecological Humanism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2017), 17.

As described above, *qi* is not a static or abstract idea but a dynamic, life-giving force that permeates all of existence. Given its central role in Confucian philosophy, spirituality, and ethics, *qi* can be used as a foundation for developing an ecotheology. Kok-Weng Chiang and Geoffrey Tan noted that "the pneumatological triad of Creator (Spirit), Nature and the human interacts well with the Confucian concept of Heaven [*Qi*], Earth, and human, hence forming a very natural contextual bridge for these two dialogue partners."[36] This approach combines a pneumatological understanding of the relationships between Spirit, humanity, and creation with East Asian Confucian thought, particularly those centered on *qi* and human nature.[37]

Theanthropocosmic Vision

In response to the contemporary ecological context, Korean theologian Heup Young Kim introduced the concept of a "theanthropocosmic vision" as the foundation for Christian theology. Kim asserted that this vision challenges the traditional anthropocentric focus of theology, advocating instead for a triadic communion of God, the cosmos, and humanity. According to Kim, "God, humans, and the cosmos constitute three inseparable and concentric axes of one reality." His approach moves beyond the binary thinking of traditional Western theology by opting for a "both-and" perspective that embraces pluralism and interconnectedness. Drawing from East Asian religious traditions' beliefs in the triadic relationship of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity, Kim advocated for a blend of Christian theology, East Asian spirituality, and ecology to develop a new ecotheological framework. This theanthropocosmic paradigm highlights the interdependence and unity of God, humanity, and the cosmos.[38]

Building on this idea, the Confucian concept of the Heaven – Earth (Nature) – Human relationship offers a model for understanding the interconnectedness of humans, the divine, and the environment. In Chinese philosophy, this triad represents ultimate harmony, and Confucian ethics emphasize the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship between individuals and the natural world. This principle is outlined in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which upholds virtuous behavior, respect for universal order, responsible governance, and the

[36] Kok-Weng Chiang and Geoffrey Tan, "A Pneumatological Eco-theology from an East Asian Confucian Perspective," *Asia Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (2012): 16.

[37] Ibid., 10-12.

[38] Heup Young Kim, "Life, Ecology, and Theo-Tao: Towards a Life Theology of Theanthropocosmic Tao." 2009 GTU Convocation.

cultivation of sincerity in character to maintain balance. Achieving this harmony between human actions and the environment is essential for preserving both ecological and spiritual well-being.[39]

Kim also proposed "Theo-Tao" as a new paradigm for a holistic, life-affirming, and ecologically conscious worldview. Theo-Tao emphasizes the search for the theanthropocosmic Tao, the ultimate Way in which the Heavenly way, the human way, and the earthly way are united. This paradigm moves beyond traditional Christian metaphors, especially Logos (word, reason), which has dominated for centuries. Logos, rooted in Greek dualism, has been overly focused on rationality, often neglecting the dynamic and transformative aspects of existence. Theo-Tao, in contrast, advocates for Tao as a more fitting metaphor for Christian theology because it encapsulates both being (the source) and becoming (transformative action). This shift is supported by Jesus' identification as "the Way" (Tao) in John 14:6. By claiming to be the way, Jesus suggests that his teachings embody a path of life and spiritual journey, rather than merely a rational doctrine to be adhered to.

According to Kim, "Theo-Tao" calls for a theology that goes beyond orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxis (right practice), and instead focuses on ortho-tao, the right way of life. It advocates for a holistic participation in the cosmic and spiritual trajectory, where knowing and acting are unified. Theo-Tao emphasizes love, positioning it as the central theme of theology, moving away from the traditional focus on faith (theology) and hope (theopraxis). This love-centered approach seeks to embody the wisdom and transformative praxis of living in alignment with the divine, human, and natural worlds, contributing to a deeper cosmic reconciliation and sanctification. Furthermore, the term "Christo-Tao" is proposed as an alternative to Christology and Christo-praxis. It presents Jesus not merely as the Logos or a figure of social action but as the Tao—the Way that unites the human and cosmic realms through his crucifixion and resurrection. In this view, Jesus' sacrifice and renewal represent a cosmic event that extends beyond humanity, lighting up the entire universe and achieving a union between God, humanity, and creation.

Additionally, Theo-Tao embraces a life-affirming and ecological vision that critiques traditional Western theology's preoccupation with being and substantialism. Instead, it aligns with the Eastern principle of being-in-non-being, which is central to both creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) and Eastern apophatic traditions. This vision also incorporates a feminine, life-giving perspective, drawing from the *Tao-*

[39] Kok-Weng Chiang, "Theology, Ecology and Economics from an East Asian Confucian Perspective," *Madang* 19 (June 2013): 70.

Te Ching's metaphor of Tao as the "mother of all things." By celebrating the feminine aspect of creation and advocating for the power of weakness and emptiness, Theo-Tao offers a theology that is both ecologically responsible and spiritually profound; it embodies a wisdom that seeks unity and balance in the cosmic order.

3. Interreligious Prophetic Communication to Promote Ecological Safeguarding

3.1. Prophetic Role in the Interreligious Context

In the previous sections, I presented how the element of care for creation in the *missio Dei*, particularly in the development of an Asian ecotheology, has been inspired by age-old Asian religious and spiritual traditions. In this section, I will propose a strategy to further advance this aspect of the *missio Dei* by fostering a unified religious voice that advocates for an ecological civilization. "Ecological civilization" is a paradigm that envisions a society where humans and nature coexist harmoniously, integrating ecological principles into governance, economy, culture, and lifestyle. It prioritizes justice, efficiency, harmony, and cultural development, aiming for fairness, sustainable productivity, and balance between human activity and nature.[40] Practical elements include transitioning to renewable energy, promoting sustainable urbanization and industry, protecting biodiversity, establishing ecological institutions, and ensuring equitable resource distribution. This concept calls for a systemic transformation that addresses the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues to attain long-term sustainability.[41]

Achieving an ecological civilization necessitates a more profound transformation than is commonly recognized. While solutions such as renewable energy are important, a systemic shift grounded in ecological principles is essential. This is because social and environmental issues are interlinked and require interconnected solutions that benefit the collective good.[42] According to John B. Cobb, Jr., achieving

[40] Pan Jiahua, "Ecological Civilization: A New Development Paradigm," *CCICED*, July 13, 2020, https://cciced.eco/environmental-industries/ecological-civilization-a-new-development-paradigm/.

[41] Spencer Scott, "An Ecological Civilization Is the Renaissance We've Been Waiting for," *One Earth*, September 27, 2023, https://www.oneearth.org/ecological-civilization/.

[42] Philip Clayton and Wm. Andrew Schwartz, *What Is Ecological Civilization?: Crisis, Hope, and the Future of the Planet* (Kindle ed. Process Century Press, 2019).

ecological civilization demands not only technological and scientific approaches but also profound spiritual and cultural shifts.[43] Toward this end, religious institutions, especially through their prophetic voices, have an essential role to play.

The term "prophet" has multiple meanings. In addition to being a predictor of future events, the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary also defines a prophet as "one who utters divinely inspired revelations" and "one gifted with more than ordinary spiritual and moral insight." The first definition of "prophet" fits theistic religious systems such as those belonging to the Abrahamic traditions. The second definition can be applied to all religious traditions, including atheistic ones such as Buddhism and Confucianism. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, being prophetic historically involved acting as a spokesperson for God, delivering messages that were divinely inspired and often aimed at calling people back to faithfulness, justice, and righteousness. Prophets were seen as individuals chosen by God to convey God's will and purpose to the people. This divine inspiration often involved receiving visions, dreams, theophany,[44] or direct communications from God, making the prophetic message authoritative and carrying the weight of divine truth.

At the heart of the prophet's role lay a call to repentance and fidelity to the covenant. Prophets constantly reminded the people of their covenant with God and exhorted them to forsake idolatry, injustice, and moral decay. This plea for repentance was frequently accompanied by warnings of impending doom should the people remain unyielding and obstinate (cf. Jer 25:4-7; Ezek 18:30-32; Hos 6:1; Isa 1:16-20; Mic 6:8; Joel 2:1-2). Another defining characteristic of prophetic activity was a fervent advocacy for social justice. Prophets tirelessly denounced oppression, exploitation, and inequality, reminding their audience that genuine worship of God entails just and compassionate treatment of one's fellow beings (cf. Amos 5:24; Isa 58:6-7; Jer 22:3; Zech 7:9-10).

While forthtelling—addressing present conditions and moral states—was a primary function, prophets also foretold future events, particularly concerning God's plans for judgment and redemption. These predictions served to validate the prophet's message and underscored the urgency of repentance. Prophecies about the coming

[43] John B. Cobb, Jr., "Necessities for an Ecological Civilization." Speech delivered at a conference of Chinese delegates at the Claremont School of Theology, May 3-4, 2010, Religion Online, https://www.religion-online.org/article/necessities-for-an-ecological-civilization/

[44] Elena Morcov, "Divine Revelation in the Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 51 (2023): 334–341.

Messiah, as seen in the writings of Isaiah and Micah, sustained hope for future restoration and salvation (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; Mic 5:2). This dual role of foretelling and forthtelling adds depth to the prophetic mission, linking present behavior with future consequences and promises.

In Islam, as in the Judeo-Christian context, the prophetic role is significant. Prophets, known as "*Anbiya*" (singular: *Nabi*) or "*Rasul*" (messenger), were chosen by Allah to convey divine messages. Their mission included guiding people toward righteousness, teaching monotheism, and establishing moral and ethical codes based on revelation.[45] Central to the prophetic mission was the call to monotheism, or "*Tawhid*," which is the belief in the oneness of Allah. Prophets spoke emphatically of the singular divinity of Allah; none other was worthy of worship. They endeavored to purge idolatry and polytheism from the hearts and minds of their people.

Prophets also called on the people to live according to the moral principles of justice, honesty, compassion, and humility.[46] Similar to the prophets in Israel, social justice is a recurring theme in the messages of the prophets of Islam. They spoke against oppression, exploitation, and inequality and advocated for the rights of the poor, orphans, and marginalized members of society.[47] The prophets in Islam consistently balanced between words of stern warning and comfort, affirming of grave consequences for disobedience and promising rewards for submission to divine commands. The outcomes were both immediate and eschatological. They offered the faithful a glimpse of paradise while cautioning the disbelievers of the fiery torments of hell (Surah An-Naba 78:36; Surah Al-Baqarah 2:81).

Beyond their role as divine messengers, prophets in Islam exemplified piety and righteousness. Muslims, aspiring to deepen their faith and align their actions with divine expectations, study and emulate their lives. The *Sunnah*, a compendium of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings, actions, and approvals, provides a practical blueprint for living in accordance with Islamic principles. Muslims venerate the Prophet Muhammad as the "*Uswatun Hasana*" (the best example),

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[45] Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu, "Revelation and Prophethood in the Islamic Worldview." *Journal of Islam in Asia* 6, no. 1 (2009): 167–189. https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v6i1.5.

[46] Juliyana Junaidi, Latifah Abdul Majid, and Mohd Arif Nazri. "Relational Justice in the Prophetic Tradition: An Analysis of Selected Hadith." *Islamiyyat* 45, no. 2 (2023): 65–75. https://doi.org/10.17576/islamiyyat-2023-4502-05.

[47] Muhammad Najmuddin, Muhammad Amri, and Andi Aderus, "Prophetic Communication: Islam as Knowledge Practice," *Palakka: Media and Islamic Communication* 3, no. 2 (2022): 98-111.

whose life offers comprehensive guidance for all aspects of personal and communal life.[48]

Beyond the Abrahamic traditions, the prophetic role often involves proclaiming spiritual and moral truths that illuminate a path away from self-destruction and suffering. In Buddhism, being prophetic is intimately tied to proclaiming messages that resonate with the Buddha's teachings. Having attained enlightenment through his own endeavors, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, imparted teachings known as the Dharma. These profound moral and spiritual guidelines aim to alleviate suffering and liberate individuals from the mundane cycle of existence. The Buddha's insights, considered extraordinary for their revelation of reality's true nature, guide practitioners toward ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom. Thus, in Buddhism, those dedicated to learning and living in accordance with the Dharma can fulfil a prophetic role by sharing insights and practices that alleviate suffering and foster ethical living. The Buddha's principal disciples, Mahākāśyapa and Ānanda, deeply versed in the Buddha's teachings, strove to carry on his legacy through their ascetic practices and efforts to compile and preserve his sermons and pronouncements.[49] While often associated with members of the Sangha, lay practitioners and teachers who have dedicated themselves to understanding the Dharma can offer invaluable guidance to others.

In Confucianism, prophetic qualities are historically embodied in sages and exemplary figures who possess profound moral insight and wisdom, often rooted in their understanding of harmony, righteousness, and propriety. Among these sages, Confucius, the namesake of the spiritual tradition, stands as a paragon since his teachings on ethics, proper conduct, and social harmony have exerted a lasting influence on East Asian culture and thought. Figures like Confucius and his student, Mencius, serve as moral beacons who offered guidance that springs from their deep comprehension of human nature and the needs of society. With teachings espousing virtues such as filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness, they established a robust framework for ethical behavior and sound governance. The prophetic essence in Confucianism resides in the sages' capacity to discern the moral path

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[48] M.H.M.B.A. Ahmad, *Muhammad the Great Exemplar*, trans. Khalifatul-Masih II, Present English Edition (UK: Islam International Publications Ltd, 2017).

[49] Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism, and Millennial Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). V.S. Dhammika, *The Buddha and His Disciples* (Singapore: Buddha Dhamma Mandala Society, n.d.).

and inspire others to cultivate the virtues that foster personal growth and social harmony.

In contemporary society, there exist individuals who, though they may not achieve sage status, can still assume a significant prophetic role. These individuals contribute to the dissemination and embodiment of Confucian values to help guide society in ethical and moral matters. In this tradition, teachers and scholars occupy pivotal positions. Confucianism places immense value on education and the role of educators. Although not necessarily sages, these individuals fulfil a prophetic function by imparting Confucian ideals and wisdom to their students. Through their teachings, they preserve and transmit Confucian values, thereby shaping the moral character of future generations. Scholars engage in the interpretation and expansion of Confucian thought, participating in scholarly discourse that keeps these teachings vibrant and relevant. Their intellectual endeavors ensure that Confucian principles continue to inform ethical conduct and social relations, which helps to extend the legacy of wisdom and virtue within the family and community.

In brief, while manifestations of prophetic communication vary from one religious tradition to another, individuals who exercise prophetic communication aim to speak what they perceive to be the truth for the good of individuals and communities. Ultimately, the purpose of religious prophetic communication is to affirm, stimulate imagination, clarify misunderstanding, inspire action, and confront death-dealing realities.[50]

3.2. Religious Prophetic Communication in the Ecological Context

In their own unique contexts, religious voices can promote an ecological ethos in society by carrying out the following five elements of prophetic communication:

(1) communicating from a position of faith;

(2) communicating in a contextually relevant manner;

(3) communicating to energize;

(4) communicating to criticize; and

(5) communicating beyond words.

[50] Stephen Bevans, "Witness and Proclamation as Prophetic Dialogue," in *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, ed. I.J.K. Kodithuwakku (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2022), 245-255.

Communicating From a Position of Faith

Religious prophetic communication is never done from a neutral position but always from the stance of faith.[51] This faith typically involves a profound belief in the divine, whether it's in a monotheistic deity (such as God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the cosmic order (as in Hinduism), or in enlightened principles (as in Buddhism). Those who engage in prophetic communication do so with a fundamental trust in the truths they proclaim—not *their* truths—but revelations or insights granted through divine inspiration, spiritual enlightenment, or moral clarity. Pope Francis asserted, "The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity."[52] The sentiments expressed by Pope Francis regarding the Christian context could represent those who come from other religious traditions. Indeed, the Dalai Lama has been quoted as saying, "The whole purpose of religion is to facilitate love and compassion, patience, tolerance, humility, and forgiveness."

The stance of faith implies a firm commitment to the beliefs, values, and teachings of the religious tradition. Prophetic communicators often speak from personal conviction and dedication to upholding and transmitting these beliefs. Speaking from a position of faith requires boldness and truthfulness in the face of social trends and tides that may oppose the presence of religion in the public arena. Sometimes, speaking from a position of faith is done in anguish and sternness, not out of hatred or condescension toward the listener, but out of deep care and concern for their well-being.[53]

In the context of ecological issues, prophetic communication from the stance of faith carries significant implications. It suggests that calls for ecological stewardship, justice, and sustainability are not merely pragmatic or scientific appeals but are deeply rooted in ethical imperatives derived from religious teachings. For instance, in Judeo-Christian traditions, the mandate to care for creation (Gen 1:28) or the prophetic calls for justice and righteousness extend to environmental concerns. The FABC echoed Pope Francis in declaring that "we are

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[51] Society of the Divine Word (SVD), *Documents of the XV General Chapter SVD,* Rome: SVD Publications, 2000.

[52] Pope Francis, *Encyclical Laudato Si'* (2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[53] Stephen Bevans, "Mission as Prophetic Dialogue," 2012. Retrieved from https://relforcon.org/files/bevans.schroder.mission_as_prophetic_dialogue.pdf.

called to a pastoral and ecological conversion to positively respond to 'both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor'."[54]

Similarly, in Buddhism, the interconnectedness of all life and the imperative to alleviate suffering encompass ecological responsibilities as part of a broader ethical framework. We are reminded that, just as a person instinctively withdraws from the idea of suffering and values their own life, other sentient beings do the same (*Dhammapada*, 129-130). Thus, suffering should not be inflicted on others intentionally, mercilessly, and wantonly. The decision to ignore this injunction leads to real consequences, if not in the present life, then in a future existence.

Speaking from a position of faith, in the context of Islam, entails evaluating all human activities concerning the ecology within the framework of submission to Allah. Islam teaches that humans are stewards (*khalifah*) of the Earth, entrusted with its care and responsible for maintaining its balance. The Qur'an teaches that the Earth must not be corrupted after it has been set in order (Qur'an 7:56) and highlights the interdependence of all living creatures (Qur'an 6:38). The Prophet Muhammad also advocated for sustainable living by exercising moderation and conservation of resources. For example, he advised against wastefulness even when using abundant resources such as water (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, 425). Therefore, in Islam, ecological responsibility is not just an ethical choice but a religious obligation, which requires commitment to living in harmony with Allah's creation and upholding the trust placed in humanity as guardians of the Earth.[55]

Communicating in a Contextually Relevant Manner

Religious prophetic communication is critical in highlighting religious principles to advocate against harmful situations and promote beneficial ones. Effective prophetic communication requires more than moral exhortation; it demands genuine community commitment and contextual understanding from the speaker. Prophetic figures do not, as a Vietnamese expression goes, "ride a horse to admire flowers," but are deeply embedded in their communities, listening to concerns,

[54] FABC, "FABC 50th Year Celebrations: Message from the FABC General Conference to the Peoples of Asia," November 21, 2022, https://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/2022/11/21/25900/.

[55] Anthony Le Duc, "Responsibility as a Primary Environmental Virtue in Islam," *Asian Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2023): 187-206, https://doi.org/10.55927/ajpr.v2i1.4821.

struggles, and aspirations to ensure their advocacy resonates authentically.[56]

The prophetic voice gains credibility and impact from its intimate connection to the community. Through respectful, mutual dialogue, prophetic figures express the moral imperatives of their faith traditions in relevant and meaningful ways. This approach enables them to address systemic issues and advocate for changes that pertain directly to the lives of the people involved.

Grounded in genuine community engagement, prophetic communication can catalyze profound social and environmental transformation. While climate change and other crises are global, their effects and solutions vary by context. A conscientious effort to listen, learn, and experience challenges alongside the community is imperative before making pronouncements. This localized approach recognizes that environmental safeguarding strategies must be adaptable to particular circumstances with varying cultural, social, and economic factors. Top-down approaches often fail to resonate with local communities, leading to impractical or counterproductive solutions. For example, well-meaning environmental policies may overlook traditional knowledge and practices of Indigenous Peoples, resulting in more harm than good done to local communities. Words from uninformed individuals can be met with resistance and rejection, especially when coming from outside the community.

Communicating to Energize

A prophet's role in religious communication extends beyond mere information delivery. They serve as catalysts of transformation by offering an eschatological vision that illuminates potential futures, both positive and negative. Through their energizing words, prophets herald a divine providence and challenge prevailing norms. According to theologian Walter Brueggemann, "It is the task of the prophet to bring to expression the new realities against the more visible ones of the old order. Energizing is closely linked to hope. We are energized not by that which we already possess but by that which is promised and about to be given."[57]

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[56] Stephen Bevans and Cathy Ross, *Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context, and Prophetic Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

[57] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 14.

Energizing communication aims to shatter the mindset that genuine transformation is impossible. In many societies, people have grown weary of the status quo, despite shifts in leadership and lofty promises. Brueggemann remarked, "If there is any point at which most of us are manifestly co-opted, it is in this way. We do not believe that there will be newness but only that there will be merely a moving of the pieces into new patterns. It is precisely the prophet who speaks against such managed data and who can energize toward futures that are genuinely new and not derived."[58]

Energizing prophetic communication involves embracing diverse perspectives and empowering marginalized voices. Engaging with scientific and technological communities through dialogue is essential. Despite being the cause of tremendous environmental harms, modern technology, particularly artificial intelligence, offers solutions for sustainable resource management and conservation. Engaging with scientists enhances the credibility and effectiveness of environmental messages. Recent religious statements on climate change often cite scientific facts before laying out relevant teachings, countering misinformation and climate change denial.

