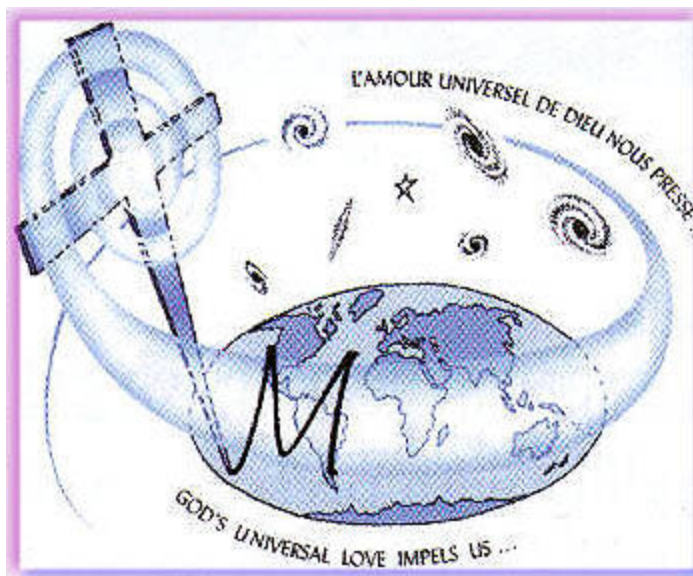


The title of my essay contains four key terms and five questions. The answers to the five questions, at least prior to Vatican II, were obvious and simple, and could be given by any tolerably informed Catholic, or Protestant for that matter: Mission is (1) the church's work for the salvation of souls, (2) carried out for the benefit of the pagans abroad, (3) mainly by priests, religious brothers, nuns, and specially-commissioned layfolk, mostly from Europe and America, (4) with the financial and spiritual support of the laity back home, and (5) by planting the church in these "mission fields." These answers were readily accepted as a matter of course because there was a common agreement on what was meant by mission: it was understood as the *foreign mission*, or *missio ad gentes*, to use a Latin expression, that is, mission in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania, all the continents except Europe and North America, which are considered already Christianized. To these foreign lands missionaries – generous and committed Christians, with a romantic love of adventure, a heavy endowment of survival skills,



and perhaps a touch of eccentricity – are sent (that is the meaning of "missionary" in Latin) and they would spend their entire lives there, amidst the semi-literate and semi-clad natives, with an occasional trip home to regale their audience with tales about conversions and mortal dangers, not averse to a bit of melodrama to shake loose the listeners' purses in support of the missions.

That was how mission was understood and practiced up to some thirty years ago. But now things have changed, and changed utterly. The change from the

enthusiasm and optimism of the World Missionary Conference that met in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, whose catchy slogan was “The evangelization of the world in this generation,” to the discouragement and even pessimism in today’s missionary circles, Catholic and Protestant alike, is visible and palpable. The factors contributing to this widespread malaise are many. For one thing, geographical shifts in the 1950s and 1960s, especially the ending of European colonialism and the gaining of political independence by many African and Asian peoples, placed in serious jeopardy Christian mission, which began in massive numbers and in a systematic fashion in the sixteenth century and reached its apogee in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often marching in locked steps with the Western colonial enterprise. To the consternation of Western missionaries, the shout “Missionary, go home” was raised in the 1960s, to be followed a decade later by the demand for a moratorium on Christian missions from the West.

In addition to the political factors, the collapse of mission as we knew it was also caused by the unexpected resurgence of the so-called non-Christian religions, in particular Hinduism and Islam. The missionaries’ rosy predictions of their early demise were vastly premature. Concomitant with this phenomenon is an intense awareness of religious pluralism which advocates several distinct, independent, and equally valid ways to reach the Divine and therefore makes conversion from one religion to another, which was considered as the goal of mission, unnecessary. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, there is the rise of what has been termed “post-modernity,” an umbrella label to describe sundry and diverse movements in contemporary thought that deconstruct and reject the claim to universal validity of any historical, philosophical and theological system such as Christianity. Stripped of this claim Christianity, and for that matter, any religion with universalistic tendencies, would lose the *raison d’être* for its missionary endeavor. [\[1\]](#)