Religion also plays a significant role by highlighting Indigenous wisdom, which encourages sustainable behaviors and provides valuable ecological understanding. Collaborating with Indigenous communities can lead to practical solutions. Religion, in its prophetic capacity, can amplify the voices of Indigenous peoples globally.[59]

Energizing prophetic communication involves collaborative efforts for tangible environmental actions, including advocacy, educational initiatives, conservation projects, sustainable investments, awareness campaigns, and global-local partnerships. Interreligious dialogue allows faith actors to find common ground and shared values, contributing to positive environmental outcomes. Most importantly, religious prophetic communication must adopt a "with" rather than "for" approach in addressing ecological concerns. This means dialoguing with those most impacted by environmental degradation, especially women,[60] children,[61] and the poor. These vulnerable groups must be

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58 Ibid.

59 Anthony Le Duc, "Interculturality as Paradigm to Promote Social and Environmental Sustainability," *Problemy Ekorozwoju – Problems of Sustainable Development* 19, no. 1 (2024): 148-158.

60 Justin Winters and Lindsey Jean Schueman, "Why Women Are Key to Solving the Climate Crisis," *One Earth*, June 5, 2024, https://www.oneearth.org/why-women-are-key-to-solving-the-climate-crisis/.

61 *New York Times*, "What Teenagers Are Saying About Their Role in Fighting Climate Change," October 12, 2023, https://www.nytimes.

empowered to be part of the solutions rather than having solutions imposed on them without consultation.

Communicating to Criticize

The converse of energizing prophetic communication is criticizing prophetic communication, which often involves speaking truth to power[62] or speaking "against the moral evil and apostasy of the world and societies."[63] Prophetic critics strive to cut through societal norms that obscure moral truths.[64] By raising counter-cultural voices to challenge prevailing narratives and expose systemic injustices, prophetic communicators disrupt indifference and complacency while provoking introspection. Their critique calls for recognizing and confronting uncomfortable truths about inequality, exploitation, environmental degradation, and other social and ethical issues threatening human dignity and planetary well-being.

An indispensable element of criticizing prophetic communication is confronting power structures that perpetuate or exacerbate injustice and inequality. Prophetic critics demand that those in authority be held to ethical standards informed by religious values and human rights principles. They oppose policies and actions that prioritize profit over people, exploit natural resources irresponsibly, and maintain systems of oppression.

In the context of the ecological crisis, religion calls for a different paradigm for human development that does not jeopardize environmental and societal well-being. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a Muslim scholar, has for decades highlighted scientism as a major cause of the ecological crisis. Since the late 1960s, Nasr has continually critiqued Western philosophical traditions for prioritizing empirical observation and technological progress, leading to a worldview that marginalizes spiritual dimensions of knowledge and fosters anthropocentrism. Nasr warned, "Nothing is more dangerous in the current ecological debate

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com/2023/10/12/learning/what-teenagers-are-saying-about-their-role-in-fighting-climate-change.html#:~:text=Glen%20Ellyn%2C%20IL-,%E2%80%9CClimate%20change%20shouldn't%20be%20our%20problem%2C%20but%20that,Adults%20have%20tried.

62 Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

63 James M. Gustafson, *Varieties of Moral Discourse: Prophetic, Narrative, Ethical and Policy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College and Seminary Press, 1988).

64 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 45.

than that scientistic view of man and nature which cuts man from his spiritual roots and takes a desacralized nature for granted."[65]

In the same vein, Pope Francis has critiqued what he calls the "technocratic paradigm," which prioritizes technological progress and economic growth over ethical considerations and ecological sustainability.[66] This reductionist view commodifies nature and leads to environmental degradation, pollution, and resource depletion. Pope Francis argued that instrumental rationality reduces complex ecological issues to technical challenges, neglecting moral considerations and exacerbating inequalities, especially among the poor and vulnerable.

Similarly, writing from the Confucian perspective, Tu Weiming asserted that the Confucian worldview contrasts with the Enlightenment mentality, which focuses on the self and community but overlooks Earth and Heaven. In contrast, the Confucian worldview calls for the integration of the body, heart, mind, soul, and spirit of the self. This integration results in actions and interactions that promote harmony at all levels, from the home to the world and beyond.[67]

Buddhist voices have also continually called for the re-examination of the present model of development. According to Laszlo Zsolnai, while the Western economic model aims to maximize profits, Buddhist economic framework aims to minimize suffering of sentient beings.[68] Buddhist prophetic voices have pointed out that we cannot cling to the misguided belief that endless economic expansion and ever-increasing Gross Domestic Product are the hallmarks of a successful society. We cannot continue to believe that high levels of production and consumption are synonymous with national progress. This delusion blinds us to the interconnectedness of all things and perpetuates a system that prioritizes short-term gains over long-term well-being. True progress must encompass the well-being of both humanity and the environment.[69,]

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[65] Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1990).

[66] Pope Francis, *Encyclical Laudato Si'* (2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[67] Weiming Tu, "The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism: Implications for China and the World," *Daedalus* 130, no. 4 (2001): 243-264.

[68] Laszlo Zsolnai, "Buddhism and Economic Development," in *Teaching Buddhism: New Insights on Understanding and Presenting the Traditions*, eds. Todd Lewis and Gary deAngelis (New York: Oxford Academic, 2016; online edn).

[69] Sulak Sivaraksa, *The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the 21st Century* (Kihei, HI: Koa Books, 2009). P. A. Payutto, *Buddhist*

Prophetic communication requires active engagement with those driving unethical innovations that harm the environment. The swift pace of technological progress, exemplified by the rise of data centers and the accumulation of electronic waste, poses serious threats to both ecosystems and public health. In response, the need for digital sustainability has never been more urgent. This requires adopting practices that mitigate the harmful effects of technology and promote more mindful, responsible consumption. In championing the cause of environmental safeguarding, religious prophetic communicators not only hold tech corporations but also other business entities, policymakers, organizations, and individuals accountable for the damage they inflict on the planet.

Communicating Beyond Words

Communication does not only take place with words but also with action. Religious prophetic communication in environmental care extends beyond rhetoric to tangible actions, with religious leaders and institutions leading by example to foster greater environmental awareness and responsibility within their communities and beyond. These organizations play a pivotal role in environmental stewardship by implementing sustainable practices such as reducing energy consumption, increasing recycling efforts, and using eco-friendly materials for construction and maintenance. Embracing renewable energy sources like solar or wind power not only reduces carbon footprints but also underscores a commitment to clean energy and sustainability. For instance, under Pope Benedict XVI's leadership, the Vatican installed 2400 solar panels in 2008 and later took steps such as banning single-use plastic bags in 2019.[70] Moreover, the Vatican has committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, setting a significant precedent in environmental leadership.

Another influential religious figure exemplifying prophetic environmental leadership is the Gyalwang Drukpa, spiritual leader of the Drukpa Lineage in Tibetan Buddhism and founder of the humanitarian organization Live to Love. Recognizing the Himalayan region's ecological fragility, he has spearheaded initiatives to restore degraded areas through tree-planting campaigns, mobilizing monastic communities and locals alike. His efforts have been recognized globally, earning

Economics: A Middle Way for the Marketplace, http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~sprapant/Buddhism/buddhist_econ.html#Wealth%20and%20Spiritual%20Development.

70 Associated Press, "First Solar Panels Installed on Vatican Roof," *NBC News*, September 30, 2008, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna26946700.

him the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Award from the United Nations in 2010 for his commitment to turning compassion into action.[71]

Another notable voice in Buddhist environmental advocacy is Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, an American scholar and Theravada monk, renowned for his proactive approach to addressing the ecological crisis. As founder and chair of Buddhist Global Relief (BGR), Bhikkhu Bodhi has focused on combatting hunger and poverty while aligning these efforts with Buddhist principles of compassion and social responsibility. To translate Buddhist values into practical solutions, BGR implements projects that promote sustainable agriculture and community development in vulnerable regions. Additionally, Bhikkhu Bodhi serves as a spiritual ambassador for the interfaith climate change movement Our Voices, which advocates for environmental awareness and policy change on a global scale.[72]

The way individual religious leaders live their everyday life is also impactful. Pope Francis' choice of a simple, everyday vehicle during his visit to Jakarta in September 2024 as part of his four-country Apostolic visit to Asia reflects his commitment to a life of humility and simplicity. Rather than accepting the planned motorcade and luxurious accommodations offered by the Indonesian government, the pope opted to travel in a modest white Toyota Innova, a vehicle commonly used by the public, and stayed at the Vatican Embassy instead of a high-end hotel.[73] With the eyes of the world following his every move, no doubt Pope Francis wanted this action to reinforce a broader message of living simply and rejecting excess, aligning with his teachings on caring

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71 PR Newswire, "Mexico City Legislative Assembly Honours Indian Buddhist Spiritual Head - The Gyalwang Drukpa," July 25, 2014, https://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/mexico-city-legislative-assembly-honours-indian-buddhist-spiritual-head---the-gyalwang-drukpa-268600502.html.

72 Raymond Lam, "Conscientious Compassion—Bhikkhu Bodhi on Climate Change, Social Justice, and Saving the World," *Buddhistdoor Global*, August 14, 2015, https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/conscientious-compassionmdashbhikkhu-bodhi-on-climate-change-social-justice-and-saving-the-world/.

73 Yustinus Paat and Mita Amalia Hapsari, "Pope Francis Rides Regular Toyota, Waves to Crowd from Open Window," *Jakarta Globe*, September 3, 2024, https://jakartaglobe.id/news/pope-francis-rides-regular-toyota-waves-to-crowd-from-open-window#:~:text=Pope%20Francis%20Rides%20Regular%20Toyota%2C%20Waves%20to%20Crowd%20from%20Open%20Window,-Yustinus%20Paat%2C%20Mita&text=Jakarta.,Embassy%20in%20Jakarta%20on%20Tuesday.

for the environment and promoting equality, as he continues to embody a lifestyle that speaks to solidarity with ordinary people.

Gandhi's timeless admonition, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world," holds great relevance for religious leadership. As spiritual guides entrusted with the care of congregations and communities, religious leaders possess a unique capacity to elevate environmental consciousness by exemplifying sustainable practices in their personal lives. This entails advocating for simplicity, embracing eco-friendly modes of transportation, and striving to minimize their individual carbon footprints. When religious leaders harmonize their actions with their teachings on environmental stewardship, they enhance their credibility and inspire others to follow suit. Through the tangible integration of sustainable practices into their daily lives and institutional operations, religious leaders relate a clear message of environmental responsibility to their followers and the broader community. Witnessing religious leaders actively embody these environmental values serves as a compelling impetus for faithful adherents to adopt similar practices in their everyday life.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this essay, I have illustrated how integrity of creation, or ecological safeguarding, as an element of *missio Dei* can be inspired by religions as well as in collaboration with other religions through shared prophetic communication. This essay has demonstrated that ecotheology in Asia is built partly on dialogue with Asian religions. However, dialogue and prophetic speech is not only used to achieve conceptual objectives but also to foster practical collaboration. Writing from the East Asian context, Anna Kirkpatrick-Jung and Tanya Riches asserted, "As the church in East Asia plays a minority role, any truly effective action undertaken is likely to emerge from a dialogue that represents the community's diversity."[74] Thus, there need to be collaborative community conversations in Asia to reflect and take advantage of the region's diversity, intersectionality, and complexity. In the process, various platforms must be curated for such dialogues and developing civil engagement around ecologically beneficial practices. These conversations should involve diverse representatives from local contexts to facilitate the translation of ecotheologies and effectively address the ecological crisis. Additionally, the interfaith ecotheological dialogues must also include partners from the scientific community

[74] Anna Kirkpatrick-Jung and Tanya Riches, "Towards East Asian Ecotheologies of Climate Crisis," *Religions* 11 (2020): 341. doi:10.3390/rel11070341

and other secular institutions. Thus, the existing pluralism in Asia can be seen as valuable assets to inform ecotheological actions that are tailored to each specific context while also having potential applicability across the region.[75] Ultimately, as active participants in God's mission, the Church's most significant contribution will not merely be to assert its prophetic voice but also to be inclusive of other voices that contribute to positive outcomes for the Kingdom of God.

ABSTRACTS

Das Konzept der *missio Dei* ist eine übergreifende Perspektive von Mission. Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit der Beziehung der *missio Dei* zu anderen religiösen Traditionen, insbesondere aus Asien, und deren Auswirkungen auf die Förderung der Bewahrung der Schöpfung. Der Autor analysiert Ansätze zur Ausarbeitung einer Ökotheologie unter verschiedenen erkenntnistheoretischen Prämissen, die von asiatischen Religionen ausgehen. Die Überlegungen im Zusammenhang mit den asiatischen Bischofskonferenzen spielen dabei eine inspirierende Rolle. Im letzten Abschnitt befasst sich der Autor mit Vorschlägen für eine prophetische interreligiöse Kommunikation unter verschiedenen Aspekten, um ein kreatives Engagement in den heutigen Gesellschaften zu entwerfen, das auf die ökologische Bewahrung als Element der *missio Dei* abzielt, die von den asiatischen Religionen und der übergreifenden praktischen Zusammenarbeit mit Gläubigen aller Religionen inspiriert ist.

El concepto de *missio Dei* es una perspectiva global de la misión. Este artículo aborda la relación de la *missio Dei* con otras tradiciones religiosas, en particular de Asia, y su implicación en la promoción de la integridad de la creación. El autor analiza los enfoques para la elaboración de la ecoteología bajo diferentes premisas epistemológicas surgidas de las religiones asiáticas. La reflexión en el contexto de las Conferencias Episcopales Asiáticas desempeña un papel inspirador. En la última sección, el autor profundiza en propuestas de comunicación interreligiosa profética en diferentes aspectos con el fin de esbozar un compromiso creativo con las sociedades actuales para llegar a la salvaguardia ecológica como elemento de la *missio Dei* inspirado en las religiones asiáticas y la colaboración práctica global con creyentes de todas las confesiones.

Le concept de *missio Dei* est une perspective englobante de la mission. Cet article traite de la relation entre la *missio Dei* u et les autres traditions religieuses, particulièrement venant d'Asie, et de leur implication pour promouvoir l'intégrité de la création. Il analyse les façons d'élaborer une écothéologie selon des prémisses épistémologiques différentes, issues des religions asiatiques. La réflexion dans le contexte des conférences des évêques asiatiques joue un rôle d'inspiration très important. Dans la dernière section, l'auteur plonge dans des propositions de communication interreligieuse prophétique sous différents aspects, de façon à esquisser un engagement créatif dans les sociétés d'aujourd'hui, afin d'arriver à une sauvegarde écologique

[75] Ibid.

comme élément de la *missio Dei* inspirée par les religions asiatiques, sur un fond de collaboration pratique avec les croyants de toutes traditions de foi.

*Marie-Hélène Robert**

HEALING WOUNDS. A PROCESS OF SALVATION AND HUMANIZATION IN A POST-MODERN *KAIROS*

This article articulates healing, salvation and the mission of the disciples. These three aspects have been recognized as closely related in theology. The author sees post-modernity as a context where the person is exposed to a variety of anxieties and anguishes which make up the situation of vulnerability in the subject. There is a wide variety of remedies on offer which demand discernment on the part of the missionaries. Jesus was committed to healing vulnerable persons and charged his disciples with this ministry. Continuing this service, the disciples can find the post-modern context a kairos for a healing mission.[1]

Introduction

Care is a both pressing and prophetic question, tending to generate more consensus than the theological question of salvation. Caring for persons and the planet is a necessity for all who live in a ravaged and wounded world. While healing and salvation are linked, they are not interchangeable. Depending on one's point of view, they are the fruit of divine intervention (grace and miraculous healing), the fruit of the mission of the church (in sacraments and engagement with suffering in the name of the tenderness of God), or the fruit of human beings (represented by a secular perspective on salvation). Are these perspectives reconcilable in post-modernity? The 2005 World Council of Churches (WCC) conference in Athens on the theme "Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile!" has certainly helped to identify healing as

* Marie-Helene Robert, OLA, is a missiologist, full professor of dogmatic theology at the Faculty of Theology of Lyon Catholic University (UCLy), and a member of UR Confluence: Sciences et Humanités [EA 1598] de l'UCLy. She has published numerous books and articles, and given lectures at various national and international conferences. She is a sister of the Missionary Institute of Our Lady of the Apostles.

[1] The English version of this article has been reviewed by Justin Hagermann, Associate Researcher, UCLy.

a new paradigm for the mission of the church, which receives itself from God and cooperates with humanity.[2]

Given the injuries that affect bodies, memories, psyches, nature, and oppressed populations, the contemporary period lets out an agonizing cry, both in our immediate circles and across the media. Believers are not spared, but they also listen to the Psalmist who affirms God "healing the broken-hearted and binding up their wounds"[3] (Ps 147:3). If the *missio Dei* is to heal the ills that afflict us, including the sufferings that we cause or experience today, this raises a certain number of questions.

How does God hear these cries? Why is healing not systematic? How do Christian missionaries today engage with healing wounds in keeping with the *missio Dei*? Despite appearances, post-modernity[4] can be a "favourable moment, one in which the availability to hear the Gospel of God's reign becomes more pronounced."[5] But are missionaries prepared for this *kairos*? Under what conditions is the witness of charity through healing a path to conversion and salvation? Is healing wounds a prerequisite to the proclamation and encounter with God, or is it the

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2 With the growing participation of Orthodox and Evangelical Christians, as well as Pentecostals and independent churches, new attention has been given to the Holy Spirit and to the ecological dimension of the Church's mission.

3 I quote from the *New Jerusalem Bible*, 1985, here and hereafter.

4 Post-modernity, beginning from the 1960s in the West, can be understood in these terms: "The institutional structures that form the social and spiritual frameworks for the individual have begun to dissipate, even disappear, especially with the abandonment […] of grand ideologies that propose an explicative dimension of the world, while one also experiences the fading of markers, framing structures, and traditional sociability (family, political parties, Church, education …), and simultaneously and under the influence of mass consumption an individual liberty emerged from every hinderance and concern for, above all, pleasure and personal enrichment (English translation of Nicole Aubert, "Modernité, postmodernité, hypermodernité", in Jacqueline Barus-Michel, Eugène Enriquez, André Lévy, eds., *Vocabulaire de psychosociologie. Références et positions*, Paris, Eres, 2016, 200. Translation: JH.

As for hyper-modernity, which has been discussed in the West since the beginning of the 1980s, this is no longer a rupture, but rather the exacerbation and radicalization of a posture towards the world. Hyper-modernity is characterized by new relationships with time, the self, others, knowledge, as well as the individualization of religious, existential, and ethical points of reference.

5 "Vers une Église hospitalière, entretien avec Christoph Theobald, Propos recueillis par François Euvé," *Études*, 2019/10 (n. 4264), 72. See P. Bacq and C. Theobald, eds, *Une nouvelle chance pour l'Évangile Vers une pastorale d'engendrement*, Brussels, Lumen Vitae, 2004.

very place of proclaiming salvation and calling to conversion, without which this proposal might be seen as an abuse of weakness?

In this article, beginning from the suffering that emerges in the context of post-modernity, which adds to the suffering that humanity encounters in every era (poverty, illness, death, violence, injustice), we will see what expectations God and missionaries can listen to or awaken in the present moment. How might we renew mission by articulating healing, conversion, and salvation for our times, particularly in the post-modern European context?

1. The Anxiety-Inducing Context of Post-Modernity in Europe

It is not simple to diagnose the illnesses generated by post-modernity without falling into lists or generalizations. But some tendencies can be identified. The relationship with space and time has profoundly changed. The aim is performance, an alignment with the present, even with the instantaneous and the fleeting.

The weakening of frameworks that have up to this point provided structure (both familial and institutional), after having been experienced as a liberation for the individual, now appear as a stress factor, even the dissolution of the person, who may find it increasingly difficult to place their trust in relationships: might they be durable and reliable? The wounds inflicted by family members, by the church, and in the workplace are even more traumatizing since they affect three places that require relationships of trust in one another and that even construct the person in their being-in-relationship. The denunciation of these structuring frameworks on a large scale marks a clear change of the times,[6] evident in the work of making reparations for the wounds caused by slavery and colonization.[7]

The relationship to tradition and its promises, as well as the relationship to work, to danger, to self-image and to that of others[8] and even to life and death, are affected by these large-scale changes. An exaggerated individualism exists side by side with structured social engagement. The ethical benchmark as a universal norm of living

6 https://www.ciase.fr/rapport-final/

7 https://healing-memories.org/our-mission/ for example. "La mémoire des colonisations et décolonisations. Entretien avec Gildas Riant - Professeur d'histoire-géographie et membre du CEREG," *Chemins de mémoire*, https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/fr/la-memoire-des-colonisations-et-decolonisations

8 About the links between post-modernity and gender, see for example Margret Grebowicz, *Gender After Lyotard*. NY: SUNY Press, 2007.

together has not disappeared, but it seems to be left to the conscience and free initiative of individuals. The salutary commitment to ecology[9] can also give rise to profound worries, which can translate into a refusal to give life, paranoid fear, or to attitudes of conspiracy theories (such as climate scepticism[10]). With a careful eye on these concerns, Pope Francis draws attention to the risks of claiming to save ourselves without others,[11] thereby bringing exaggerated forms of individualism into the frame of potential healing.

The digital revolution, artificial intelligence and the rise of social media render it increasingly difficult to relate simply to reality, which can lead to psychological dissociation. The hyper-mediatization puts the person in real time with situations of intolerable suffering, which one can neither ignore nor alleviate entirely.

Research into cognitive science, neuroscience and genetic biology reduces the value of the human being in their environment and negates the particularity of their spiritual life. In turn, the perception of these fields of research potentially reinforces hardening views among religious traditionalists, even fundamentalists.[12]

These multiple occasions of suffering cannot leave missionaries indifferent, even if they can make one feel overwhelmed, powerless, and lost. How can we envision this situation as a *kairos* for the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation? The first task is to attempt to comprehend what kind of salvation the current generations expect, whether explicitly or implicitly, and how the Gospel can join with them in their wounds and with their potential expectations to be healed.

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9 Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum* (LD). Apostolic Exhortation on the climate crisis, 4 October 2023.

10 IFOP survey on conspiracism, for the Fondation Jean-Jaurès and Conspiracy Watch, in December 2017 https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/3942-1-study_file.pdf. And Wave 2 of this survey in January 2019: https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/115960-Pr%C3%A9sentation-version-publi%C3%A9e.pdf. Everything suggests that since 2019 the numbers have only been able to increase. Reports are not limited to eco-complotism.

11 Pope Francis, LD 23, 28.

12 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008.

2. Healing or Salvation in the Multiplicity of Spiritual and Religious Offerings

> The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds… And you have to start from the ground up. The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you.[13]

In these famous words spoken at the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis invites the church to go to the heart of its mission. "To heal wounds" is linked with the first proclamation, because Jesus came to heal and save humanity. But how is this relationship between healing and salvation received in post-modernity?

For Jean-Marie Gueullette, theologian and medical doctor,

> Depending on cultures, situations, and modes of suffering or unhappiness from which the question of healing arises, this verb [to heal] will designate rather well both the disappearing symptoms and the end of illness, as well as the return to that which is considered normal in terms of biological status or social behaviour, or even to the salutary distance from this or that form of unhappiness with which a person has temporarily found themselves identified.[14]

This liberation from unhappiness can also be a recognition of God's intervention as a personal decision. However, the post-modern context also witnesses the proliferation of wellness therapies, mindfulness, and emotional regulation, which invite the person to discover methods of healing by oneself, and by relying on the experience of others. *Care* and *cure* complement one another against resignation to suffering.

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[13] Interview with Pope Francis by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, 2013. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html

[14] Jean-Marie Gueullette, "Guérir : un désir, un rêve ; une fonction sociale, entre compétence et charisme ; un don gratuit ou un devoir moral," *Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale* 266, 2011/HS, 9-32, here 10-11 (Translation JH).

This market sometimes develops in reaction to the church's counter-testimonies,[15] or in the estimation that the church has run its course. But this market often responds to an expectation that the person should be treated in a holistic perspective. Mind, spirit, body, and history form a whole in search of *reunification*. This is perhaps the way that our contemporaries understand salvation, and it is something to be appreciated, even in the surprising manifestations in the quest for healing:

> An esoteric guru and intensive care provider, a psychoanalyst and a Pentecostal preacher might have trouble recognizing that they have something in common, and yet they at least share the fact of being recognized as bearers of healing power by the same patient who turns to one just as much as the other.[16]

The profound desire to be reunified passes, paradoxically, through recourse to a multitude of paths rather than by the deepening of one of them. Pluralism and syncretism are the normative configurations of hyper-modern contexts, in which the individual, including a Christian, searches by himself or herself, rather than through familial or institutional transmission, the means of here-and-now salvation. Just after the Council, Karl Rahner had prophesied that:

> The Christian of the future will either be a mystic, which is to say a person who has experienced something, or will not be a Christian, because the spirituality of the future will no longer rest upon a unanimous conviction, evident and public, nor on a widespread religious climate, prior to personal experience and decision.[17]

In this context, missionaries might help with spiritual discernment, from person to person. They are sometimes called to condemn (sectarian movements,[18] satanic cults), often to dialogue with and to

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[15] We have mentioned the abuse crisis. The history of Christian mission also contains its dark pages, the active or passive complicity with numerous injustices (including races, cultures, genders, and powers), campaigns of forced conversion in the name of an erroneous theology of salvation. This history does not belong to the past: its traumatic effects continue to act not only in personal and collective memories, but also in some current political and social arrangements.

[16] Gueullette, Guérir : un désir, un rêve (Translation JH).

[17] Karl Rahner, *Écrits de Théologie* VII. *Écrits pastoraux*. Madrid: Taurus, 1969, 25 (my translation).

[18] These movements are identifiable by the dependence of the healing, which requires total spiritual, social, and economic obedience; by the spirit of

esteem that which is good in the proposals that are developing,[19] and always to propose in joy and hope the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Desire and fear are the two sides of the same coin. However, the fear of hell is no more effective than the desire for paradise for the persons focused on the immediate present, on the healing more than on eternal salvation, which is sometimes at best a vague idea, an indistinct hope, a scattered desire for spirituality and connection with the energy of the universe. But the anguish about finitude and death is always present.

The pastoral care of funerals in the post-modern context is decisive. It is a delicate area of mission, when families gathered around the deceased are not always comfortable with faith in the resurrection, but are still in need of consolation, comfort, and hope. How can we tell these loved ones of a deceased family member who could not be healed or saved in time that the non-healing is not an admission of failure of God's power and goodness? How can we make the funeral a meeting place between life and death oriented towards hope and towards that which is beyond the immediate? How can we awaken the desire for salvation that goes beyond the non-healing?

It would be equally important to look at how healing and salvation are presented in the pastoral work of healthcare, the ministry of reconciliation, the sacrament of anointing the sick, the Eucharist, the places of pilgrimage and popular devotion. How might these traditional places of healing in Catholic pastoral care also become spaces of missionary encounter with persons who are far removed from the faith? Do these proposals still make good sense, or should we prefer alternatives to them, ones that are more accessible, more innovative, and where the person takes more initiative?

The missionary believes that God is always at work (John 5:17), even in ways that are imperceptible. This kind of missionary can therefore watch for the moments and the openings through which God becomes present, thereby awakening the person to a possible

harm, anxiety or subjection; by the demand to reject the Christian conception of the world so that the healing can take effect.

[19] "Affirming the presence of God's healing energies at work in the whole of creation, thanks and praise should be given for all different means, approaches and traditions which contribute to the healing of human persons, communities as well as creation, by reinforcing their healing potentials…" https://www.oikoumene.org/fr/resources/documents/preparatory-paper-ndeg-11-the-healing-mission-of-the-church, n. 72.

encounter,[20] which includes longing in the desire to be healed. Hence, the relationship takes precedence over the discursive content, though without replacing it. In this respect, Scripture gives us important keys to understanding the relationships between healing and salvation.

3. Healing and Salvation in the Bible

God awakens sleeping consciences by the voice of the prophets. They call for hope and healing through conversion and forgiveness (Isa 33:24; Jer 33:6; 2 Kings 5:1-19). The healing of hearts, which leads to the reunification of being, requires a realignment of attitude towards God and neighbours.

The wounds of body, heart, and spirit touch Jesus. His encounters with lepers, the helpless, the deaf-mute, and the blind bear witness to God's merciful heart and healing power, a sign of God's unique power of salvation.[21] Jesus affirms that illness is not a divine punishment (John 9:3). He welcomes and reintegrates the person who turns towards him.[22] He refers them to his Father, who has authority over healing (John 9:3). The healings have an eschatological scope (cf. Luke 7:20).

> They manifest the victory of the kingdom of God over every kind of evil, and become the symbol of the restoration to health of the whole human person, body and soul. They serve to demonstrate that Jesus has the power to forgive sins (cf. Mark 2:1-12); they are signs of the salvific goods, as is the healing of the paralytic of Bethesda (cf. John 5:2-9, 19-21) and the man born blind (cf. John 9).[23]

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[20] Marie-Hélène Robert, "Conclusion," *in* Peter Baekelmans, Marie-Hélène Robert, eds., *New Trends in Mission: The Emerging Future*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2022, 359-368.

[21] For the synoptics, see e.g. Elian Cuvillier, Gilles Drouin *et al.*, *"Guérissez-les." Salut et guérison dans les Églises chrétiennes*, Paris, Bayard, 2021, 29-74.

[22] Pope Francis, "Address to the Participants in The Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Biblical Commission," Thursday, 11 April 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/april/documents/20240411-plenaria-pcb.html. On the theme "Sickness and suffering in the Bible."

[23] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Prayers for Healing", 2000, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20001123_istruzione_en.html, n 1.

"We have been healed by his bruises" (Isa 53:5, cited by Matt 8:16-17 and 1 Pet 2:24), forgiven and saved. At each encounter, Jesus includes the person suffering from an illness in the process of healing.

This is why healing and faith are often associated in the Gospel.[24] Healings are presented as miracles, in which the dimension of faith, whether on the part of the sick or those close to them, is a factor or a consequence of the miracle (Matt 17:19-21). The healed person is restored in their integrity and in their familial and social relationships. The non-healing is also a question of faith: "My grace is enough for you: for power is at full stretch in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

In the four Gospels, the crowd and the disciples are often less spontaneously moved by compassion than Jesus (Luke 18:15 and par.; Mark 10:46 and par.). But Jesus sends his disciples on mission with this injunction to heal the sick and raise the dead (Matt 10:8), combined with preaching and teaching. They receive the power of Jesus but not his power of salvation, which only belongs to him.

Jesus also affirms that following him includes taking up one's cross (Matt 16:24). Suffering is part of the disciple's commitment. Salvation and the healing of wounds, indeed, are not synonyms. Salvation is offered to all, including the sick, the healthy, and the dying.

The letters of Paul place healing in a set of charismata, which are in the service of the community (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30[25]) and bring healing closer to the ministry of reconciliation:

> God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were urging you through us, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God. For our sake he made the sinless one a victim for sin, so that in him we might become the uprightness of God. As his fellow-workers, we urge you not to let your acceptance of his grace come to nothing (2 Cor 5:19-6,1).

How might the contemporary post-modern person hear these affirmations? The biblical hermeneutic of suffering and healing is in fact

[24] In particular Mark 5:23, 29, 34; 10:52; Matt 8:8; 9:22,29; 15:28; Luke 17-19; 1 Cor 12,9; Acts 3,16; 19,11-12; Jas 5,14-15: "Any one of you who is ill should send for the elders of the church, and they must anoint the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him. The prayer of faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up again; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven."

[25] The list in Rom 12:6-8 does not mention the gift of the Spirit, the charisms of healing, accomplishing miracles or speaking in tongues.

complex. Charismatic or Pentecostal preaching, often charged with being fundamentalist in character, may well appeal to the Bible in a post-modern approach:

> It is about restoring faith in God to its rightful place, by leaving aside distinctions between science and faith, culture and religion, reason and feeling, objectivity and subjectivity, body and soul. Teachings on healing are the privileged terrain for questioning the scientific approach to reality. They use a non-scientific reading of the Bible to show that modernity has not kept its promise of happiness, and that the humanities (taught at school) do not (necessarily) humanize.[26]

It is against this background that the rediscovery of charisms in the 20th century is situated, particularly the gift of healing, in charismatic, Pentecostal, and Evangelical circles. Prayers of praise and healing, the "prayer of the brethren," or the exercise of charisms take inspiration largely from the practices of the first Christian communities, and can be experienced in an interconfessional manner, or in emulation,[27] which increases and authenticates the scope of the testimony.

At present, this practice seems to be more widely admitted in dioceses, because its success suggests that it meets certain aspirations of the post-modern context: a meaning and an identity, a reinforcement of self-esteem, the feeling of being "at home," miracles, and healings.[28] The theological meaning of salvation is not the main issue for the person who suffers, who above all expects to be healed and saved, as Pope Francis emphasizes in his 2013 interview. But the occurrence of salvation during a praying assembly centred on healing will be even more touching.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, there is need for discernment. Moreover, post-modernity attaches itself to credible, reliable, charismatic figures of testimony. However, unlike the Pauline practice, which

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[26] Christophe Boureux, "Les modalités d'interprétation des récits bibliques de guérison aujourd'hui," *Revue d'Éthique et de Théologie Morale*, 266, 2011, 95-108 (my translation).

[27] Valérie Aubourg, *Réveil catholique. Emprunts évangéliques au sein du catholicisme*, coll. Enquêtes 5, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 2020.

[28] Karl Gabriel, "Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Charismatics in Four Parts of the World. The results of case studies by the German Bishops' Conference Research Group," Gabriel, Karl & Müller, Johannes (eds.), *Evangelicals, Pentecostal Churches, Charismatics: New Religious Movements as a Challenge for the Catholic Church: Documentation of the International Conference of the German Bishops' Conference (Rome 9th–11th April 2013)*, Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Communications Foundation, 2015, 73-97.

values networks, it is not the communal or institutional attachment of the testimonies that is emphasized, but rather their singularity, their efficacity, and their radicality. Hence, articulating person, community, and society in the testimony is certainly an important missionary task in a world that tends to esteem the individual, sometimes at the expense of the collective.

Scripture and the history of missions are the common reservoir from which missionaries draw to relay the *missio Dei* to the contemporary world: the joy of salvation and healing. But they do so differently according to their formation, their experience, or their church. Some elements are activated and put into practice, such as the gift of healing, but others lose their impact in society, as they are put to the test in an overwhelming reality, resistant or indifferent to the message of the Gospel. What place might we give to healing wounds in the process of salvation?

4. A Process of Humanization to Its Ultimate Achievement

Tending towards the Kingdom

Since 1948, health has been defined in a holistic perspective, as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity",[29] including the fundamental human right to health without distinction of race, religion, political belief, social or economic condition. This raises the question of who might be considered to be in good health and how to pursue healing ills that compromise well-being. Is spirituality included in the "mental" dimension of the definition?

At the 2005 WCC conference in Athens, the proclamation of the word of God is presented as a message of hope and consolation; the celebration of the Eucharist is a major sign of reconciliation and restoration. Worship in itself is even a ministry of healing:

> Joining the others as community of believers, being liberated from guilt and the burdens of life, experiencing even unbelievable cures, being enflamed by the experience of singing and of praise, are a tremendously healing experience (106).

Athens values the pastoral ministry of each believer, as well as individual or communal intercession for members of the community, especially the sick (104). Healing ministry is the visible expression of the

[29] Constitution of the World Health Organisation, 1948.

healing presence of God through spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of healing (105). Healing and salvation are clearly connected.

Jesuit theologian André Fossion proposes an extensive definition of salvation, which takes into account the questions of contemporaries:

> In the Christian perspective, salvation designates life in abundance, the begetting of life that God gives. It concerns every human being in their flesh, individually and collectively. This salvation includes all together: health, well-being, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, overcoming trials, deliverance from evil, recovery from death itself and, finally, eternal life in the Kingdom to come. Salvation thus understood refers to the process of humanization in which we are brought to the ultimate achievement. Human beings contribute to this. Nevertheless, it will never be an auto-accomplishment, but a gift from God, by grace, beyond that which humanity can hope for by itself.[30]

In this approach, which is very biblically just, no person and no aspect of human life is *a priori* excluded from salvation, of which God is the origin and the end. Healing is a step in the process of humanization until the ultimate achievement: the Kingdom, which transcends postmodern concerns identified in the first point. Does the Kingdom respond to the expectations signalled in the second point? In part, this is because humankind is involved at each step and always in relation with others. The healing of wounds is not a prerequisite for the proclamation of salvation, but rather one of its places of revelation, among others. "The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew."[31]

Caring in love

Caring is one necessary and praiseworthy professional activity. Caring out of love and in the ways of love (1 Cor 13) is a witness rendered to the heart of the message of announced salvation. The credibility of the faith is at stake. The early church took seriously Jesus' ministry of healing. From the earliest days of the church, healing ministry contributed to its expansion and has taken different forms

[30] André Fossion, "Repenser l'évangélisation," *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 2019/4 (Tome 141), 583-596 (Translation: JH).

[31] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, 2013, 1.

throughout history. The development of medicine in the West from the 18th century brought a great change: the vision is less holistic; the spiritual dimension is even more neglected. But, moreover, this development increased the moral obligation of Christians to care for all persons in their need, which manifested itself in the growth of congregations and societies of mission that put care at the heart of their undertaking: healing gives credibility to the proclamation while protecting missionaries from ailments, testifying to an evangelical generosity, but sometimes at the cost of depreciating the local means of healing; traditional healers are associated with indigenous, superstitious beliefs, which have also continued underground.[32]

Numerous witnesses gave their lives to accompany the suffering in their wounds, in a compassion that heals socially but not always medically. They have marked the history of the church and mission, manifesting that charity as God's gift is both the source and criterion of mission,[33] even the soul of mission.[34]

"It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognise you as my disciples" (John 13:35) and even for your enemies (Luke 6:27, 35; Matt 5:44), which the philosopher Fabrice Hadjad interprets in these terms:

> Even the persecutor is already an ally. Even the executioner is already a brother. It is this that renders their violence so appalling and absurd. And it is also this that makes their persecution never an obstacle, but the very place of witness, being the manifestation of a love that is greater than the world and more enduring than hatred.[35]

Forgiveness and reconciliation are an integral part of the process of healing, humanization, and salvation. If loving is proper to humanity, then love of enemies is proper to Christians. The centres of care directed by Christians welcome every person, whatever their origin, their religion, or background, even in situations of conflict. Loving and

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[32] Manoj Kurian, "Healing," Kenneth R. Ross, Jooseop Keum et al. eds., *Ecumenical Missiology: Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission*, "Regnum Edinburgh centenary series" 35, Oxford, Regnum / Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2016, 192-200.

[33] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990, 60.

[34] Benedict XVI, "Charity: soul of the mission," Message for the 80th World Mission Sunday 2006. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/missions/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20060429_world-mission-day-2006.html

[35] Fabrice Hadjaj, "La conversion missionnaire: sortir de soi-même pour se laisser provoquer par les signes des temps,".http://www.laici.va/content/laici/en/blog/Hadjaj_congresso_movimenti.html (Translation: JH)

caring for every being reflects an act of faith: it is believing that each person is created in the image of God and loved by God, not reducible to that which they suffer at a given moment in their life.

Yet the witness of universal love is not always well received in contemporary cultures. Welcoming strangers and the poor can even reinforce divisions in the church.[36] Charity can be disguised proselytism or benefitting from the weakness of a person. But how can we reconcile the interpersonal generosity with the concern for the common good in our societies?

The Vulnerable Life

Social doctrine is an integral part of mission, not a separate appendix. The Synod for Synodality rehabilitates this with vigour. However, the critics of the Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC) coming from diverse theological and political currents have reproached it for being abstract, moralistic, and ideological. This accusation was formulated, for example, by Marie-Dominique Chenu in *La doctrine sociale de l'Église comme idéologie.*[37] These critiques are to be heard because they join a post-modern world that places religion in the sphere of the personal, even the intimate. By examining this more closely, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC) [38] adopts an integral vision of the person. It encourages the "preferential option for the poor" (182) in the search for solidarity. The CSDC also seeks to heal "the spread of a destructive *counter-civilisation*": it proposes a culture of life (231), of sharing (256), of peace (495), of wisdom (560), and a "civilization of love" (580). These are all important aspirations for our contemporaries. The challenge is to present them as something other than a general code of conduct.

The CSDC refers 25 times to the *Evangelium vitae*, where Pope John-Paul II denounces the "culture of death," "contrary to solidarity," due to "the eclipse of the sense of God and of humankind" and "of dignity and of life" (murder, abortion and euthanasia). "In turn, the systematic violation of the moral law produces a kind of progressive

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[36] Jacques-Benoît Rauscher, *Les frontières d'un discours : les papes et l'accueil de l'étranger*, Paris, Cerf, 2024.

[37] Fernando De La Iglesia Viguiristi, "Jean-Paul II et la doctrine sociale de l'Église," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, October 13, 2022.

[38] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2006, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

darkening of the capacity to discern God's living and saving presence."[39] The diagnosis of the encyclical, which elicited lively and contrasting reactions, remains a pressing current affair in a world where the most vulnerable are threatened with extinction, and where the value of life is no longer a given or a point of consensus.

But how can we render this need more audible, as citizens and as Christians, when legislations, in the name of the liberty of the individual, fail to protect life? The SDC needs to be updated in each particular context, while remaining aware of conflicts of interest. The mission of the church, in response to the call of the Gospel, develops a *collaborative* accompaniment, based on listening, support, and grace towards those who are actors or victims of assault on their dignity.[40] Opening to God encourages opening to neighbours[41] and to listen to their need for salvation.

The existential challenges of the post-modern world require missionaries to move beyond their usual practices and presentations of the Gospel, but without renouncing the heart of the message. Collective discernment is at the heart of the process, based on experience, revelation, and the sufferings of the world.

The Process of Conversion and Transformation

The call to conversion is not reserved for Easter homilies or for certain groups or zealous preachers! It concerns every missionary. Conversion is an *act of grace* that calls for a free *response*, faith, and authentic engagement. It is *mediated* by a witness, a liturgy, a program, a reading, an event, a dream, a community. It leads to a life of discipleship *in community*, even if it is not always easy for the new converts to find their place in it.[42] The elements of this process presuppose being experienced in charity, the charity of attention, of listening, and the charity that ratifies that salvation has come (Luke 19:1-10).

But the wounded world does not spontaneously turn towards the source of healing, whether due to ignorance or disappointment. Yet God desires the salvation of all and loves all beings, which makes their

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39 John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 1995, 21.

40 "Powers, Inequalities, and Vulnerabilities: Mission in a Wounded World, IAMS 50th Anniversary and 15th IAMS General Assembly", *Mission Studies* 39 (2022): Issue 2, (June 2022).

41 Christoph Theobald, *Le Christianisme comme style. Une manière de faire la théologie en postmodernité*, 2 vols, Cogitatio Fidei 261, Cerf, Paris, 2008.

42 Marie-Hélène Robert, ed., *L'accueil des convertis dans les communautés chrétiennes*, Québec, Saint-Joseph, 2018.

salvation possible without conversion to the Trinitarian faith, but not without conversion to charity (Matt 25:40-45).

Hence, if conversion is a gift from God, the role of the missionary in the dynamic of salvation is to be an announcer, a go-between, a mediator, a watchman, but also an active witness to the charity and the joy of salvation. The missionary is supported by ecclesial and social institutions, but is not confined to them, and seeks to reach people in the places where they live and suffer.