In what follows I will not focus on these extra-theological factors that have in one way or another contributed to the collapse of Christian mission. Rather I contend that what has shattered our previous centuries-long consensus about mission and the conventional answers to the five questions raised above is a new theology of mission that views the relations among the four key terms – proclamation, reign of God, church, and mission – in a radically different way. This new way of conceiving the reciprocal relationships among these four theological realities is predicated upon a different way of conceiving their priorities. If a rather simplistic summary be permitted, the old theology prioritizes these four realities in this descending order of importance: church, proclamation, mission, reign of God. The new way prioritizes them in just the opposite order: reign of God, mission, proclamation, and church. Let it be noted at once that it is not the question of denying any one of these four realities, in the old theology of mission as well as in the new. Indeed, all the four elements are present in both theologies, but in very different modes of emphasis and degrees of importance. Consequently, the answers to the five questions concerning Christian mission: what for, to whom, by whom, with whom, and how, are given very differently by the two theologies. And because they answer these five questions differently, the two theologies of mission are not harmless intellectual games. On the contrary, they determine, to descend to pedestrian matters, the way budgets are planned, which projects get funded, whether churches or social centers are built, and of course, how power is controlled and by whom.

I will now delineate the ways in which these two theologies of mission conceive the relations among the four central realities of the Christian faith – reign of God, mission, proclamation, and church – and how within each theological purview the five questions concerning mission are answered. I will illustrate my presentation with examples taken from the history of mission.

MISSION DEFINED BY CHURCH

In his monumental study of mission the late South African missiologist David Bosch argued that the Roman Catholic understanding of mission from 600 to 1500 was characterized by two basic concerns: saving souls and church extension. [21] The first goal of mission is dependent upon Augustine’s view of humanity, which he developed in opposition to Pelagius, as radically corrupted by sin, both original and personal. This anthropology entails that the missionary will focus his or her work on saving the lost souls, which in the mission fields are identical with the heathens, that is, the non-baptized. In this perspective, mission is narrowed down to ensuring the individual’s eternal destiny, and other elements of the church’s mission such as the transformation of the economic, social, and political structures, dialogue with other religions, and engagement with the local cultures, are set aside as secondary or neglected.

Another Augustinian doctrine also determines the second goal of mission. In his dispute with the Donatists who insisted that only those who were totally unblemished and perfect could be church members, Augustine emphasized that what is essential is not the personal moral and spiritual condition of the Christians but the church and its official institutions. These are the means of salvation. This doctrine coheres well with an earlier teaching of Saint Cyprian, namely, there is no salvation outside the church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Again, this ecclesiology entails that the missionary will concentrate his or her efforts on bringing as many pagans as possible into the church, the only ark



of salvation, by blandishments and conquest if necessary. Baptism was changed from a process of the individual’s gradual incorporation into the church after a long and arduous moral and spiritual training (i.e., the ancient catechumenate) into a rite of entrance of the mass, sometimes the whole tribe, into the church with a minimum of catechesis and often without real conversion. Once baptized, the new Christian becomes the object of ecclesiastical control and guidance. Hence, it is necessary to set up church structures as soon as possible in the missionary fields, a process known as “planting the church” (*plantatio ecclesiae*), which now becomes the second, and even the overriding goal of mission, on which most of the resources and energies of the missionary labor is spent. Consequently, the success of mission, not unlike the body count in war, is measured by the number of the sacraments administered, dioceses established, churches built, and money collected.

There were of course missionaries who did not think that “saving souls” and “church planting” were the only or even main goals of mission, and acted accordingly. My point here is not to evaluate the missionary enterprise of the last four centuries but to outline the theology of mission that served as its engine. In this theology, in which salvation is both individualized and ecclesiasticized, the center and heart of the missionary project is the church, and church

understood primarily in the institutional model. [3] This is clear in both Protestant and Catholic circles. For example, Gustav Warneck (1834-1910), the foremost Protestant missiologist, has stated explicitly: "By Christian mission we understand the entire activity of Christendom that is directed to the planting and organization of the Church of Christ among non-Christians." [4] Similarly, even though he emphasized individual conversion, Josef Schmidlin (1876-1944), widely regarded as the first Catholic missiologist, believed that conversion is only a preliminary goal; the ultimate goal, for him, is to bring the individual into the organized church which he identified with the kingdom of God. [5] The planting of the church is also strongly emphasized in the so-called Louvain School (as led by Pierre Charles and Jacques Masson): conversion is only the means to the goal of mission, which is the extension of the visible church.