One of the major characteristics of post-modern societies is pluralism and the taste for trying different experiences. Three trends can be identified: the "identity" trend (people identify with the religions to which they belong), the "engagement" trend (people recognizes themselves in a community to which they belong, commit themselves to it and validate other possible types of engagement) and a kind of dilettantism or indifferentism. In the latter case, it is not that one believes or does not believe, but that one does not seek to make a choice between these two possibilities. This opens up a certain modulation of the intensity and commitment, a modulated relationship to religious belief, as well as to the possibility of changing religion or church.[43] Syncretism is seen here as a means of modulation, or an occasion to increase one's field of possibilities. This post-modern stance is a condition of possibility for religious pluralism that does not live under the mode of confrontation. Religion no longer has the ancient sense of an obligation that governs the relations between individual and the collective. It is no longer the sign of an individual's belonging to a defined community or the sign of her or his fidelity to a tradition, nor the inscription to a system guaranteeing a relationship to truth. To speak of conversion is perhaps even anachronistic for many people in search of a personal, non-binding experience of transcendence in their quotidian life, or the realization of their own potential.

> Syncretistic religiosity touches on body and mind therapy, relaxation techniques and meditation practices, the desire for harmony with the cosmos and earthly forces, unconditional fidelity to gurus, enthusiastic support for the colours of a sports club, devotion to humanitarian or other causes. […] The market logic can serve as a fermenting agent for the structuring of being-together.[44]

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[43] According to Anthony Feneuil, lecture at the UNISTRA doctoral school, "Plurality, pluralism, syncretism, dilettantism. Religious non-exclusivity," Strasbourg, 10 October 2024.

[44] Jean-Martin Rabot, "Syncrétisme et posmodernité," in Cabecinhas, R. & Cunha, L., *Comunicação Intercultural. Perspectivas, dilemas e desafios*,

In this context, the missionaries are attentive to people's expectations, proposing to them a path of discoveries based on what they are seeking to experience. Depending on whether the missionary perceives post-modernity as a discrediting of monotheistic religions or as a *kairos*, he or she will approach this mission in diametrically opposed ways.

Conclusion

Healing can be both a prerequisite for proclamation and its proper place. There is abundant literature on the question of priorities in the church's mission: proclamation, dialogue, reconciliation, hospitality, liberation, healing, and liturgy. Contemporary thinking on integral[45] or holistic mission shows that this question of priorities cannot be a pretext for limiting mission to a single aspect and discrediting other aspects. The complementarity of missionary approaches allows us to reach as many people as possible, whereas the denigration of other types of action limits the scope of mission. Depending on their history, formation, mission context, and target audience, missionaries will take healing, the proclamation of salvation or the call to conversion as their point of entry, but these will also lead to other doors of encounter with God. They all count.

The wounds of division between Christians undermine missionary witness in a fractured world which thirsts for reconciliation and peace. God's multiform action unfolds in a suffering world and requires the collaboration of all God's children in love. Alpha courses, ethical commitments between Christians of diverse ecclesial communities,[46] the healing of memories between Christians through dialogue,[47] the emulation of Pentecostals and Evangelicals in the exercise of the gift of healing[48] testify to the vitality and necessity of receptive ecumenism

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Porto, Campo das Letras, 2008, 179-190, citation 185-186 (Translation: JH).

45 For example, McTair Wall, ed., *Mission intégrale*. Vol. 2 *Regards historiques, philosophiques, bibliques et théologiques*, Charols, Excelsis, 2023.

46 Marie-Hélène Robert, "L'œcuménisme est-il une culture, le produit de cultures ou leur transformation possible?", Réflexions à partir de la Charte œcuménique (2001). *Positions luthériennes*, 70, 1, 2022, 57-66.

47 https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/OEA-Lutheran-Mennonites-EN-full.pdf

48 According to Manoj Kurian, "Healing," the pneumatological paradigm of Pentacostal and charismatic churches, enters into the meaning of systems of traditional cultures and cosmologies of healing to declare that God can do the impossible and that faith heals, going beyond evil in all of its forms

in Christian mission.[49] It is to be hoped that missionaries will become ever more committed in this direction, placing their trust in God's action rather than in their own realizations.

The post-modern context is a *kairos* for missionary proclamation, provided that we understand and love this world without endorsing all that which wounds it or destroys it at its roots. Mission is a witness to hope and to personal and collective responsibility, where God's saving action is a call to an ever-increasing humanization that continues to deepen as human beings move towards eschatological fullness.

Abstracts

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit Heilung, Erlösung und der Mission der Jünger. Diese drei Aspekte sind in der Theologie als eng miteinander verbunden erkannt worden. Die Autorin sieht die Postmoderne als einen Kontext, in dem der Mensch einer Vielzahl von Ängsten und Befürchtungen ausgesetzt ist, die die Situation der Verletzlichkeit des Subjekts ausmachen. Es gibt eine breite Palette von Heilmitteln und Lösungsangeboten, die von den Missionaren Unterscheidungsvermögen verlangen. Jesus engagierte sich für die Heilung verletzlicher Personen und beauftragte seine Jünger mit diesem Dienst. Wenn die Jünger diesen Dienst fortsetzen, können sie den postmodernen Kontext als *Kairos* für eine Heilungsmission betrachten.

Este artículo articula la sanación, la salvación y la misión de los discípulos. Estos tres aspectos han sido reconocidos como estrechamente relacionados en teología. La autora considera la posmodernidad como un contexto en el que la persona está expuesta a una variedad de ansiedades y angustias que configuran la situación de vulnerabilidad del sujeto. La oferta de remedios es muy variada y exige discernimiento por parte de los misioneros y misioneras. Jesús se comprometió a curar a las personas vulnerables y encargó este ministerio a sus discípulos. Continuando con este servicio, los discípulos pueden encontrar en el contexto posmoderno un *kairós* para una misión de sanación.

Cet article relie guérison, salut et mission des disciples. Ces trois aspects ont été reconnus comme intimement liés en théologie. L'auteur considère la post-modernité comme un contexte où la personne est exposée à toutes sortes d'anxiétés et d'angoisses qui créent une situation de vulnérabilité du sujet. Il existe une grande variété de remèdes qui demandent du discernement de la part des missionnaires. Jésus guérissait les personnes vulnérables et a chargé ses disciples de ce ministère. Prenant la suite de ce service, les disciples

and meeting the needs of contemporary life. Ecumenical comprehension has been enriched by the teaching of these churches. Likewise, ecumenical engagement for justice builds upon the conviction that individual health is linked to a healthy society and a healthy ecology.

[49] Petter Jakobsson, Risto Jukko, Olle Kristenson, eds. *Sharing and Learning. Bible, Mission and Receptive Ecumenism*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2021.

peuvent discerner dans ce contexte post-moderne un kairos pour le ministère de guérison.

*Estêvão Raschietti, sx**

DE AMÉRICA HACIA EL MUNDO Y DEL MUNDO HACIA AMÉRICA INQUIETUDES EN TORNO A LA MISIÓN AD GENTES

Esta reflexión se ubica en el contexto del VI Congreso Americano Misionero (CAM6) que se realizó en Puerto Rico del 19 al 24 de noviembre de 2024 con unos 1300 participantes de todo el continente.[1]

En esta ponencia, de la que se conserva el estilo de alocución, el autor discute la vocación misionera ad gentes *de la Iglesia y su puesta en práctica. Para América Latina se destacan dificultades en la realización de esta vocación de salir* ad gentes. *Esto tiene que ver con la historia, que lleva a reflexiones sobre el contexto colonial de la empresa misionera. Pero hay que tener en cuenta los cambios en la comprensión de la misión y del ser mismo de la Iglesia para poder asumir una misión ad gentes en el sentido de salir de su propio contexto e ir hacia las fronteras en una perspectiva de compartir y convivir con los pobres, más allá de todas las fronteras.*

El tema que se me pidió que presentara en este Congreso es realmente muy amplio, con posibilidad de enfoques multidisciplinares desde el punto de vista histórico, antropológico, sociológico, teológico y pastoral. Me encontré ante el dilema de tener que optar por un corte, porque no podía abarcarlo todo. Así que voy a ver en una dirección, de América hacia al mundo, con alguna referencia a la otra dirección, del mundo hacia a América, centrándome en algunos de los elementos que podrían obstaculizar un decidido impulso misionero *ad gentes.*

El motivo principal de la convocatoria del *VI Congreso Americano Misionero,* que estamos celebrando, es para llamar la atención sobre la

* Estêvão Raschietti SX es un misionero Xaveriano, de origen italiano, quien trabaja desde hace 30 años en Brasil. Se ha dedicado a la animación misionera, en revistas, en el Consejo Misionero Nacional de la Conferencia Episcopal Brasileña (COMINA) y en otros organismos misioneros brasileños. Estudió misionología en São Paulo (2002) y adquirió un doctorado en teología (PUCPR, Curitiba, 2020) con un análisis sobre misión y decolonialidad y su referencia a un nuevo paradigma misionero (publicado en 2022: A missão em questão. A emergência de um paradigma missionário em perspectiva decolonial, Petrópolis: Vozes). Es el director del Centro Cultural Conforti en Curitiba.

[1] Véase https://www.vaticannews.va/es/iglesia/news/2024-11/cam6-puerto-rico-una-fiesta-sinodal-para-la-iglesia-de-america.html.

importancia de la misión *ad gentes* y *ad extra* (más allá de las fronteras), para animar y renovar el compromiso de nuestras Iglesias locales en la cooperación misionera con las Iglesias de otros continentes, especialmente de África y Asia. Este llamamiento se dirige en particular a América Latina, donde vive el mayor porcentaje de católicos del mundo, pero cuyas Iglesias son todavía poco activas en la evangelización universal. Las Iglesias de América del Norte, en cambio, proceden de una tradición mucho más audaz, al igual que las de México y Colombia: estas últimas acaban de celebrar el centenario de sus congresos misioneros.

Hoy es perceptible un cierto estancamiento misionero entre las Iglesias que han hecho poco en materia de cooperación intereclesial y las Iglesias que han dejado de actuar en gran medida. Es necesario preguntarse por qué este relajamiento del espíritu misionero universal (cf. *Redemptoris missio* [RMi] 2) y de esta "nueva primavera de misión ad gentes en nuestro continente" *(Documento de Aparecida* [DAp] 379) que nunca sucedió como esperábamos. También necesitamos reflexionar y pensar sobre qué tipo de caminos debemos recorrer en este tiempo de gracia en el que se habla mucho de misión y misionaridad, de discipulado-misionero y de estado permanente de misión, de conversión pastoral y de "*Iglesia en salida",* todas perspectivas de fe y compromiso que se resisten en traducirse concretamente en un firme envío "hasta los confines de la tierra".

Hace más de 40 años, la III Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano, en Puebla (México, 1979), afirmó con audacia y esperanza que "finalmente, para América Latina, había llegado la hora de intensificar los servicios recíprocos entre las Iglesias particulares y de proyectarse más allá de sus propias fronteras, *ad gentes*" (DP 368). Desde entonces, ¿qué se ha hecho realmente? ¿De qué manera nuestras Iglesias se han mostrado verdaderamente dispuestas, con generosidad y determinación, a "dar de su pobreza por la alegría de su fe, y esto sin descargar sobre algunos enviados el compromiso que corresponde a toda la comunidad cristiana" (DAp 379)?

He aquí algunas consideraciones al respecto, con el fin de señalar algunos caminos de reflexión, abrir el debate e intentar atajar algunas inquietudes que rodean a la misión *ad gentes*.

1. ¿La misión ad gentes sigue siendo actual hoy en día?

No es la primera vez que la Iglesia en América cuestiona su actuación en relación a la misión *ad gentes*. Ya a principios de la década de 1980, el Departamento de Misiones del CELAM reunió a varios

expertos misioneros, teólogos y pastores para discutir la cuestión, en una serie de encuentros e iniciativas de las que surgieron algunas obras con títulos muy sugerentes: *América Latina: ¿irse o quedarse?* (1984) de José Marins y equipo, un trabajo generado a partir de dos viajes a once países de Asia; *La misión desde América Latina* (1983), una colección de artículos de un grupo de especialistas, entre ellos Carlos Pape, José Comblin, Juan Gorski y otros; y el opúsculo del teólogo chileno Segundo Galilea (1928–2010), *La responsabilidad misionera de América Latina* (1983), una provocación sugerente para que América Latina salga de sus madrigueras.

Estas tres obras, en sus diferentes propuestas, trataron de responder a una misma inquietud: ¿por qué América Latina no está tan comprometida con la misión *ad gentes*? Según los autores, en primer lugar, era necesario abordar el problema de lo que se entendía por "misión", y si el modelo de "misión extranjera" se ajustaba a la realidad socio-religiosa y eclesial de América Latina. La epopeya histórica de la misión del mundo hacia América dejó un legado ambivalente: por un lado, la dedicación y el testimonio despojado de muchos misioneros que llegaron de otros continentes; por otro, la implantación de un modelo de fe y de Iglesia poco respetuoso con las culturas locales. La búsqueda de una práctica misionera renovada, más inculturada, dialógica y liberadora, que pudiera abarcar todas las dimensiones de la acción evangelizadora de la Iglesia, todos los ámbitos, internos y externos, y todos los sujetos del Pueblo de Dios, era necesaria a la luz del Concilio Vaticano II, de la Conferencia de Medellín, de la Exhortación Apostólica *Evangelii nuntiandi* y de la Conferencia de Puebla.

Sin embargo, una observación sagaz de Carlos Pape fue particularmente llamativa. Dijo que la misión *ad gentes* está directamente ligada a la experiencia de la propia identidad eclesial: "mientras una Iglesia no alcance una experiencia personalizada de su propio ser y de los contenidos que puede transmitir, delega sus compromisos ad gentes en la esfera de las cosas que se aceptan, pero no se viven."[2] Hay muchas cosas que no negamos, pero que no ejercen una influencia decisiva en nuestra vida, porque no las reconocemos como prioritarias y relevantes: una de ellas es la misión *ad gentes*. Nos falta la convicción y tal vez nos falta la motivación.

Aunque Juan Pablo II advierte que "en la historia de la Iglesia, el celo misionero ha sido siempre un signo de vitalidad, así como su declive es un signo de crisis de fe" (RMi 2), no se puede negar que hoy existe un cierto malestar en torno a la misión *ad gentes:* "¿Es válida aún la misión entre los no cristianos? ¿No ha sido sustituida quizás por

[2] Carlos Pape et al., *La misión desde América Latina*, 1983.

el diálogo interreligioso? ¿No es un objetivo suficiente la promoción humana? El respeto de la conciencia y de la libertad ¿no excluye toda propuesta de conversión? ¿No puede uno salvarse en cualquier religión? ¿Para qué, entonces, la misión?" (RMi 4).

Incluso en tiempos relativamente recientes, muchos misioneros han salido de Europa o de América del Norte hacia ultramar para salvar a las almas del fuego del infierno, para hacer cristianos católicos a todos los pueblos del mundo y para plantar la Iglesia en todos los rincones de la tierra. A estos ideales consagraron sus vidas, se aventuraron por caminos temerarios, se enfrentaron a una fatiga extrema, pasaron por necesidades y pruebas de todo tipo, sufrieron terribles enfermedades y condiciones insoportables, sucumbieron en enfrentamientos con las poblaciones locales, terminaron perseguidos, encarcelados, torturados, etc. Muchos murieron muy jóvenes y pronto fueron venerados como mártires y héroes por sus Iglesias de origen.

Hoy quizá ya no arriesgaríamos la vida por las mismas convicciones. Tenemos otra percepción de la realidad y tenemos otra comprensión de los misterios de la fe. Además, el Concilio Vaticano II nos liberó definitivamente de tener que realizar cierto tipo de tareas. El Papa Benedicto XVI dijo en términos inequívocos "que la Iglesia no crece por proselitismo, sino por atracción" (DAp 159). Y el Papa Francisco dijo recientemente a los Misioneros de África: "El anuncio del Evangelio no tiene nada que ver con el proselitismo. Si en algún momento alguno de ustedes se encuentra haciendo proselitismo, por favor deténgase, conviértase y luego continúe. El anuncio es otra cosa" (Discurso a los participantes en el Capítulo General de los Misioneros de África – Roma, 13 de junio de 2022).

Si no es proselitismo, ¿qué es, entonces, este anuncio? Francisco responde: "La misión cristiana no es transmitir una verdad abstracta o una convicción religiosa, sino principalmente permitir a las personas con las que nos encontramos tener la experiencia fundamental del amor de Dios, y encontrarlo en nuestra vida y en la vida de la Iglesia, si somos testigos luminosos de Él reflejando un rayo del misterio trinitario" (Discurso a los participantes en la Asamblea de las Obras Misionales Pontificias [OMP] – Roma, 25 de mayo de 2024). Por lo tanto, "los cristianos tienen el deber de anunciar el Evangelio, sin excluir a nadie, y no como quien impone una nueva obligación, sino como quien comparte una alegría, señala un horizonte estupendo, ofrece un banquete deseable" *(Evangelii gaudium* [EG] 14). La alegría del Evangelio es un valor en sí mismo, es pura gratuidad, es pura espontaneidad, es algo que no se puede contener, que se desborda y sale de sí mismo: "esta es definitivamente la misión" (DAp 360). Ya no hay que salvar a nadie: dejamos la salvación a la misericordia de Dios.

El Concilio Vaticano II también ha querido subrayar una misión que brota "del amor fontal del Padre" *(Ad gentes* [AG] 2), como instinto, como *modo de ser* de la misma naturaleza divina. Esta intención desplaza sutilmente el eje de la necesidad de salvación de las almas y de la implantación de la Iglesia, a una cuestión de orden eminentemente teológico: Dios es así, Dios es misión, Dios es relación porque "Dios es Amor" (1 Jn 4,8). La razón misionera de la Iglesia se basa en la adhesión de la fe a un Dios de amor gratuito e incondicional que busca al ser humano, baja del cielo, lucha y da la vida por un mundo más humano: "Cristo muestra que Dios es cercanía, compasión y ternura" *(Dilexit nos* [DN] 35), y "la ternura de Dios no nos ama con palabras, pero él se acerca a nosotros y, estando cerca, nos da su amor con toda la ternura posible" (DN 36). La única conversión que nos pide es amarnos unos a otros como Él nos ha amado (cf. Jn 13,34), vivir como hijos e hijas del Padre y hermanos y hermanas entre nosotros: ni más ni menos.

2. ¿La misión ad gentes *es colonial?*

Una segunda razón de la inquietud que rodea a la misión *ad gentes* es que esta misión está vinculada al colonialismo, como brazo espiritual de un movimiento de expansión del Occidente cristiano desde el siglo XVI, que se ha traducido en la explotación de los recursos minerales, agrícolas y humanos de los pueblos originarios de este Nuevo Mundo, en la expropiación de sus territorios y en el exterminio de sus habitantes, de sus organizaciones sociales, de sus culturas, de sus identidades y de sus dioses.

La búsqueda frenética de oro iba acompañada de la infatigable labor de sometimiento y conversión de los nativos, mano de obra necesaria en los ingenios y las minas. Los testimonios ejemplares de clérigos como Antonio de Montesinos (1475–1540) y Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566), que denunciaron las brutalidades de los conquistadores, lamentablemente no representan el cuadro general de la acción eclesiástica en el continente, cuya complicidad con los poderes políticos era indiscutiblemente normativa. Este es un hecho histórico incuestionable y sin muchos atenuantes de la misión del "mundo" hacia América, así como hacia África y Asia.

Este colonialismo no es solo una herida profunda que permanece abierta en el cuerpo y en el alma de los sobrevivientes de toda Abya Yala, sino que continúa actuando en el presente como *estructura subyacente* de la modernidad occidental, o como su "lado oscuro" codicioso, imperialista y hegemónico, imponiendo relaciones asimétricas en las esferas micropolítica, macroeconómica y sociocultural

hasta el día de hoy. Esta colonización también tuvo su terrible rostro humanitario: una colonización del amor, del bien, del don, de la verdad, siempre en una relación de sumisión entre el superior blanco-cristiano-civilizado y el inferior indio/negro-pagano-salvaje. Los misioneros se dirigían amablemente a personas que no conocían, considerándolas en su dignidad fundamental como portadoras de alma y razón, pero que no los sabían usar utilizar. Por lo tanto, era esencial subyugarlos, educarlos, convertirlos, para que pudieran llegar a ser "como nosotros". La misión *ad gentes*, en el molde de la conquista espiritual, casi nunca fue discutida en sus "buenas intenciones" y "buenas acciones", a pesar de que estaba inmersa en gran medida en la vorágine autorreferencial que llamamos "eurocentrismo".

Alguien llegó a pensar que el ADN imperialista era congénito al cristianismo desde sus orígenes. Sin embargo, la misión de Jesús y de los Apóstoles, así como la de las comunidades de los primeros siglos, nunca fue colonial. El mandato misionero de Mateo, en el que el Resucitado envía a sus hermanos al mundo para *"hacer discípulas a todas las naciones"* (Mt 28,19) nunca fue un programa proselitista –como se interpretó durante mucho tiempo–, sino una invitación a una comunidad todavía cerrada en sus tradiciones judías a abrirse a acoger a los no judíos considerados impuros, pecadores, idólatras, y por lo tanto no dignos de pertenecer al Pueblo de Dios. El mandato misionero no nos envía a conquistar, sino a abrirnos, a acercarnos, a encontrarnos, a acoger al otro que es distinto de nosotros y a ser acogidos por él. Por esta razón, el espíritu del envío misionero del Evangelio de Mateo es extraordinario en su provocación, como lo es su teología del discipulado, ya que define el seguimiento de Jesús no como la adhesión a una confesión religiosa, sino como la adopción de una práctica de vida basada en las Bienaventuranzas: "El que dice: 'Señor, Señor', no entrará en el reino de los cielos, sino el que hace la voluntad de mi Padre que está en los cielos" (Mt 7,21).

Ciertamente, este espíritu mesiánico de los orígenes ha acompañado siempre la misión de la Iglesia y ha representado un dispositivo crítico con respecto a los acontecimientos de la historia y al camino mismo del Pueblo de Dios. Sin embargo, sabemos que la profecía del Evangelio fue a menudo encubierta por los intereses político-económicas que surgieron de la simbiosis entre el llamado poder espiritual y el poder temporal. Creemos también, sin sombra de duda, que la presencia del Espíritu de Dios nunca ha dejado de actuar en medio de los cursos y recursos de la historia. La cuestión es saber y reconocer si las Iglesias y sus emisarios han estado a la altura de la tarea de participación y cooperación con esta *missio Dei*, y si todavía lo

están, ya que no es posible para la Iglesia evangelizar "en profundidad" (EN 20) cuando están en juego relaciones de dominación y de poder.

Si la misión *ad gentes* fue colonial, no podemos condenarla *in toto* y volvernos exclusivamente a nuestros propios ámbitos familiares y socioculturales. Las Iglesias no pueden negar la misión a los pueblos sin negarse a sí mismas y la universalidad del Evangelio: la Iglesia ha nacido de la misión *ad gentes* y su vocación es y será siempre salir de sí misma para anunciar el Evangelio y hacer discípulos a todos los pueblos. El simple recurso a la culpabilidad histórica, obligando a la misión cristiana a un repliegue estratégico o a una moratoria definitiva (*¡misioneros que se vayan a casa!*), no parece ser una solución razonable porque, además de no reconocer la naturaleza misma de la Iglesia, no garantizaría en modo alguno el fin del colonialismo y de la opresión exógena y endógena de los pueblos en el mundo.

Pero es absolutamente necesario recordar y hacer penitencia por los crímenes cometidos por el colonialismo histórico y actual. Son actitudes necesarias porque permiten positivamente una redefinición de las relaciones de encuentro entre los diferentes pueblos y culturas, un camino más atento, más abierto, más gratuito, más discreto, más fraterno, más dialógico y humano. Es un camino de aprendizaje de discipulado que nunca terminaríamos de recorrer. Si el carácter colonial de la misión *ad gentes* fue determinado por la *expansión* europea, el carácter *decolonial* ciertamente no será su opuesto, es decir, introspección y clausura, sino una nueva apertura caracterizada por el intento de un auténtico encuentro con el otro: ¡debemos correr este riesgo! La expansión en términos de conquista no fue una apertura al mundo: fue más bien la afirmación de una identidad sobre la alteridad.

Pasar de la dominación al encuentro significa respeto, reconocimiento, diálogo, hospitalidad, amistad: significa pasar de la ansiedad del "salvacionismo" a la calma de la convivencia y del compartir; del voluntarismo heroico a la sencillez humana del huésped y del peregrino; de la sed triunfante de conquista a la cercanía sin armas de quien debe pedir permiso para poder presentar sus propuestas (cf. *Querida Amazonía* [QAm] 26); de la presunción de los que quieren enseñar a la sabiduría y disposición de los que quieren aprender. En definitiva, una misión de una Iglesia auténticamente pobre, misionera y pascual, como quería Medellín, comprometida en una evangelización de pobres a pobres, como quería Puebla, con la inculturación como imperativo de seguimiento de Jesús, como quería Santo Domingo, en un proceso permanente de conversión pastoral, como quería Aparecida, configurada en el diálogo intercultural y en la reciprocidad entre interlocutores, como quería el Sínodo de la Amazonía.

3. ¿La misión ad gentes no corresponde a la acción global de la Iglesia hoy?

Una tercera inquietud con respecto a la misión *ad gentes* se refiere a su especificidad de una misión dirigida a los pueblos no cristianos. En una época en la que dominaba un régimen de cristiandad, es decir, un Estado en el que la Iglesia como institución ejercía un papel social, político y cultural relevante, decisivo e institucional para la vida de los ciudadanos, el mundo estaba dividido en dos partes: los países cristianos y los países no cristianos. Un país cristiano se definía por la mayoría de bautizados entre sus habitantes y, por lo tanto, supuestamente esta mayoría estaba formada por personas que ya habían sido evangelizadas.

Poco a poco, entre los siglos XIX y XX, con la progresiva introducción de las perspectivas de la Ilustración y el establecimiento de los Estados laicos, se fue sintiendo y luego constatando una pérdida de influencia de la Iglesia en las sociedades tradicionalmente cristianas de Europa. Desde que los padres franceses Henri Godin e Yvan Daniel publicaron en 1943 el libro titulado *Francia, ¿país de la misión,*[3] la reflexión teológica y la acción eclesial comenzaron a cambiar lentamente de foco, considerando que la misión evangelizadora no se refería solo a tierras lejanas en relación con los países cristianos, sino que se encontraba en el corazón de estos países en proceso de secularización y de descristianización: los no cristianos hoy están por toda parte, incluso gracias a la secularización, a las migraciones y al proceso de globalización de la sociedad mundial.

El mundo entero se convirtió así en una inmensa tierra de misión. Europa, cuna de la misión *ad gentes*, constituye hoy un desafío misionero de primer orden, con sus Iglesias cada vez más en la diáspora de la vida social. El mismo Juan Pablo II, en la *Redemptoris missio*, terminó describiendo los ámbitos de la misión *ad gentes,* abriendo un abanico muy amplio de situaciones, circunstancias, condiciones, entre ámbitos geográficos, nuevos fenómenos sociales y areópagos modernos, de modo que esta misión, distinta en cierto modo de la nueva evangelización y de la pastoral misionera, abarca de hecho una multiplicidad de escenarios que diluyen el sentido tradicional de la misión a los pueblos no cristianos.

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[3] Henri Godin, Yvan Daniel, *La France pays de mission?,* 1943 (nueva edición: Robert Dumont (éd.), *La France, pays de mission? Suivi de La religion est perdue à Paris.* Textes et interrogations pour aujourd'hui. Préface de Jean-Pierre Guérend. Postface d'Émile Poulat, Paris: Karthala 2014, 57-273.

El Papa Benedicto XVI sostenía también que "el campo de la misión *ad gentes* se ha ampliado considerablemente y ya no es posible definirlo únicamente por consideraciones geográficas o jurídicas."[4] Por su parte, el Papa Francisco llamó la atención sobre la realidad sociocultural profundamente cambiada: "En aquel momento [...] era más fácil distinguir entre dos vertientes muy claras: por un lado, un mundo cristiano y, por otro, un mundo que todavía necesita ser evangelizado. Ahora, esta situación ya no existe. [...] En las grandes ciudades, necesitamos otros 'mapas', otros paradigmas, que nos ayuden a reubicar nuestros modos de pensar y nuestras actitudes: ¡ya no estamos en la cristiandad!".[5] Constatar el fin de la cristiandad ratifica también el fin de un modelo de misión *ad gentes*: se trata ahora de "situarse" en otra realidad que exige por parte de la Iglesia "una conversión pastoral y misionera, que no puede dejar las cosas como están" (EG 25).

El sentido de ir lejos para anunciar el Evangelio a los no cristianos hoy carece de una motivación empírica, ya que los no cristianos son nuestros vecinos. En esta coyuntura, toda acción de la Iglesia está invitada a hacerse misionera, redescubriendo así su esencia más profunda, pero también por las mismas circunstancias que la impulsan a un dinamismo decisivo de salida de sus ámbitos y de cercanía a las múltiples situaciones humanas y existenciales.

Ciertamente, este cambio en la práctica y en el modo de entender la misión representa un gran avance para la madurez de la conciencia eclesial: todo bautizado es misionero y todo pueblo de Dios está llamado a la misión. Ahora bien, todas las Iglesias locales son misioneras, porque todas están en permanente estado de misión. Por lo tanto, esa distinción colonial entre una Iglesia "constituida" y una Iglesia "misionera" ya no tiene sentido: la "Iglesia misionera" se convierte en modelo y paradigma para todas las Iglesias, colocando a cada una en pie de igualdad con las demás.

Esta operación, entretanto, esconde un riesgo: el de no reconocer las diversas situaciones en las que las Iglesias y los cristianos se encuentran en su vivir y actuar. El Concilio Vaticano II advierte que hay diferentes "condiciones" en las que se realiza concretamente una misma misión (cf. AG 6), y especifica también que el término "misiones", en plural, se refiere a los proyectos misioneros que se llevan

[4] Benedicto XVI, Discurso a los participantes en el Congreso del 40° aniversario del Decreto *Ad gentes,* 11 de marzo de 2006.

[5] Francisco, Discurso del Papa Francisco a la Curia Romana en la Presentación de las Felicitaciones de Navidad, 2019.

a cabo en ciertos "territorios" donde la Iglesia local es pequeña, perseguida, pobre o incluso casi inexistente.

Lo que debemos mantener de la tradición misionera de la Iglesia, para no liquidar de una vez por todas la misión *ad gentes* en la misión global de la Iglesia, es su impulso profético de salir de nuestra zona de conforto para ir a los lugares más remotos, más olvidados y desafiantes. La palabra "misión" siempre apunta audaz y proféticamente a una situación extrema, última, fronteriza y marginada a la que los discípulos misioneros están llamados a llegar. La misión no se hace en cualquier parte: la misión tiene su "geografía" y sus "interlocutores" privilegiados, fuera del ambiente, de la comunidad, de la cultura de cada Iglesia local.

En primer lugar, la misión se desarrolla en las periferias territoriales, socioculturales y existenciales. Las periferias son lugares alejados del centro, lugares de lucha por la vida, lugares de exclusión, marginación, precariedad, transgresión, informalidad, violencia, como la Galilea donde vivió Jesús, y donde hoy viven las víctimas y sobrevivientes de "un sistema social y económico injusto en su raíz" (EG 59). La misión, ayer como hoy, debe *situarse* en estos contextos. Por lo tanto, hablar de misión es también y esencialmente hablar de *territorios*, contextos, lugares en los márgenes de un sistema, donde la Iglesia experimenta un *cambio fundamental* en su percepción del mundo, un compromiso evangélico con los pobres y un empeño en la construcción de un mundo más justo, fraterno y solidario.

En segundo lugar, la misión tiene lugar en las fronteras, en las líneas divisorias, en los umbrales entre identidades y alteridades, culturas y territorios. Aunque para algunos vivimos en un mundo sin fronteras, para la mayoría las fronteras representan vallas infranqueables. Las fronteras son muros reales y crueles para millones de migrantes y refugiados, pero también cercas simbólicas, imaginarias y coloniales para millones de excluidos: se erigen vallas (in)visibles para separar clases sociales, segmentos ideológicos, grupos de interés, culturas, razas, géneros, generaciones, religiones y todo tipo de fragmentación y diferencia. Una vez derribadas estas vallas verticales, pueden convertirse en puentes: hay que estar en las fronteras para ofrecer lugares de encuentro y reciprocidad, de diálogo y participación, de paso para ir y venir, construyendo nuevos lazos y nuevas relaciones. La misión, por tanto, es habitar las fronteras y promover una cultura del encuentro *(Fratelli tutti* [FT] 215).

En tercer lugar, la misión se realiza necesariamente hasta los confines de la tierra, fuera de nuestros mundos, cruzando todas las fronteras, abriendo caminos y avanzando siempre hacia aguas más profundas. El camino misionero es un camino de peregrinación que va

siempre más allá, impulsado por el Espíritu a recorrer caminos misteriosos, audaces y sorprendentes. Este Espíritu nos impulsa a salir de nuestras guaridas y abrirnos al mundo de los demás, no por un deseo de conquista, ni por un capricho aventurero, sino por el más simple espíritu de servicio a la vida. El Espíritu de Cristo hace nacer en sus discípulos un "corazón sin fronteras, capaz de superar las distancias de origen, nacionalidad, color o religión" (FT 3), capaz de abandonar "todo deseo de dominio sobre los demás" (FT 4) y de soñar juntos "como una sola humanidad, como caminantes de la misma carne humana, como hijos de esta misma tierra que nos cobija a todos, cada uno con la riqueza de su fe o de sus convicciones, cada uno con su propia voz, pero *fratelli tutti"* (FT 8). El fundamento de un "corazón sin fronteras" (FT 3) es simplemente lo humano: "darse cuenta de cuánto vale un ser humano, cuánto vale una persona, siempre y en toda circunstancia" (FT 106).

La misión nos llama constantemente al deber evangélico de solidaridad, de diálogo y de apertura universal con todos los pueblos, todas las Iglesias, todas las culturas y todas las religiones, incluidas las que no encontramos en nuestras fronteras. Sabemos que tenemos un tesoro en vasijas de barro para ofrecer, y que este tesoro es para la vida de todos, sin excluir a nadie, para que en Él vivan todas las personas: no podemos guardarlo solo para nosotros. Ya no podemos pensar solo en nuestras comunidades, en nuestras parroquias, en nuestras diócesis, en nuestros pobres, en nuestros niños, en nuestras familias: ¡es demasiado pequeño! Necesitamos abrir los ojos, los corazones y poner los pies en el camino. El pensamiento, el corazón y el caminar deben ser del tamaño del mundo. El Papa Francisco también dijo en una asamblea de las OMP: "Frente a la tentación de las comunidades de encerrarse en sí mismas – es una tentación muy frecuente, muy frecuente, de encerrarse en sí mismas –, preocupadas por sus propios problemas, vuestra tarea es exhortar a la *missio ad gentes,* a testimoniar proféticamente que la vida de la Iglesia y de las Iglesias es misión, y es una misión universal" (Asamblea de las OMP, 2013).

4. ¿La misión ad gentes es solo para algunos o para todo el Pueblo de Dios?

Las palabras "misionero", "misionera" son parte de una terminología moderna bastante reciente. Se refieren a los predicadores del Evangelio que dejan sus tierras para evangelizar a los pueblos y establecer la Iglesia en todos los rincones del mundo. En la tradición católica, eran predominantemente los religiosos y religiosas consa-

grados los que se entregaban a la misión *ad gentes*. Gracias a sus esfuerzos, hoy tenemos la presencia de comunidades eclesiales en casi todos los países del mundo. Sin embargo, en la tradición protestante, fueron los cristianos más comunes los que se movilizaron y organizaron para la misión *ad gentes*. Además, gracias a ellos se proclamó la Palabra de Dios y se fundaron muchas comunidades.

Hoy se usan las palabras "misionero", "misionera" como adjetivo para todos los bautizados, para designar su vocación esencial a vivir y anunciar el Evangelio en todas partes: "Por el Bautismo recibido, todo miembro del Pueblo de Dios se ha convertido en discípulo misionero (cf. Mt 28,19). Cada bautizado, independientemente de su papel en la Iglesia y del grado de instrucción en su fe, es un sujeto activo de evangelización, y sería inoportuno pensar en un plan de evangelización llevado a cabo por agentes cualificados, mientras que el resto de los fieles serían sólo los destinatarios de sus acciones" (EG 120).

Pero, convengamos, hay diferentes acciones que tocan no solo la forma, sino también el grado de compromiso y el dinamismo misionero entre el agente pastoral en su parroquia y la mujer consagrada que está al servicio de la misión más allá de las fronteras en un país musulmán de África o Asia. El Papa Benedicto XVI recordó que "la vida consagrada resplandece a lo largo de la historia de la Iglesia por su capacidad de asumir explícitamente el deber de anunciar y predicar la Palabra de Dios en la *missio ad gentes* y en las situaciones más difíciles" (*Verbum Domini* [VD] 122). Ahora bien, nos preguntamos ¿por qué parece estar excluido a los laicos – palabras que ni siquiera deberían existir en la Iglesia – participar en este tipo de misión, cuando habría muchas personas que están entusiasmadas y dispuestas a prepararse y a salir a integrar proyectos misioneros más allá de las fronteras?

He aquí dos consideraciones que hacer sobre la participación de todo el Pueblo de Dios en la misión *ad gentes*. En primer lugar, es necesario que "nos formemos como discípulos misioneros sin fronteras" (DAp 376), "con un corazón universal, abiertos a todas las culturas y a todas las verdades, cultivando nuestra capacidad de contacto humano y de diálogo" (DAp 377). Esto es parte de nuestra catolicidad para alimentar una mística universal, que eleve la compasión por la humanidad en su conjunto, por todos los pueblos y todos los seres vivos. Esta mística se expresa en la vida cristiana de tres maneras: con la oración, que es la primera y más eficaz obra misionera, porque hace justicia a la primacía de la acción de Dios en el mundo; con el compartir los bienes, que manifiesta eminentemente la fraternidad y la solidaridad evangélica de la comunidad eclesial con las necesidades de las otras Iglesias; por último, con el compromiso de los agentes en la cooperación misionera,

ya que no hay nada más testimonial que el don de la propia vida. Todas estas acciones pueden entenderse como cooperación y sinodalidad misionera.

Con respecto a este último punto del envío de misioneros más allá de las fronteras, esta es una vocación y un ministerio específico, conferido por la Iglesia a algunas personas llamadas, dispuestas y empoderadas. No existe un estado de vida exclusivo para este servicio: cualquier bautizado puede ser enviado a una misión más allá de las fronteras, siempre que madure esta vocación junto con una comunidad eclesial y sea realmente capaz de participar en algún proyecto misionero.

Sin embargo, el mayor desafío para la Iglesia con respecto a la participación de los laicos en la misión *ad gentes* es repensar su estructura y la mentalidad que tiene al respecto. Es realmente difícil para un laico pensar en ser enviado a otro país sin una institución que lo apoye, que lo aliente, que lo anime, que lo cuide de su formación, que lo reconozca en su proyecto de vida de constituir una familia, de tener un salario digno, de tener su propia autonomía, de poder contar con una carrera que valore sus conocimientos y sus habilidades. En otras palabras, es necesario instituir un ministerio misionero *ad gentes*, reconocido por todas las instancias eclesiales, al que todos los bautizados y bautizadas puedan acceder indistintamente, según los diversos carismas.

Y por lo que se refiere a las Iglesias locales, sabemos que son las principales protagonistas de la misión junto con el Espíritu Santo. Desde que el Concilio Vaticano II dejó muy claro este reconocimiento, la misión *ad gentes* ya no es una actividad exclusiva reservada a los institutos misioneros especializados, sino que es un mandato – el único mandato – que el Señor ha dejado a su Iglesia apostólica, y que ella lo ejerce *dentro* de su contexto sociocultural con los pueblos que le han sido confiados, y *fuera* de su contexto sociocultural como cooperación misionera con otras Iglesias locales. Ambas las direcciones representan el compromiso esencial de una Iglesia verdaderamente misionera y sinodal.

"Local" nunca debe entenderse como "particular", es decir, que una Iglesia debe ocuparse sólo de una "parte" del Pueblo de Dios. El Concilio Vaticano II afirma que "todos los obispos son consagrados no sólo para el beneficio de una diócesis, sino para la salvación del mundo entero" (AG 38), y que "la gracia de la renovación no puede crecer en las comunidades si cada una no amplía el campo de su caridad hasta los confines de la tierra y se preocupa tanto por los que están lejos como por los que son sus propios miembros" (AG 36). Por no hablar de los sacerdotes que "necesitan comprender muy bien que sus vidas también

están consagradas al servicio de las misiones" (AG 39) y que los *obispos* "envían a algunos de sus mejores sacerdotes a las diócesis más necesitadas de clero" (AG 38). Son llamadas muy serias que tenemos que rescatar.

Del mismo modo, no se puede oponer lo "local" a lo "universal", no sólo en el compromiso fundamental de proclamar la misma fe, en la unidad en la tradición apostólica y en la fidelidad al depósito de la fe entre las diversas Iglesias locales, sino también – y yo diría que sobre todo – en la cooperación misionera. El Papa Francisco recuerda en la Encíclica *Fratelli tutti* que "no es posible ser sanamente local sin una apertura sincera y amable a lo universal, sin dejarse interpelar por lo que sucede en otros lugares, sin dejarse enriquecer por otras culturas, sin solidarizarse con las tragedias de otros pueblos". El peligro que corremos es encerrarnos en un "localismo" que nos deja incapaces "de admiración frente a la multitud de posibilidades y de bellezas que ofrece el mundo entero, y carentes de una solidaridad auténtica y generosa". De este modo, la Iglesia local deja de ser receptiva, "ya no se deja completar por el otro, y se limita en sus posibilidades de desarrollo, se vuelve estática y enferma" (FT 146). Segundo Galilea dijo que para América Latina es necesario enfrentar "el desafío misionero de 'dar desde nuestra pobreza' o permanecer indefinidamente empobrecidos".[6] Uno de los signos claros del empobrecimiento de nuestras Iglesias, es el clericalismo.

5. ¿La misión ad gentes *es una misión imposible?*

Hablando de *"dar de nuestra pobreza",* otro obstáculo decisivo para la promoción de la misión *ad gentes* en muchos países de América es la cuestión de los recursos humanos y financieros. El énfasis en la pobreza, que no debería representar una dificultad insuperable, sino más bien "convertirse en un camino de renovación misionera",[7] encuentra en efecto, varios obstáculos tanto para la Iglesia que envía como para la Iglesia que recibe: por un lado, el envío misionero se hace inviable a causa de los costes de los proyectos; por otro, las expectativas con la ayuda material se ven frustradas.

Las misiones siempre han contado con el apoyo de las Iglesias que enviaron misioneros con enormes inversiones económicas que provenían de la generosidad y las posibilidades de sus bienhechores, así como de la capacidad organizativa y de compromiso de estas Iglesias.

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[6] Segundo Galilea, *La responsabilidad misionera de América Latina*, Bogotá: Ed. Paulinas, 1981, 22.

[7] Ibid., 36.

Esto contribuyó a configurar la misión *ad gentes* en torno a las obras y proyectos de desarrollo, generando a menudo una cierta dependencia de sus destinatarios.

El camino inculturado de una Iglesia pobre a otra Iglesia pobre es mucho más complejo, ya que no puede responder a las necesidades básicas de sus interlocutores, pero tampoco puede colmar las expectativas creadas a lo largo del tiempo por una misión colonial. Por lo demás, sabemos que la misión *ad gentes*, en su expresión más pionera, difícilmente puede sostenerse a corto plazo: por el contrario, requiere inversiones a largo plazo, antes de que pueda convertirse en una realidad autónoma. La misión, desde un punto de vista estrictamente administrativo, es siempre un "costo" para una organización: o, mejor dicho, es pura gratuidad.