In practice, the planting of the church in mission lands followed what has been called the "reduplication model." [6] That is, the missionaries sought to transplant or reproduce in another culture the type of church of their origins, with its organizational structure, law, ways of worship, and theology. And since these elements of their original churches were tightly woven with European culture, mission often meant Europeanization. Even the enlightened Schmidlin thought that conversion of the natives requires them to leave their cultures and adopt Western civilization, with its nobler "moral precepts," "better methods of work," and "higher culture." Already in the seventeenth century, Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes noted, with deep regret, that Indian converts were required to dress like Portuguese and Chinese male converts to cut their long hair. [7]

In light of this mission theology we are in a better position to elaborate its answers to the five questions mentioned above.



(1) What is mission for? It was to save individual souls and to establish churches for this purpose in foreign lands, outside of Europe and North America. The emphasis was on their moral and spiritual welfare, even though their material well-being was not neglected, especially by means of education, health care, and social services. (2) To whom? To the "pagans" who were considered to

be living outside the sphere of God's grace and on the way to eternal damnation. The pagans were the "objects" of the missionary's conversionary efforts, not the "subjects" with whom the missionary could enter into dialogue. Their religions were superstitions which they must abjure and reject in order to convert to the only true religion, that is, Christianity. (3) By whom? Mostly by special agents, such as priests, members of religious orders, both male and female, and some elite laity. All these agents had to be especially commissioned by the hierarchical church which sent and controlled them, especially through the Propaganda Fide Congregation (founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, with a triple purpose: propagation of the faith, preservation of the Catholic faith, and dialogue with other Christian churches). (4) With whom?

Certainly not with other Christians, especially Protestants, who were competing with Catholic missionaries for members among the pagans; not with the local churches, which were still regarded as immature. The immediate collaborators of the missionaries were the layfolk back home who supported them with prayers and money, and who tried to raise other missionary vocations. Finally, (5) how? By planting churches, that is, by replicating the Western church models. This strategy was adopted not only because Western culture was considered superior but also because it was used as a way to ensure “unity,” that is, uniformity in the church.

From these answers it is clear that in this ecclesiocentric theology of mission the other three elements of the Christian faith – proclamation, mission, reign of God – were given short shrift. Not that these were ever denied, but that they were all subordinated to the church. It is the church that gave them meaning and purpose. Proclamation was subordinated, at least in Catholicism, to the sacraments, since it is the latter that admit the pagans into the church and make them dependent on the hierarchy. Ironically, mission too was neglected, since it is only an extremely small group of Christians that were missionaries; the church as a whole was not seen as missionary by nature, as Vatican II was to put it later on. Furthermore, the church was divided into the sending church and the receiving church, with the latter as the “object” of the former’s missionary activities. Finally, the reign of God, especially its prophetic and eschatological dimensions, were practically forgotten, since it was now identified with the church in its current form.

CHURCH DEFINED BY MISSION

By the 1950s, with the colonial empires in ruins, independence movements in full swing, science and technology advancing, and with them, the worldwide process of secularization, and reform rumblings in the church, the old theology of mission underwent a severe crisis. It was seen as a model no longer suited for the emerging world order. For one thing, the frontiers that demarcated the “Christian” from the “non-Christian” lands, the “saved”



from the “heathens” were becoming blurred: not only the “Christianized” West has become “dechristianized,” so that in 1943 a book could be published with the shocking title “*France: pays de mission?*” but also, even in the West, Christians now rub shoulders daily with Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and adherents of other religions. But a crisis is both danger and opportunity. The danger of extinction threatening the old theology of mission became an opportunity for a new theology of mission to be born, in which a quiet Copernican revolution took place: what was at the periphery now occupied the central position; or, to use another image, there was a topsy-turvy motion: what was on top fell to the bottom, and what was first became last, and what was last became first, as a Gospel saying goes.