Por eso, para muchas Iglesias pobres del continente, que tienen dificultades para cerrar las cuentas del mes, la misión *ad gentes* se convierte en una misión imposible. Sin embargo, esto no les impide cultivar este deseo, alimentar su conciencia y su práctica misionera en su seno, así como lanzar carteles, promover iniciativas y desarrollar proyectos con otras Iglesias de la provincia eclesiástica, con la Conferencia Episcopal o con la ayuda de otras organizaciones.

Hay que tener en cuenta, además, que la misión *ad gentes* también está experimentando transformaciones en su *modo* de actuar. Hoy la misión ya no se sitúa predominantemente en el ámbito de las grandes obras, sino principalmente en el ámbito de las relaciones: estamos llamados a recrear nuevas relaciones basadas en la acogida, la misericordia, el perdón y la alegría del Evangelio. La misión es sentarse, es ternura, es abrazarse, es pasar tiempo con la gente, es confraternizar, es cuidar de la vida, de las heridas de los crucificados. Hay que convencerse de que la misión no significa acometer grandes empresas: hoy ha tomado una dirección diferente, más mística y contemplativa, más escondida y humilde, más servicial y samaritana, más acorde con nuestra fragilidad y pobreza, que es un signo profético contra el utilitarismo del *"paradigma tecnocrático dominante*" (LS 106).

También hay quienes piensan que hoy, para anunciar el Evangelio de Jesús hasta los confines de la tierra, disponemos de medios mucho más baratos, inmediatos y eficaces: la internet, las redes sociales e incluso la inteligencia artificial. Sin duda, estos medios tecnológicos suponen un gran avance para la humanidad, abriendo nuevos e interesantes caminos también para la evangelización. Sin embargo, Pablo VI, de regreso de un viaje a Uganda en 1969 (cf. *Udienza generale,* Roma, 6 de agosto de 1969), se preguntaba por qué el Evangelio, que es la verdad revelada, no se difundía por *sí mismo* a través de los modernos medios de comunicación: porque "la red de co-

municación de la fe debe ser humana para que el mensaje llegue al corazón de las personas", respondía. En otras palabras, lo que se necesita es cercanía, ternura, contacto humano, comunicación de corazón a corazón… Se necesita "alguien que vaya allí" para que el Evangelio se convierta realmente en compartir, comunión y comunicación. Y el Papa concluyó: "Es paradójico, pero Dios necesita de seres humanos, necesita de misioneros." La proximidad y el encuentro entre las personas marcan la diferencia.

Imagínate: ¡todo lo que necesitas para dar a conocer a Cristo al mundo es el google! El Papa Benedicto XVI afirmó en su Encíclica *Spe salvi* [SS], que el cristianismo no es una comunicación de contenidos previamente desconocidos: el mensaje cristiano no es *"informativo"*, sino *"performativo*" (SS 2). Esto significa que el Evangelio no es sólo una comunicación de cosas desconocidas, sino que es una comunicación que transforma vidas. Evangelizar no significa sólo conseguir que la gente conozca a Jesús, sino que lleven a Jesús y su Evangelio a sus propias vidas. El joven rico también se encontró con Jesús: fue un encuentro profundo, intenso y radical. Aun así, su vida no cambió y se marchó triste.

Tratamos de hacer realmente posible esta misión *ad gentes*, porque hay un camino muy sencillo para que las personas se encuentren por primera vez con Jesús, que es a través de nuestras personas, de nuestro abrazo, de nuestro testimonio, de nuestra escucha, de nuestro silencio y de nuestras palabras. Luego, con el camino eclesial, Jesús se revela más profundamente en la comunidad, en la Palabra, en los sacramentos, en la oración, en la devoción y en todo lo demás, pero inicialmente se anuncia a través de la cercanía, la ternura y el encuentro misionero. En esto no hay proselitismo: es puro corazón y pura pasión.

Conclusión

A pesar de todo, la misión *ad gentes* de América hacia al mundo forma parte del camino de nuestras Iglesias desde hace mucho tiempo, como vemos en los testimonios de este congreso. Son testimonios hermosos, humildes, despojados, intrépidos, pero poco conocidos y reconocidos. Tal vez deberíamos empezar a valorar más a nuestros misioneros y misioneras, para que esta misión se convierta en una misión para toda la Iglesia en América. Ciertamente, no es edificante ver que incluso en documentos y asambleas eclesiales bastante recientes no se dedique ni una palabra a la misión *ad gentes*. ¡Necesitamos trabajar con más coraje y audacia en la animación misionera en este continente! Lo que hace falta es que las Iglesias locales se impliquen mucho más

en la cooperación misionera, y para ello debemos promover y fomentar la organización y coordinación de los organismos misioneros en nuestros países.

El documento de Aparecida afirma que "el mundo espera de nuestra Iglesia latinoamericana y caribeña un compromiso más significativo en la misión universal en todos los continentes" (DAp 376), y sabemos que tenemos mucho que ofrecer, algo original e importante, el sentido de salvación y liberación, la riqueza de nuestra piedad popular, la experiencia de las Comunidades Eclesiales de Base, el florecimiento de nuestros ministerios, la esperanza y la alegría de nuestra fe (cf. DP 368). América Latina puede presentarse como un interlocutor privilegiado con las realidades más pobres del mundo, en la promoción de un nuevo modelo de misión, de Iglesia y de sociedad.

Recordemos siempre que también nosotros necesitamos misioneros de todo el mundo, no sólo porque la misión *ad gentes* y los confines del mundo están en medio de nosotros, sino también porque la presencia de los demás nos enriquece mucho. La misión promueve una dinámica circular de reciprocidad y sinodalidad, de modo que no sea una acción unidireccional, cayendo así en una lógica colonial. El Papa Juan Pablo II señaló que "cooperar con la misión no significa solo dar, sino también saber recibir. Todas las Iglesias, jóvenes y antiguas, están llamadas a dar y recibir de la misión universal, y ninguna debe encerrarse en sí misma" (RMi 85). Esta reciprocidad e intercambio son elementos típicos de la misión entendida como cooperación. Entretanto, esto significa mucho más: la misión se lleva a cabo solo en un trabajo conjunto, eminentemente eclesial y sinodal.

Esta misión sinodal *ad gentes*, que habita en las periferias, que derriba muros y cruza fronteras, que abre caminos hasta los confines de la tierra, interpela a la Iglesia que somos y a la Iglesia que queremos ser. Una frase que se puede encontrar en uno de los documentos de la Iglesia en Brasil de hace casi 40 años decía lo siguiente: "La madurez eclesial es una consecuencia y no sólo una condición de la apertura misionera: una Iglesia que abandona su espíritu misionero con el pretexto de que aún no se han satisfecho plenamente todas las necesidades locales, estaría condenada a la esterilidad" (CNBB, *Igreja: communhão e missão*, 1988, 119). Una Iglesia local camina, evangeliza y es evangelizada, crece y madura su identidad en la medida en que se pone abierta al diálogo con los pobres y con los otros hasta los confines de la tierra. Es la misión la que hace a la Iglesia y no al revés: la misión siempre es lo primero. Por eso, ya lo hemos dicho varias veces, en esta aventura de la misión *ad gentes* lo importante no será lo que seremos capaces de realizar, sino la Iglesia que seremos capaces de llegar a ser.

ABSTRACTS

This reflection originates in the context of the VI American Missionary Congress (CAM6) that took place in Puerto Rico from November 19-24, 2024, with some 1300 participants from all over the continent.

In his paper, which keeps its oral style, the author discusses the missionary vocation *ad gentes* of the church and its implementation. For Latin America, difficulties are highlighted in the realization of this vocation to go out *ad gentes*. This has to do with history, which leads to reflections on the colonial context of the missionary enterprise. But it is necessary to take into account the changes in the understanding of mission and of the very being of the church in order to assume a mission *ad gentes* in the sense of leaving its own context and going to the frontiers in a perspective of sharing and living together with the poor, beyond all frontiers.

Diese Überlegungen stehen im Kontext des VI. Amerikanischen Missionskongresses (CAM6), der vom 19. bis 24. November 2024 in Puerto Rico mit etwa 1300 Teilnehmern aus dem ganzen Kontinent stattfand.

In diesem Beitrag, der den Redestil beibehält, erörtert der Autor die missionarische Berufung *ad gentes* der Kirche und ihre Umsetzung. Für Lateinamerika werden die Schwierigkeiten bei der Verwirklichung dieser Berufung *ad gentes* hervorgehoben. Dies hat mit der Geschichte zu tun, die zu Überlegungen über den kolonialen Kontext des Missionsunternehmens führt. Es ist jedoch notwendig, die Veränderungen im Verständnis der Mission und des Wesens der Kirche zu berücksichtigen, um eine Mission *ad gentes* in dem Sinne anzunehmen, dass sie aus ihrem eigenen Kontext herausgeht und sich an die Grenzen begibt in einer Perspektive des Teilens und des Zusammenlebens mit den Armen, über alle Grenzen hinweg.

Cette réflexion s'origine dans le contexte du VIe Congrès missionnaire américain (CAM6) qui a eu lieu à Porto Rico du 19 au 24 novembre 1924 avec quelques 1300 participants de tout le continent. Dans son article qui garde le style oral, l'auteur traite de la vocation missionnaire *ad gentes* de l'Église et de sa mise en œuvre. Il souligne les difficultés que rencontre l'Amérique latine dans la réalisation de cette vocation de sortir *ad gentes*. Cela vient de l'histoire – ce qui conduit à une réflexion sur le contexte colonial de l'entreprise missionnaire. Il est cependant nécessaire de prendre en compte les changements dans la conception de la mission et de la nature même de l'Église, de façon à assumer une mission ad gentes au sens de quitter son contexte propre pour aller aux frontières, dans une perspective de partage et de vie avec les pauvres, au-delà de toutes frontiières.

*Shiju Paul Puthenpurackal, SVD**

ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION: THE FIFTH DIMENSION OF RELIGIOUS MISSIONARY FORMATION AS EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

The author pleads in this reflection for the inclusion of an ecological dimension into the formation programs of religious missionaries. In his reflection, he draws on recent magisterial insights and stresses the urgency of such a reorientation in formation perspectives due to the ecological requirements of our present world situation.

The traditional dimensions of priestly formation programs and religious missionary programs are fourfold. They are the Human Dimension, Spiritual Dimension, Intellectual Dimension, and the Pastoral/Missionary Dimension. Each of these dimensions at every stage of missionary formation presents specific goals and specific indicators for growth. All four dimensions of formation are an interwoven integrated journey in a community. It entails setting attainable and challenging goals, and ways that one will achieve them through new learning, right accompaniment, ongoing reflection, and periodic/annual evaluation for holistic growth. The process takes place through inputs, interiorization, interaction and integration in a community.

The current realities and changing paradigms in caring for the earth, our common home, require a re-imagined religious missionary formation program with a new kind of spiritual leadership that incorporates a socio-ecological systems approach. This approach embraces the interconnected diversity of social and ecological dimensions across different types of socio-political, environmental, and economic contexts. It calls for bold policies in religious missionary programs to create meaningful space for a new way of being missionary disciples in

*Shiju Paul Puthenpurackal (born 1970) was ordained in 1997 in Kerala (India) and belonged to the SVD Botswana Province until 2017. There, he served in parish ministry, in the common novitiate in Ghana and as provincial for Botswana Province for two terms until 2014. After serving a term as formator for theologians in Divine Word Theologate in Chicago, he joined the Jesuit Refugee Service in 2021. He is currently ministering with refugees in Maban County, Upper Nile State in South Sudan, bordering Sudan and Ethiopia.

our planetary world to match the urgency of our planetary crisis. For example, Pope Francis urges us to contextualize religious missionary formation in the Amazon. In the final document of the Pan-Amazon Synod he writes:

> In order to offer future priests of the Amazon's churches a formation with an Amazonian face, inserted in and adapted to the reality, contextualized and able to respond to the many pastoral and missionary challenges, we propose a formation plan in line with the challenges of the local churches and the reality of the Amazon. Its academic content should include disciplines such as integral ecology, ecotheology, theology of creation, Indian theologies, ecological spirituality, the history of the Church in the Amazon, Amazonian cultural anthropology, and so on. The formation centres for priestly and religious life should preferably be inserted in the Amazonian reality, with a view to keeping the young Amazonian in formation in contact with his or her own territory while preparing for the future mission, thus guaranteeing that the process of formation not distance itself from the people's lived reality and their culture, as well as offering other young non-Amazonians the opportunity to take part of their formation in the Amazon, thus fostering missionary vocations.[1]

Among the many well-known environmental activists of our era, one can mention the following prominent personalities who influence the world through their impact and wisdom: Wangari Maathai**,** an environmental and political activist from Kenya who founded the Green Belt Movement; U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson who founded the Earth Day; Sunderlal Bahuguna, leader of the Chipko Movement by rural women in India; Chico Mendes from Brazil who was shot dead by cattle ranchers; Sister Dorothy Stang who was martyred for being outspoken in her efforts on behalf of the poor and the environment; Chief Raoni Metuktire of the Kayapó tribe who is respected worldwide for a life dedicated to protecting the Amazon rainforest; Rachel Carson who is regarded by many as the founder of the modern environmental movement; Jamie Margolin who co-founded Zero Hour with other environmental activists; Swedish activist Greta Thunberg who co-authored with Jamie the book *Youth to Power: Your Voice and How to Use It;*

[1] Pope Francis, Pan-Amazon Synod. Final Document. *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, 2019 Retrieved from http://secretariat.synod.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/documents/final-document-of-the-amazon-synod.html. #108 [accessed 26 October 2019].

Vandana Shiva from India who advocates for agroecology, ecofeminism and fights biopiracy; Joanna Macy, a scholar of deep ecology that brings a new way of seeing the world as our larger living body; Thomas Berry who urged us to recognize our rightful place on earth in a vast evolving universe and Mathew Fox, an advocate of creation spirituality.

Adding ecological formation as the fifth dimension of our formation programs at every level could address the challenges of our time in a more conscious, intentional, and strategic way. It would instill a new path and awareness in response to God's call in this area and to help planning how to put them into practice effectively at this vital time in our world's history. The emergence of this new religious consciousness of life that everything is interrelated, interconnected and interdependent paves the pathway to experience a strong call to personal, communal and institutional conversion. It demands we do some inner work and choose alternative lifestyles to allow us to create new ways of being creative disciples. This article attempts to clarify and exemplify the intertwined nature of the ecological dimension for religious missionary formation and emphasize that it operates as its integral aspect.

Indigenous Wisdom Across Cultures

The wisdom of indigenous peoples and our ancestors of all nations and cultures is a great source of formation with the earth, learning from the earth and living close to the earth. According to the United Nations, though indigenous people constitute only 6.2% of the global population and 22% of the land on the planet, they account for around 80% of the world's biodiversity. They preserve and sustain this profound and respectful relationship with the earth through their stories, performing arts, festivals and celebrations. Rubina Cohen lists interconnectedness and balance, sustainable practices, spiritual connection to nature, cultural preservation and respect, and un-learning destructive practices as some of the common elements of earth-based indigenous wisdom in action[2] (points, 1-5). Therefore, formation with the earth, learning from the earth, and living close to the earth, immersing into the natural cycles of the land, and listening to her heartbeat are imperative to any religious missionary formation. Formation practices that are sustainable and respectful to the environment and rooted in

[2] Cohen, R., *Nurturing a Sustainable Future: Embracing Earth-Based Wisdom for the New Year*. Retrieved from https://www.seedsofwisdom.earth/2023/12/27/embracing-earth-based-wisdom/ [accessed 27 December 2023].

the indigenous wisdom and knowledge acquired over generations gradually instill a sense of resilience in candidates, because indigenous knowledge systems form their generation to thrive in extreme environments with sustainable strategies and methods. Recognizing, acknowledging, and integrating indigenous wisdom in formation programs plays a fundamental role in protecting the environment and birthing resilient creative missionary disciples for the 21st century with renewed paradigms and frameworks.

Emergence of Communities' Reimagining

Texts inspired from Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* (LS), *Laudate Deum, Fratelli tutti* and *Querida Amazonia* are setting new distinctive benchmarks for religious missionary formation in our imperiled planetary home. These teachings have marked a pivotal moment in history and our faith journey. The world-renowned Princeton Theological Seminary has intentionally started *Farm+Seminary: Farminary*, a sustainable farm to integrate rigorous theological education with regenerative sustainable agricultural practices and the meaning of life in our fragile ecosystem.[3] Sophia Theological Seminary in Richmond is a reimagined community that strives to live and learn in harmony with creation and one another. It is a small seminary where a deep thinking, hardworking community is on a journey of ecological conversion by working on an ecologically sustainable farm to financially sustain their tuition and housing expenses. They describe Sophia as a "seminary with dirt under its nails."

Another self-organizing emergent movement is called the Order of the Sacred Earth (OSE). It is a deeply spiritual and radical movement of mystic activists. They integrate leading edge science and various spiritual and wisdom traditions to act with courage and urgency to heal and protect the living earth. Those who join this order profess the following sacred vow that underscores the charisms through which they operate and the values they strive to fulfill: "I promise to be the best lover and defender of Mother Earth that I can be."

It is challenging to think critically and creatively, and to find ways to move beyond more traditional approaches to religious missionary formation to include an ecological dimension for greater understanding and appreciation of the living earth even amid the deepest of divides. More and more formation programs are innovating with creative

[3] Dube, I., *Farm+Seminary: Faminary*. Princeton Magazine. Retrieved from https://www.princetonmagazine.com/farmseminary-farminary/ [accessed April, 2020].

learning paradigms not only to achieve a more sustainable lifestyle, but also to create a stronger resource for God's work in the world through greater connection and stewardship for the environment. The aim of the ecological dimension in formation is to bring about a deepened awareness of being in communion and commitment in this intricately woven web of life.

From "Ego-self" towards "Eco-Self"

The phrase "Eco-Self" comes from the phrase ecological self. It was introduced by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess to describe human beings in a web of relationships as living equitably with other living beings and the earth itself.[4] The emergence of a new cosmic consciousness in which everything is interdependent, interconnected and interrelated is remodeling the lens of religious missionary formation. It calls for a radical change in the way we view our very self and the concept of God. It calls forth the passing over from an "ego-self" focused on wellbeing and competencies to an "eco-self" focused wellbeing and competencies. The "eco-self" is an expression of "everything is connected to everything else" and as humans we are an intrinsic part of nature interwoven with the rest of life. The "ego-self" is a human-centered sphere that describes human maturation from the flourishing of an individualized ego for self-realization as a people set apart crowning the pyramid of creation to live in right relationship with all of creation in this intricately woven web of life. An operational framework based on an "ego-system" that focused solely on the wellbeing of oneself resulted in three interrelated divides such as the disconnect between self and nature called ecological divide, a disconnect between self and other known as the social divide, and a disconnect between self and Self explained as the spiritual divide. An eco-system awareness emphasizes a consciousness-based system change of well being of the whole, grounding itself in the inner place or the source from which we operate.[5]

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[4] Strumse, E., "The Ecological Self: a Psychological Perspective on Anthropogenic Environmental Change." *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 3 (2007): 13-15.

[5] Scharmer, O., *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018. Kindle Edition 216-286.

Reconnecting Religious Missionary Formation Goals to the Biosphere

In today's context of living with the devastating consequences of a worsening planetary crisis, it is high time to reconnect religious missionary formation programs and perspectives on integral and holistic formation to the biosphere foundation. Today it is a precondition for sustaining life in all its biodiversity on earth rather than a mere choice. Religious missionary formation programs have been presented as an action-oriented framework intended to foster integral growth in a volatile world. Folke et al. concluded the following:

> Humanity is embedded in the biosphere. Nature is inside us as much as we are inside nature. In this sense people, irrespective of social and cultural contexts, coevolve with the planet and our beliefs, perceptions, and choices shape our actions, technologies, and future in the biosphere in sustainable or unsustainable ways. Fundamental issues for humanity like democracy, health, poverty, inequality, power, justice, human rights, security, and peace all rest on the life support capacity and resilience of the biosphere. The biosphere provides preconditions for achieving and sustaining dignity in human relations.[6]

A religious missionary formation program has two aspects in mind as we formulate its contents: to grow in religious missionary calling in a holistic way, responding to the needs of a wounded world, and a lifelong religious missionary commitment to leading effective and sustainable initiatives to effect change as shepherds and luminaries. We can easily recognize that our congregational priorities and works are closely connected to the *Earth Charter* and to the *Sustainable Development Goals* of the United Nations. The Earth Charter is a document of collective wisdom of the global community which is both a people-centered and ecosystem-centered declaration. It is organized under four pillars: Respect and Care for the Community of Life; Ecological Integrity; Social and Economic Justice; and Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace. These four overarching pillars have 16 main principles and 61 supporting principles that provide a framework for caring for our common home and integral human development with a commitment to

[6] Folke, C., Biggs, R., Norström, A. V., Reyers, B., & Rockström, J., "Social-ecological resilience and biosphere-based sustainability science", *in Ecology and Society* 21: 3 (2016): 41. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-08748-210341

future generations.[7] The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are formulated as 169 targets with 230 indicators for monitoring and evaluation.[8]

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals are the overarching roadmap for transformative and accelerated actions to achieve integral development for people and planet. The commitment to "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB), including the promise to "reach the furthest behind first" (FBF) is a landmark political declaration to deliver an integrated development vision. Familiarity about the SDG agenda of the United Nations and the Earth Charter in our formation programs further enhances the ecological dimension. Aligned with *Laudato si*' and grounded in a religio-spiritual perspective, the Earth Charter and the SDGs can provide a comprehensive framework about the current global engagement taking place for the ecological dimension of formation programs.