First of all, there was a total reconfiguration of the relations among the four basic elements of the theology of mission: Now, the central pillar sustaining the missionary edifice is the reign of God; it is the light that shines on all missionaries activities of the church, which is now seen to be missionary by its very nature. Next, the mission of the church flows from the fact it is a sign of and instrument for the reign of God, and therefore the church cannot be simply identified with the reign of God as such, in spite of the many links that unite the two. Then comes proclamation, which is seen as only a part, necessary but not dominant, of a complex of activities of the church. Last comes the church with its role as servant, not mistress, of mission. Like John the Baptist in front of Jesus, it has to say: the reign of God must increase, and I must decrease.

Secondly, in light of this reconfiguration, the five questions concerning mission receive different answers. Briefly, (1) What for? For the full realization of the Kingdom of God, which is already-but-not-yet, present-and-future, realized-and-eschatological. (2) To whom? To the whole world in all its dimensions and arenas, including the cosmos, and to “pagans,” who are not really pagan, and to “Christians,” who are not really Christian. (3) By whom? By God, first of all, because the Church’s mission is nothing but a continuation of God’s mission; and secondly, by all, hierarchy and laity, even though some are more engaged in “missionary” activities than others. (4) With whom? With all Christians, and not only with Catholics, without denominational confrontation and competition; and furthermore, with the followers of other religions as well, since they too are called to the reign of God, even though not all of them will join the church. Finally, (5) how? By personal witness and dialogue. A few words on each of the four elements of Christian mission in this new configuration and on each of these five answers are in order.

The Reign of God

Recent biblical scholarship has demonstrated the centrality of the reign of God in Jesus’ ministry. [\[8\]](#) It is the heart of his preaching: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15). Many of his parables speak of the kingdom of God, and his miraculous deeds are signs that the kingdom of God that he was announcing had indeed arrived. This kingdom is said to be of God because its arrival signals the gracious, forgiving, and redeeming presence of Yahweh in the world, and is not the fruit of human efforts. This kingdom is open to all, and all are invited to enter into it, but it is given especially or “preferentially” to those who are marginalized, that is, the poor, the afflicted, the oppressed, the captives (Luke 4: 18).

Jesus embodied in his person the reign of God he proclaimed: “This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening,” declared Jesus, referring to Isaiah 61: 1-2, which he had just read from the scroll. In this sense, the kingdom of God is a present reality. God’s saving power and complete and perfect self-revelation in the future was already assured in the preaching, and above all, in his death and resurrection. The eschatological events of Jesus’ death/resurrection are a powerful validation by God of Jesus’ message about God’s power over sin, corruption, injustice, and violence. God’s rule will be characterized by universal peace, justice, and love, and it is already here. In this sense, the kingdom of God is professed to be “the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 1:11), and to proclaim the kingdom of God is necessarily to

proclaim the Christ-event. The two proclamations, which throw light on each other, cannot be separated from each other.

On the other hand, there are sayings and gestures on Jesus' part that indicate that somehow this kingdom of God is still to come, or more precisely, that its full and complete self-realization and manifestation still awaits a future time. [\[9\]](#) That is why he taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom. In his farewell dinner with his disciples, he said that he had been longing to eat that Passover with them before he suffered, and that he would not eat it again "until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" and that he would not drink wine again "until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22: 16-18). As a result his disciples and their immediately followers were acutely aware of Jesus' imminent return in glory, the Parousia, perhaps within their lifetime. Even though the Parousia did not occur in the way they anticipated, this expectation of Jesus' so-called Second Coming was not rejected. Indeed, the Creed continues to proclaim that Jesus will "come again to judge the living and the dead." Needless to say, with the passage of time, the fervor of the expectation did grow dim, and the symbol of the kingdom of God did eclipse and was eventually replaced by other less tension-filled and historically relevant images and ideas. [\[10\]](#)

In a certain but true sense, the mission that God has given to Jesus to perform is not yet completed, since history is still going on. The body of Christ is still growing, until the end of times. Like Paul, every Christian must say: "In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the church" (Col 1:24). It is precisely in this in-between time, that is, between the ministry-death-resurrection of Jesus and his Parousia that the church was born and it is within this time that its mission is to be carried out. The church has no self-identity except as rooted in and derived from the mission that Jesus received from his Father. And given the centrality of the reign of God in Jesus' mission, as we have observed above, it would be theologically wrong to subordinate the reign of God to the church, as it was done in the old theology of mission. On the contrary, the church must be subordinated to and oriented toward the reign of God which is its goal and *raison d'être*.