The Earth Charter and the SDGs are a common pathway for the missionaries to network and partner with others for the transformation of the world. In this optic, it takes conversion to redesign our formation programs by inserting an ecological dimension in ways that address the pressing challenges of our time and particular context leading to action. The pastoral care of people and the care of ecosystems are inseparable since the wellbeing of our biosphere is the hub that holds the web of creation. Our intercultural community centers of formation can become places of living those frameworks if this is integrated into the "whole of formation" approach, that is expressed in all components of formation programs at all levels and into the life of our religious communities and institutions with a call to action. Therefore, aligning religious missionary formation goals to the Earth Charter and the SDGs is foundational to meeting 21st century challenges for consciousness raising and application of values.

Integral Ecology

Pope St. John Paul II appropriated the term "human ecology" from the social sciences in his memorable 1991 encyclical *Centesimus annus*. The Pope writes:

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7 *The Earth Charter*, 1992. Retrieved from https://earthcharter.org/read-the-earth-charter/ [accessed 30 May 2024].

8 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet*, 2023. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/

> Although people are rightly worried—though much less than they should be—about preserving the natural habitats of the various animal species threatened with extinction, because they realize that each of these species makes its particular contribution to the balance of nature in general, too little effort is made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic "human ecology." Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God's gift to man. A person must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.[9]

The encyclical provides an illuminating lens demonstrating how various diverse surroundings influence the development of the human person and the contemporary moral–cultural crisis in the world today. The concept of integral human development was a key theme of Pope Benedict in *Caritas in veritate*. The Pope writes, "Knowing that we, as persons and communities, are part of God's family gives us a vision and energy to serve a truly integral human development".[10] It underscores the formation of the human person in all his/her dimensions such as spiritual, social, cultural, and political dimensions for authentic human flourishing and wellbeing. Pope Francis links and integrates the perspectives of his predecessors to coin the phrase "integral ecology" for an integrated approach to our ways of being in the world.

Pope Francis exhorts us in *Laudato si'* that addressing current global issues requires the development of an *integral ecology*—an integrated holistic approach that considers the interactions between both natural and social systems. In chapter four of *Laudato si'*, entitled "Integral Ecology," Pope Francis addresses the environmental, economic, and social ecology; cultural ecology; ecology of daily life; the principle of the common good; and justice between the generations.[11] The encyclical explains that the social and environmental issues are not two separate crises, but one complex crisis with both social and environmental dimensions that require alternative frameworks through the lens of an

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[9] Pope John Paul II., *Centesimus Annus*. Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html

[10] Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, #78 Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html

[11] Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 2015, #137-162. Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

integrated ecology. The global goals for sustainable development attempt to address pressing global issues with down-to-earth ideas and action plans to implement without much attention to the underlying spiritual and cultural problem that we face. Pope Francis argues that "our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience".[12]

Today, the human, spiritual, intellectual, and missionary/pastoral dimensions of religious missionary formation programs are often treated in isolation of each other with much promise and many pitfalls. At times this even promotes a modern myth of "progress" "grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)".[13] Inclusion of an ecological dimension provides a unique holistic approach at the intersections of the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral/missionary dimensions, to develop an alternative framework, informed by spiritual wisdom, contemplation, value formation and creative action in intercultural settings. In *Querida Amazonia* Pope Francis exhorts:

> Human groupings, their lifestyles and their worldviews, are as varied as the land itself, since they have had to adapt themselves to geography and its possibilities. Fishers are not the same as hunters, and the gatherers of the interior are not the same as those who cultivate the flood lands. Even now, we see in the Amazon region thousands of indigenous communities, people of African descent, river people and city dwellers, who differ from one another and embrace a great human diversity. In each land and its features, God manifests himself and reflects something of his inexhaustible beauty. Each distinct group, then, in a vital synthesis with its surroundings, develops its own form of wisdom. Those of us who observe this from without should avoid unfair generalizations, simplistic arguments and conclusions drawn only on the basis of our own mindsets and experiences.[14]

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[12] Ibid., #105.

[13] Ibid., #210.

[14] Pope Francis, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, 2020, #32. Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html

Ecological Conversion for Integral Formation

Metanoia is a radical and profound change of both the heart (the source of our passions, feelings, decisions, and motivations), and the mind (source of all thoughts and ideas). Our capacity for standing back, for seeing the bigger picture, restores our intertwined relationships with each other, with God, and with the earth itself.[15] J. Martin (2015) comments on *Laudato si',* "We can awaken our hearts and move towards an 'ecological conversion' in which we see the intimate connection between God and all beings, and more readily listen to the 'cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' (no. 10)."[16] The concept of "integral ecology" endeavors to balance human activity and the natural environment. These understandings, accompanied by deep contemplation, bring to experience a strong call to personal, communal and institutional conversion for a new way of being and acting in the world.[17] This births a new authentic spirituality that connects us inwardly and gives meaning to our collective actions to find innovative and creative solutions to nurture our common home. Pope Francis shares the attitudes and changes within ourselves that can result from undergoing an ecological conversion in *Laudato si'*.[18] It includes paying attention to the internal movements of our hearts that sense deep gratitude for the world, a loving awareness of being in communion with the rest of creation, pursuing creative and innovative approaches in nurturing the environment supported by generosity, self-sacrifice and a responsibility based on faith. Including an environmental dimension to religious missionary formation programs adds a contemplative pathway widening the web of human interrelatedness, increasing intellectual and intuitive pursuits, and widening the tent of pastoral inclusion through communal discernment and the deepening of collaboration.

Goals of the Ecological Dimension of Formation

The ecological dimension of religious missionary formation aims to ground a person through the sacred interweaving of mind, heart, and body to Jesus the Christ so as to grow into a Christ consciousness in which everything is related. In this level of consciousness each of us is

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15 Ibid., #66.

16 Martin, J. (2015), "Top Ten Takeaways from 'Laudato Si'". America. Retrieved from https://www.americama gazine.org/faith/2015/06/18/top-ten-takeaways-laudato-si [accessed 6 June 2018].

17 Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, #215.

18 Ibid., #220.

more than a singular "I" constantly becoming a relational self, embodied and eco-centric in kinship connecting more deeply with our living planet and one another. The integration and wholeness of self-in-relationship of a person consists of innovatively walking the following paths, a framework provided by the Creation Spirituality.[19]

Via Positiva

Criteria:

a. Demonstrate awe, reverence, gratitude and joy for the entire creation;
b. Experience "God is in everything and everything is in God.";
c. Be receptive to the unfolding of the creative energy of God in diverse ways;
d. Affirm our goodness and our enoughness to promote "less is more";
e. Display a lifestyle that regenerates the earth and sustains biodiversity.

Via Negativa

Criteria:

a. Awaken consciousness to the planetary and human sufferings experienced in social, ecological and spiritual divides;
b. Recognize, acknowledge, name and integrate our shadows and the society;
c. Engage experiences of chaos and darkness as groundbreaking moments in which life germinates again as darkness is the origin of everything that is born;
d. Develop the skills of letting go and letting be through forgiveness, reconciliation and restorative justice for the new to emerge;
e. Learn to embrace our vulnerabilities as possibilities to make our lives better.

[19] Fox, M., Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality. TarcherPerigee 2000.

Via Creativa

Criteria:

a. Ability to interweave the light and shadows of life to birth creativity;
b. Attaining a clear sense of one's values, competence, strengths, blind spots and biases;
c. Developing skills for creative and transforming discipleship practices for everyday life;
d. Building communities of formation as intersections of biodiversity and cultural diversity;
e. Co-creating a preferred sustainable future by the pastoral care of people and the care of ecosystems;
f. Strengthening capacities to grow beyond the anthropocentric consciousness to become eco-citizens wherever we find ourselves.

Via Transformativa

Criteria:

a. Learn to do internal works to strengthen the skills that are more challenging to practice self-compassion and self-care;
b. Increased ability for self-compassion connects us with the inner strength that sustains us and helps us to sustain others in crisis to experience healing, connection, and tenderness;
c. Deepen core practices to serving others from a biodiversity of ideas, ethnicities, religions, gender identities, and cultures with true sensitivity, respect, and compassion;
d. Transform consciousness by actively engaging faith to end all expressions of suffering especially reaching the furthest behind first;
e. Work for systemic change through advocacy, networking and community mobilization;
f. Practice a clinical method of learning in formation and ministry, viz., action-reflection-feedback-new action.

Questions for Reflection

1. How can I personally incorporate the vision of a sustainable way of life into my daily life? What small steps could I take today for the change of my mind and heart?
2. In what ways can our communities and institutions integrate the spirituality, knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life into our religious missionary formation programs and policy-making to foster a deeper connection with the Earth?
3. What personal, communal and institutional challenges do I/we foresee in undergoing an ecological conversion and embracing a more Earth-centric way of life, and how could I/we overcome them?

Conclusion

Therefore, the inclusion of an ecological dimension in our formation programs is no more a choice, but an obligation in the 21st century. All papal phraseologies such as human ecology, integral human development, and integral ecology would strive for the broad, holistic view of a socio-ecological systems approach and the psycho-social adaptability of individuals, their relational living with one another, their societies and the environment. Formation for mission trains the candidates to enrich and transform the lives of the marginalized people worldwide and to nurse a wounded ecosystem by crossing multiple divides. The ecological dimension further strengthens the holistic approach we employ in our ministries where we value people not just as project beneficiaries, but as dignified human beings with many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, needs, rights and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of sufferings in their lives. Be not afraid! (Matt 28:10)

ABSTRACTS

Der Autor plädiert in dieser Reflexion für die Einbeziehung einer ökologischen Dimension in die Ausbildungsprogramme von religiosen Missionaren. In seiner Reflexion stützt er sich auf neuere lehramtliche Erkenntnisse und betont die Dringlichkeit einer solchen Neuausrichtung der Ausbildungsperspektiven aufgrund der ökologischen Erfordernisse unserer aktuellen Weltsituation.

El autor aboga en esta reflexión por la inclusión de una dimensión ecológica en los programas de formación de los religiosos misioneros. En su reflexión, se

basa en recientes reflexiones magisteriales y subraya la urgencia de tal reorientación en las perspectivas de formación debido a las exigencias ecológicas de nuestra actual situación mundial.

Dans cette réflexion, l'auteur plaide pour l'inclusion d'une dimension écologique dans les programmes de formation des religieux missionnaires. Il relève plusieurs intuitions magistérielles et souligne l'urgence d'une telle réorientation des programmes, en raison de l'actuelle situation mondiale.

*Stanislaus Lazar, SVD**

NEW WINE IN FRESH WINESKINS: BECOMING CREATIVE DISCIPLES IN TODAY'S WOUNDED WORLD

The author presented this contribution at the SVD and SSpS National Colloquium, held at Atma Darshan in Andheri East (Mumbai, India) in November 2024. Setting out from an analysis of the conflictive situation of today's society, particularly in India, "vulnerability" is presented as a capacity to relate to others. It is important to come to terms with an understanding of mission which, in the Indian context, builds on a combined paradigm of prophetic witness and solidarity with the poor and marginalized. The author calls for mission in bold humility, following the dreams and vision of a new society. Missionaries must rely on their spirituality, grounded in the Trinity, in order to engage the public sphere and offer visions of hope.

1. Wounded World Today

The world is moving very fast in the technological and cyber field. A communication Copernican revolution is taking place and newness is found in this field every other day. People get the benefits of this growth; they are overwhelmed with plenty of newness, while at the same time, they are confused about what is right and wrong, moral and immoral, good and bad for society. Mostly, youth and rich thrive fast in the postmodern world, but also often with confusion.

* Lazar T. Stanislaus is an SVD missionary from India. He completed his doctorate in Missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. He was the Director of Ishvani Kendra Institute of Missiology and Communications, Pune, India. He served one term as the President of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM). He was the Provincial Superior of India Mumbai Province. In addition to contributing many articles to different journals and editing books, he offers, in theological institutes, courses and seminars in Missiology, Dalit Theology, Interculturality and related subjects. He was the Mission Secretary of the Society of the Divine Word at the Generalate in Rome.

Along with progress in science, technology, industry and cyber space, there are also plenty of problems: social and economic inequality, moral degradation, dominant and crazy leaders in some countries, local and international wars, abuse of creation and climate crisis, fake news, chronic physical wounds and the failure of health systems and so forth. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers experience tremendous hardships.

Referring to the wounds in India, religious fundamentalism, narrow nationalism, cultural imperialism, violence, polarizing politicians and hate speeches, the present government's attitudes and policies towards minorities, the manipulation of the Constitutional rights of the minorities and the poor are some of the problems.

Christians fear to express their faith in the public sphere. Church leaders experience mental and physical anguish in their ministries. Being surprised by attacks on the places of worship or institutions, fear of being attacked especially where the majority live in the rural areas, the harassment of fundamentalist politicians and local leaders are some of the realistic situations for Christians in India today.

The present government also continues to suppress the freedom of religion. Intimidation of social activists and people protesting government policies, as well as silencing dissent in academia are now prevalent. India cries for freedom for human rights defenders and for information seekers and others who take a stand on truth, justice and human dignity. There is a concern of increasing anti-conversion laws, hate speech, and the demolition of homes and places of worship for members of minority faith communities. Fear seems to have paralyzed large sections of the minorities, especially Christians.

Along with these, we need to admit that we too have wounds and conflicts within our communities and in the church. In this context, we have to ask ourselves, what are the conflicts that we experience in our communities and mission areas? What are the wounds of our local Christian community or parishioners? What are the wounds of our coworkers? Do we perceive them? Are we close to them?

2. Basic Considerations

2.1 Realizing the Vulnerability

Vulnerable is derived from the Latin noun *vulnus* ("wound"), which comes from the Latin verb *vulnerare*, meaning "to wound." Thus, vulnerability is a position in which one can be easily hurt or wounded. It

also denotes that there is a potential for pain. People are wounded, experience a lot of pain due to various reasons.[1]

True vulnerability is revealed by the extent to which you face real "woundability." In his beautiful book, *Strong and Weak*, Andy Crouch says, "Vulnerable at root means woundable." It means putting something you love at real risk of losing it. Stephen Bevans says that vulnerability of disciples can give hope.[2] Discipleship denotes an experience of vulnerability.

Vulnerability is a sign of our longing for grace and mercy. It is the sign of the Holy Spirit's deep stirring within us, and it is one of the most important attributes to cultivate in those we disciple. Like the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), we long to confess our secrets and be met by the loving mercy of God. Conversion of our heart or longing for healing is a power of this vulnerability (Jam 5:16).

The vulnerability of Christ did not violate his authority. We no longer live as slaves to fear but with vulnerable-authority as the children of God—out of the inexpressible joy that we are the righteousness of God in Christ, full of the power of the Spirit of God (Rom 8:15; 15:13, 1 Pet 1:8-9).[3] Through his vulnerability, Jesus *liberates us* and gives us the authority to depend on *God*.

According to Robert Schreiter a "*missio ad vulnera*"—"mission to wounds"—is a response to living within the *missio Dei* today.[4] The Indian church continues to take care of wounded, vulnerable people. Christians in India are wounded, vulnerable and fragile. While dealing with these wounds, we need to find ways to create Christian communities less subject to flammability, and less action due to anger and resentment and more grounded in honest assessment from history and factual happenings of the present. We need to read the signs of the times without manipulation of the truth, and not becoming scapegoats of the wounds nor becoming new victims. Let us go beyond "the politics of petulance"[5] to the present context while realizing our vulnerability.

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1 Paul Kollman, "The Urgent Demands of the Present: Missiological Discernment in a Wounded World," *Mission Studies* 39 (2022): 139-162, 141.

2 Stephen Bevans, "Theological and Missiological Reflections," in *Missionary Discipleship in Glocal Contexts*, Lazar T. Stanislaus and vanThanh Nguyen (eds.), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2018, 137-150, 150.

3 Akshay Rajkumar, https://in.thegospelcoalition.org/article/true-vulnerability-is-real-woundability/

4 Roger Schreiter, "Locating European Mission in a Wounded World in Deep Transformation," *Mission Studies* 37 (2020): 333-353, 35l.

5 Alan Wolfe, *The Politics of Petulance: America in an Age of Immaturity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2018.

Christian mission helps us understand that we have to navigate our woundedness in a wounded world. Realizing vulnerability is neither playing the victim card nor the minority card. Wounds and vulnerability will be part of us. As Kwame Anthony Appiah has written, "What we all want, and cannot have, is the ideological equivalent of a *Forever Stamp*, the assurance that our version of enlightenment will withstand the passage of years, without requiring ungainly supplementations."[6]

Pope Francis said in Chile, "We are not asked to ignore or hide our wounds. A church with wounds can understand the wounds of today's world and make them her own, suffering with them, accompanying them and seeing to heal them."[7] This is the challenge in India, although we are wounded and vulnerable, we don't hide ourselves, but seek others who are wounded and show compassion.

2.2 Searching for a New Paradigm

Over the years, according to the contexts and the development of a theology of mission, many paradigms of mission have emerged: paradigms of the Kingdom of God, liberation, missional church, holistic mission, integral mission, migrant and diaspora mission, digital mission and so forth. In the context of India, the following have been the suitable paradigms: paradigms of justice and advocacy, interfaith dialogue, inculturation, peace and reconciliation, and prophetic dialogue. We are all familiar with prophetic dialogue. We engage in a dialogical process and at the same time try to be prophetic in our mission approach.

In the context of religious fundamentalism, government harassment, and majoritarianism, discriminations against minorities and especially Christian institutions, a single paradigm of mission may not help to really face the situation. A *combined paradigm* of prophetic witness, solidarity with the marginalized, and contextual resilience (non-violence) offers a robust approach for Christian mission. It provides a framework for standing firm in faith, advocating for justice, and working for peace in ways that are courageous, creative, and deeply rooted in Christian convictions.

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[6] *Forever Stamp* refers to the US Postal Service practice of issuing stamps without a price affixed that guarantees delivery. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Defender of Differences*, 2020, *New York Review of Books*, quoted in Paul Kollman, "The Urgent Demand of the Present," 159.

[7] https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/francis-comic-strip/francis-chronicles/five-wounds-christ-pope-urges-recovery-traditional

The metaphor of putting new wine into new wineskins (Matt 9:17) emphasizes the need for alignment between the substance of the Gospel (the new wine) and the methods and structures through which it is delivered (the new wineskins). In this context, the new wine (substance) is the fresh expression of Christian mission through prophetic witness, prophetic hope, bold humility and solidarity with the marginalized. The new wineskin (method) is the innovative, flexible, and contextually relevant strategies that allow this mission to flourish in a challenging environment.

2.3 Letting the Mission Choose Your Direction

Being aware of the local context, the socio-economic and political situation; being mindful of the cultural context, the forces within and outside the local community, the thirst and aspirations of the people, the openness and the resilience of the people, we need a direction for the future course of action in our mission today. In this situation, being aware of our own skills and talents, leadership qualities, team spirit, personal calling, personal discernment and prayer are helpful to know what I/we can be. As missionaries, the core values of mission such as compassion, service, and inclusiveness of the weak and poor should resonate with us, and our direction should be in alignment with our Congregation in order to make a difference in society.

Thus, there is a possibility to choose one's direction. But in the context of our provinces and regions, community discernment and direction seem to be best for sustainability and impact in society. Let the context create consciousness and direct us to choose our mission. In this way, we may neither become prisoners to the structures of the province nor pursue our own ego or "my mission." Rather, there is a freedom to find innovative and relevant mission.

2.4 Essential Qualities of Postmodern Missionaries

Other than our religious values of faith, commitment, honesty, and transparency, developing other qualities are very significant today. Postmodern missionaries could have the following knowledge and dispositions: cultural intelligence, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, relationship building, emotional intelligence, developing resilience, an attitude towards lifelong learning, teamwork, humility and love for social justice and so forth.

Certainly, we cannot be superhuman beings knowing everything and developing all skills. Depending on the local ministries in which one is involved, the combination of some qualities would be very

helpful and necessary. A missionary who uses social media platforms to share the gospel and connect with people from different cultures demonstrates digital literacy and cultural intelligence. A missionary who starts a small business to generate income for a community exemplifies skills in entrepreneurship, relationship building, team building and collaboration. A missionary who involves local leaders to address community needs showcases knowledge of social justice, emotional intelligence and resilience. Thus, there is no perfect combination, but certainly some combination of these qualities helps to be rooted in that ministry.

In my experience over the years, the *leadership* quality of every missionary is important. Every missionary should develop strong leadership qualities, without exception. Organizing programs, giving orientations, explaining the present situation, standing with the public to lead them or show the way, analyzing the situation with the people and having courage to articulate a right thing in a right place are extremely important. Without these we may be simple and humble missionaries, but we become ineffective in the larger society. We may be healing the wounds of a few people but not many. Leadership quality is a must for any Arnoldus family member. This has power and a transforming effect.

3. Becoming Creative Disciples

A disciple is essentially a follower or student. In the context of Christianity, a disciple is someone who follows Jesus Christ. By placing faith in him, the disciple lives like Jesus. Discipleship is the process of becoming a disciple. It involves a deep, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, characterized by learning, growing, and serving, and it is a lifelong journey. Stephen Bevans explores discipleship as transforming discipleship, which involves three aspects: always being open to the transforming work of the Spirit in oneself; discipleship is more than just a relationship with Jesus, it is always call to mission; furthermore, transforming discipleship is a call to be involved in liberating or transforming the world.[8] He further explains that today, we are called to *transforming missionary discipleship*. The implications are the following: discipleship means caring for creation, mission from the margins and being committed to community; discipleship is committed to evangelism, reaches across religious boundaries, is sensitive to the

[8] Stephen Bevans, "Theologies of Mission," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mission Studies*, Kirsteen Kim, Knud Jørgensen and Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press 2022, 111-128, 120.

trends of secularization, models leadership and takes up the cross.[9] The 18th SVD General Chapter [GC] also called for this type of discipleship (see 2018 GC 13).

Creative ministries are done in various ways in the local context. The challenge is always how to do them creatively so that they are relevant, attractive, effective and transforming. Let me put forth some aspects of becoming creative disciples that can shape our life, commitment and the ministries in our context.

3.1 Having a Dream

As the Arnoldus family, we need an individual dream or vision as well as a collective dream. A vision of mission is crucial for having clear focus and achievable targets. It energizes and motivates us to achieve what we have set as a goal. Without a clear vision and a thorough plan and commitment to act upon it, our dream will remain just in the clouds. The truth is, there's no secret sauce, no magic recipe—just a heck of a lot of passion, perseverance and commitment that's needed.

Abdul Kalam once said, to have a "small dream is crime." Always have a big dream or vision, large enough to have transformative measures. Jesus had a vision (Luke 4:16-20) and he made efforts to realize this dream. Arnold Janssen had a dream; at times, he felt that it was like vapors, disappearing, but his faith, commitment and hard work helped him to realize his dream. We too have dreams from our provincial and general chapters, but we need vision for mission in our local context, and this should be big. Without vision (aligned with the province), in each of our communities and for individuals, our life can be directionless. The new wine today is to have a big dream or vision in our mission. A new wineskin is a way to realize this dream.

3.2 Deepening Missionary Spirituality

Missionary spirituality for the Arnoldus family is deeply rooted in Trinitarian spirituality which binds a missionary in a love relationship with the Trinity, and that love is shared with others. Thus, in this deep-rooted belief and commitment, one shares one's faith and serves others, often in a foreign or challenging environment. It's a call to go beyond one's comfort zone to bring the message of love, hope, and compassion to those in need. This spirituality is not a renunciation of the world but a deeper immersion into the world as disciples of Jesus with Gospel radicalism. The Divine Word is the living fountain that

[9] Ibid., 120-121.

sustains missionary spirituality (2024 GC 43). "Discovering the Word is an exercise that animates our life" (2018 GC 53).

Spirituality is seeking God, listening to the Spirit and following the Spirit's promptings. In our quest to be rooted in Trinitarian spirituality, discovering the Word in the world and being guided by the Word of God molds our spiritual growth. To witness to our faith in this challenging situation in India, the more we grow deeper in missionary spirituality, the stronger we will be able to face the challenges. Missionary spirituality motivates us to love the people regardless of their background or religion; it instills a willingness to embrace the unknown and step outside of one's comfort zone, to reach out with humility to others, often in positions of vulnerability and dependence, and to be sensitive to the multicultural manifestations. In a disheartening situation, "it is spirituality that moves a person to empathize with another, to act concretely, and to show solidarity with others" (2024 GC 46).

In this growth, Joan Chittister says, today, we need prophetic spirituality, it "is the spirituality of awareness, of choice, of risk, of transformation. It is about the embrace of life, the pursuit of wholeness, the acceptance of others, the call to co-creation."[10] This makes the missionary more emphatic and relevant today.

3.3 Bold Humility

Bold humility is a term that describes the balance of confidence and grace, wisdom and vulnerability, proclamation and respect. It shows both being committed, being consistent, ready to take risks, and also not fearing failures. But at the same time, knowing one's own weakness and not trumpeting achievements, it shows respect to others. In mission, bold humility is a virtue to be developed. David Bosch speaks of mission as done in "bold humility" or with a "humble boldness." When we offer God's love and mercy to people, "we know only in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed."[11] With true faith and trust in God and together with our companions, we need bold humility that can challenge and change a situation. Pope Francis says, "Holiness is also *parrhesia* (speaking freely): it is boldness, an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 129).

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[10] https://www.thelivingwater.com.au/blog/the-time-for-uncommon-courage-is-now-says-joan-chittister

[11] David J. Bosch, T*ransforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991, 489.

It is a way of living out one's calling with gratitude and following the Spirit's voice boldly in context, but humbly acknowledging one's weakness. It also involves recognizing the suffering of others and accepts the challenges that come with leadership, working for justice and against discrimination. We probably need this boldness in being aware of the wounds in the world today; at the same time, we need humility acknowledging that we cannot change everything; but we will also not accept everything. Bold humility is a quality that can help to discover and foster creative disciples.

3.4 Apostolic Aggressiveness

Being apostolic is our commitment and a way of life for religious. Aggressiveness in a positive sense refers to a proactive, determined, and sometimes forceful approach to advancing the mission and goals of the church. It involves taking bold steps in discipleship and ministries, rather than passively waiting for opportunities to arise. Here, aggressiveness does not refer to its negative side, such as being violent or unkind or destructive.

Trinitarian spirituality deepens the real meaning of love. Love at times shows anger or aggressiveness to stress what is just and right. *Logos* spirituality manifests that the Word was incarnate and had shown the meaning of sacrifice and at times aggressiveness to place the love of God above all. Jesus showed his annoyance when he entered the temple, chased away the vendors and overturned the tables, saying, "My house shall be called a 'house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers" (Matt 21:13). Jesus cursed with seven "woes" the unjust system and attitude of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23). Jesus was in fact apostolic in preaching and sharing God's love and mission; but that did not hide the other element of being stern, harsh, strict and stubborn.

Being aggressive in discipleship means putting significant effort into mentoring and teaching others in the faith. In ministry, aggressiveness can mean pursuing the church's mission with a high level of commitment and energy, taking an aggressive stance in advocating for social justice, and speaking out against discrimination. An aggressive approach is always motivated by compassionate love and grace. Missionary spirituality with apostolic aggressiveness is also helpful; but in the given context, a communitarian approach would be more advisable.

3.5 Resilience for Justice

Resilience calls for conviction, courage, and commitment. Resilience is based on a deep spirituality and oneness with the Spirit. Resilience is spiritual growth, and it is strengthened with community support and encouragement. The protest marches, fasting for justice, raising our voices in the public spring out of resilience. Along with resilience, we need good strategies for justice. Emeritus Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil, who has a long experience in dealing with various groups, says, "In the long term it is far better to invite people to intelligent reflection, draw them to responsible self-criticism, elicit a change of mind, and help them towards reorientation of their strategies."[12]

India is considered only "partly free" by Freedom House and effectively an "electoral autocracy" due to its anti-pluralist practices by the V-Dem Research Institute (USA). In the context of religious fundamentalism, stifling democratic values and less respect for women, violence is increasing. Arnoldus spirituality should help to develop resilience in us, in order to stand for integrity and establish justice. Let not injustice rule over us. We are committed to the "victims of structural injustices such as ethnocentrism, racial discrimination, religious persecutions, human trafficking and other forms of social economic injustice (2012 GC 22-23)" (2018 GC 42).

What the religious could do is to take proactive measures to counter violence, create think-tank groups, have a center of documentation regarding fundamentalism and its effects, train journalists, enter into state and central media, train lay leaders and encourage Christian lay people to enter into politics.[13] The fundamentalism and violence is not going to end soon, most probably they will be increasing. It is said, "you cannot stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." Be prepared to build resilience with the power of Christ and Trinitarian spirituality.

Another area for resilience is to work towards an inclusive church and gender equality. Injustice and violence to women is prevalent in the sphere of the church and society. Sr. Robancy Helen says, "Women in the church need to raise concerns about gender equality and work toward changing patriarchal beliefs and customs. Like-minded men

[12] Thomas Menamparampil, "The Emerging Cultural Challenges to Christian Mission Today," in *The Emerging Cultural Challenges to Christian Mission Today*, S. M. Michael and Jose Joseph (ed.), New Delhi: Christian World Imprints 2016, 5.

[13] L. Stanislaus, "Christian Response to Hindutva," in *Nationalism and Hindutva: A Christian Response*, Mark T. B. Laing (ed.), New Delhi: ISPCK 2005, 177-203.

must collaborate in this process to eliminate the cultural divide within the Indian church."[14]

3.6 Make a Difference in the Public Sphere

We are involved in the communication apostolate and the activities vary. Keeping with Arnold's view, communication has to become an evangelizing tool. It communicates God's love and the Good News to the people. While appreciating many activities, I would like to point out one area—our communication apostolate must be involved in the public sphere. Gifted individuals need to be identified and should be given the task of sharing the good news in the mainstream media—television, radio or print media. We appreciate very much that a lot of confreres and sisters are involved in social media; this is powerful and useful. Good and life-giving initiatives, deeds and activities need to be shared, and not only among us, but also with the public. Given the context of our country, individual social media clips and initiatives are too many. They revolve around local events. A concerted effort to make inroads in the public sphere is urgent. Writing articles and comments in periodicals, magazines, journals, etc., influences people. Letting our social media reach the public is another challenge. Taking up social issues, national concerns, expressing the views of excluded and marginalized in the public sphere seems to be an urgent ministry. This may not be rewarding, may not boost ego, but it is a prophetic approach; courage is needed to tell the truth regarding human right abuses, discrimination against minorities, atrocities against women, intolerance of fundamentalist groups and so forth. Journalism may not be so attractive, but it has a lot of power. Social media are powerful, but they have to be for the public, not just for a few Catholics and a few personal contacts.

The church has stressed, "we are what we communicate." Communicate with the heart.[15] Communicating from heart to heart is significant: "In order to speak well, it is enough to love well."[16] Thus our love for mission prompts us to be good communicators, especially good journalists in this challenging situation. We must re-educate ourselves about journalism as a sacrament and we must value it.

Let me bring in the talk of the day, Artificial Intelligence. Various claims are articulated today; some say it is going to bring about a

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[14] https://www.globalsistersreport.org/columns/status-and-contribution-women-indian-church?utm

[15] Pope Francis, *Message for the 57th World Communication Day*, 2023.

[16] Ibid.

Copernican revolution in the world. Others say it is not that mind changing to turn the world upside down. Pope Francis says, "Artificial intelligence systems can help to overcome ignorance and facilitate the exchange of information between different peoples and generations… Yet, at the same time, they can be a source of 'cognitive pollution,' a distortion of reality by partially or completely false narratives, believed and broadcast as if they were true."[17] In using AI, let us use it justly for growth in society; let not our communication creativities die, but grow with integrity and freedom.

3.7 Collaborative Mission with Lay Partners

Today, the lay associates/partners are becoming more significant in realizing our missionary vocation. Mission becomes more meaningful with collaborative efforts with the lay partners. Here, the lay people realize their vocation, missionary discipleship and find meaning in collaboration with our religious congregations sharing their charisms. We are moving in the right direction giving formation and promoting these groups. Certainly, there are challenges in this collaboration, but the more we collaborate and promote lay partners, the better the future will be. As one person said in a meeting in Rome at UISG (International Union of Superiors General, 2024), "The success of a congregation depends on when the lay people own the charism of that congregation and continuously cooperate with it."

4. Potential Approaches

4.1 Being Prophets of Hope

Prophecy is not magic, not fortune-telling, not extremism, not unorthodox. Prophecy is religion that releases the Divine in the human,[18] that calls for announcing this Divine and calling for justice, right relationships, peace and resisting inequality and discrimination; it calls us to not compromise with evil, thus denouncing it to the core. More so, prophecy shows an alternative way of life—transforming life—in the given context. That raises the question: what is the future of prophecy in our country?

Prophesy raises our hearts and souls to the level of meaningful life and resists the fringe and major fundamental religious groups who call

[17] Pope Francis, *Message for the 58th World Communication Day*, 2024.

[18] Joan Chittister, *Awakenings: Prophetic Reflections*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2022, 99.

for division, hatred and enmity with various religions. Prophesy raises its voice to break social unjust structures, caste systems, laws that are cornering the poor and enslaving women with cultural systems. In today's context, the prophets hold the values of justice and stand against the unjust structures. Thus, what can we do? What does God want us to do?

When we allow God to fill us and be our master, we are entering into prophetic posture. God points to a horizon that we can walk. This calls for a radical renunciation to give up our own "clicks" and "possessions" so as to readily enter into a new path. FitzGerald says that we must *de-link* from the obsession with the past, as she assures us, "(this) gives way to a new undefinable assurance, and this conversion releases creativity and most importantly freedom for the limitless possibilities of God, for hope. This freedom, this posture of hope is really prophecy…"[19] Hope becomes prophecy. FitzGerald concluded, "Be prophets of hope!"[20] Pope Francis addressing the Divine Word Missionaries during the General Chapter 2024, said, "being prophetic hope for every culture"[21] is a challenge, but this is the call of the church today: to be relevant, impactful and effective missionaries. The 15th General Chapter of the SSpS said, "Immersed in the dance of the Trinity, we are compelled to make a prophetic journey of transformation towards becoming a melody of compassion in this world."

Oscar Romero provides much inspiration to be a creative disciple, "Each of you has to be God's microphone… Let us not hide the talent that God gave us on the day of our baptism." Arnoldus family members are called today to be prophets of hope and to establish peace. Oscar Romero says, "Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all people to all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is a right and duty."[22] Being prophets of hope is to bring peace.

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[19] Constance FitzGerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis of Memory," Catholic Theological Society of America (June 2009), *CTSA Proceedings* 64 (2009): 35, https://ejournals.bc.edu

[20] Ibid., 42.

[21] *Faithful to the Word*, 6, Rome: SVD Generalate 2024, 71.

[22] https://www.albertus.edu/alumni/documents/from-romeros-homilies-speeches-and-writings.pdf

4.2 "Keep your Mind in Hell and Despair Not"

While explaining the theology of "non-despair" of St. Silouan and St. Sophrony, Irina Paert explains about the various wounds in the Estonia Christian Orthodox community. This is to remind them of their sufferings and hardships, but one has to look beyond these wounds. Creative response can come through contemplation. Deep reflection of the past, present and the future within the context is seeking what God wants us to do now.

Irina says, "reconciliation is only possible through an act of personal repentance, kenotic self-emptying and condemnation of oneself to Hell. The ascetic downward movement is a pre-requisite for flowing (knowing) Christ, who descended into Hell to save sinners, and emptied himself on the Cross."[23] The act of kenotic humility helps to reach everyone. The "*metanoian* search of deep transformation"[24] begins from inwardness and a path of humility that helps to accept the pain and suffering of all. This ascetic downward movement is crucial to rise above. One cannot kill God, to wipe away a conscience. Truth will ever triumph; therefore despair not, enthusiasm and courage helps the believers to search for light. Accepting many *kulturkampf* (wounded world) situations is like "keeping your mind in hell" but "despairing not" because there is hope. As a united religious community, we will see the light of Christ and assist others to seek that Light.

4.3 Transforming the Cultures and National Integration

"Woke culture" refers to a broader societal trend where people actively engage in advocating for social justice causes. This culture emphasizes awareness of systemic inequalities, promoting diversity and inclusion, and calling out perceived injustices. It also involves a strong focus on identity politics, where issues related to race, gender, and other identities are central to the conversation. "Woke culture" is a complex and evolving phenomenon. At times, this is also used pejoratively. Navigating the correct and just use of this term is significant. The underlying aspect is: seek justice so that love prevails.

Transforming culture is a mission; this is a huge task, but a vital approach to mission. At the root, culture is created by society; it has good and bad elements and customs; it emotionally vitalizes people for

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[23] Irina Paert, "Keep Your Mind in Hell and Despair Not": Dealing with the Wounds and Complicities of 20th Century Orthodoxy in Estonia Through the Theology of St. Sophrony (Sakharov) and Arvo Pärt, *Misson Studies,* 38: 1 (2021): 98-118, 114.

[24] Schreiter., "Locating European Mission in a Wounded World," 333-353.

the best and worst of life, and so forth. Culture is dynamic and it changes. The mission is to transform culture so that every aspect of it will resonate the love of God, the manifestation of the Divine, the fragrance of Love. Thus, the challenge and demand for the missionary is to transform cultures—be it "woke culture," "Indian culture" or foreign culture, so that there is unity and peace. Bishop Menamparampil says, "a central mission of the Church is to help *a happy encounter* of people of diverse beliefs and cultures and invite them towards a world of unity. Those who facilitate the process are truly *a blessing to the nations*."[25]

Hindutva ideology leverages, manipulates, and weaponizes Hindu symbols, traditions, and rituals to produce a politicized vision of Hindu nationhood.[26] Basically, trumpeting Hindu culture that needs to survive is a political manipulation. Thus, today we need cultural and national integration. We cannot isolate ourselves; we cannot hide behind the walls of our churches and institutions. We need to come out; we need to be seen in the public places; we need to be heard, and above all we need to become agents of transformation.[27] Transformation of the cultures will help national integration.

The real fear is violence, restraining the freedom of the minorities, passing laws that would choke the minorities and more so, and brainwashing bureaucrats to curtail the missionary activities at any cost. Pope Francis says that Christians are called to share the Gospel of peace, even amid persecution.[28] Christians must continue to be promoters of a culture of respect for all, of welcome, and of an inclusive fraternity where everyone can enjoy the bread of communion and the joy of solidarity.

Social thinkers and religious leaders who have grown with intercultural sensitivities can play a significant role as "people of dialogue" and "artisans of peace" (*Fratelli tutti* [FT] 284). Fostering "social friendship" (FT 99), "culture of encounter" (FT 216), "interdisciplinary reflection" (FT 204) and interreligious dialogue are some ways to build cultural and national integration.

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[25] Thomas Menamparampil, "To Be a Blessing to the Nations," in *Called to Be a Blessing*, Jose K. and Christian Tauchner (eds.), New Delhi: Global Publishing House 2023, 160-181, 181.

[26] Manan Ahamad and others, *Reporting Guide on Hindu Nationalism,* South Asia Scholar Activist Collective 2024, 30.

[27] Edwin Rodrigues, "Stretch Out and Reach Out: Ways to Revive Our Withered Existence," *Vidyajyothi*, 8:8 (2024): 561-566, 565.

[28] https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-08/pope-francis-message-nazaret-committee-persecuted-christians

4.4 Partnership and Collaboration

In this postmodern and post-truth society, making the right choices is crucial. Doing the right ministries at the right place is significant.[29] Christian discipleship requires discernment, commitment and action to counter the prevailing situation. Our mission is to share the good news and to historicize the love of God. This means that our engagement with others—networking, partnership with NGOs—working for liberation, freedom and unity are vital in the prevailing situation of the country. Intercongregational cooperation has seen success in Italy, Brazil, Colombia, and so forth. In India, there are a few congregations involved. I think it is time to venture into this approach and cooperate with other congregations in some fields. This is a challenge, hard work and cumbersome. In the context of a synodal approach and partnership, we have to find ways to engage in intercongregational ventures.

In this aspect, ecumenism plays an important role in our mission. Someone said, calling for *Mahasabha* of all Christians is essential in today's situation to show solidarity, work together and to have some common programs. This is very much lacking in India. Can we take a position to boost ecumenism in our country?

Conclusion

In the looming shadows of apocalypse(s), new visions of hope are flowering around the world, involving truly radical conversion(s) from blind faith in science, technology and markets and at times in social media and the rejection of the spirituality of consumerism. New blossoms are emerging as more people are advocating ecologically responsible communities, raising voices for human rights, responding to migrants and listening to the persecuted Christians. Mission blossoms when we see Christ in the poor, in excluded, discriminated women and suffering minorities and place hope in small changes. We can become new wine in new wineskins with a creative living of our vocation. The root of becoming a creative disciple is deep missionary spirituality. May Arnoldus spirituality help us!

[29] S. M. Michael, "Post-Truth and Its Challenges to Christian Mission Work in Asia," in *Challenges in a Postmodern World: Asia Pacific Christian Responses*, Kupang: Widya Mandira Catholic University 2022, 20.

ABSTRACTS

Der Autor präsentierte diesen Beitrag auf dem nationalen Kolloquium von Steyler Missionaren und Missionsschwestern, das im November 2024 im Atma Darshan in Andheri East (Mumbai, Indien) stattfand. Ausgehend von einer Analyse der konfliktreichen Situation der heutigen Gesellschaft, insbesondere in Indien, wird „Verwundbarkeit" als eine Fähigkeit zur Beziehung zu anderen dargestellt. Es ist wichtig, sich mit einem Missionsverständnis auseinanderzusetzen, das im indischen Kontext auf einem kombinierten Paradigma von prophetischem Zeugnis und Solidarität mit den Armen und Ausgegrenzten aufbaut. Der Autor ruft zu einer Mission in kühner Demut auf, die den Träumen und Visionen einer neuen Gesellschaft folgt. Missionare müssen sich auf ihre in der Trinität begründete Spiritualität stützen, um sich in der Öffentlichkeit zu engagieren und Visionen der Hoffnung anzubieten.

El autor presentó esta contribución en el Coloquio Nacional SVD y SSpS, celebrado en Atma Darshan, en Andheri East (Mumbai, India), en noviembre de 2024. Partiendo de un análisis de la conflictiva situación de la sociedad actual, particularmente en la India, se presenta la "vulnerabilidad" como capacidad de relación con los demás. Es importante llegar a un entendimiento de la misión que, en el contexto de la India, se base en un paradigma combinado de testimonio profético y solidaridad con los pobres y marginados. El autor aboga por una misión con audaz humildad, siguiendo los sueños y la visión de una nueva sociedad. Los misioneros deben apoyarse en su espiritualidad, basada en la Trinidad, para comprometerse en la esfera pública y ofrecer visiones de esperanza.

L'auteur a présenté cette contribution au colloque national SVD et SSpS qui s'est tenu à Atma Darshan, Andheri, Bombay Est, en Inde, en novembre 2024. Partant d'une analyse de la situation conflictuelle dans la société d'aujourd'hui, particulièrement en Inde, la « vulnérabilité » est présentée comme capacité de se relier aux autres. Il est important d'accepter une conception de la mission qui, dans le contexte indien, allie le témoignage prophétique et la solidarité avec les pauvres et les marginalisés. L'auteur plaide pour une mission audacieusement humble, qui accompagne les rêves et la vision d'une société nouvelle. Les missionnaires doivent s'appuyer sur leur spiritualité, ancrée dans la Trinité, s'engageant dans la sphère publique et offrant une vision d'espérance.

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