It is most interesting that in his encyclical *Redemptoris missio* [RM] (1990), which, together with Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975), is widely regarded as the *magna carta* of Catholic mission, John Paul II places the theme of the reign of God immediately after speaking of Jesus as the only Savior and devotes a long chapter to it, which by itself is a theologically significant departure from the old theology of mission. John Paul affirms that "[t]he proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom are the purposes of his [Jesus'] mission" (RM, 13). Similarly, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* [EA], which focuses on Christian mission in Asia, the Pope also makes Jesus and his realization of the Kingdom of God the starting point and ground of the church's mission in this continent ("Jesus the Savior: A Gift to Asia"). We will speak of the relationship between the church and the Kingdom of God in due course, but there is no doubt that for John Paul II as well as for most contemporary missiologists, the Kingdom of God stands front and center in any theology of mission.

Mission

Another fundamental change introduced by the kingdom-centered missiology is that it is mission that defines the church, and not vice versa. [\[11\]](#) Just as the kingdom of God is prior to mission, so mission is prior to the church. The church comes to be only because it has been called to mission. It exists for the sake of mission. Mission defines what the church is and what it must do.

Consequently, the whole church is missionary, or as Vatican II declares in its Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*): “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” (no. 2). The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) affirms: “The obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his or her state” (no. 17). Hence, it would be wrong to regard “mission” primarily as “foreign mission” and that only an elite few are called to this mission. Pope John Paul II notes that “there is a new awareness that *missionary activity is a matter for all Christians*, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations” (*RM*, 2). Hence, the hallowed distinction between the sending church and the receiving church is thereby invalidated.

This does not mean that the so-called foreign mission, the *missio ad gentes*, is no longer necessary, as John Paul II reminds us. [\[12\]](#) But it is not granted the almost exclusive right to mission. The Pope recognizes the complex and ever-changing situation of the church, and to give due importance to all its aspects, he distinguishes three situations for the church’s mission. The first is that of “peoples, groups and sociocultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is the mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term” (*RM*, 33). The second is that of “Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission” (no. 33). Here the mission of the church takes the form of “pastoral care of the faithful.” Lastly, there is “an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost their living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel” (no. 33). Here we have a “new evangelization” or a “re-evangelization.” [\[13\]](#)

Whatever may be thought about the accuracy and usefulness of this threefold distinction, [\[14\]](#) at least its basic point is well taken, namely, foreign mission does not constitute the entire mission of the church but is only a part, albeit necessary, of it. Furthermore, its principal goal is no longer “saving souls” and “church planting” but bearing witness to the Kingdom of God. Nor is the field of mission *ad gentes* only the foreign lands, but it also includes urban centers, the young, migrants and refugees, and what John Paul II calls “the modern equivalents of the Areopagus,” namely, the world of communications, social justice, scientific research, and the world of consumerism and materialism (no. 37).

Proclamation

Among the many activities of the church's mission there must no doubt be "proclamation." There was a rumor that at the Asian Synod, which met in Rome from April 19-May 14, 1998, there was a fear that in Asia "dialogue" has replaced or at least overshadowed "proclamation." Perhaps for this reason, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Pope reaffirms not only the necessity but also the "primacy" of proclamation: "There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord. The Second Vatican Council and the magisterium since then, responding to a certain confusion about the true nature of the church's mission, have repeatedly stressed the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelizing work" (EA, 19).

What is meant by "proclamation" here? If past missionary practices are any guide, we tend to take it to mean *verbal* announcement of the "good news," written and/or oral, Protestants mostly by means of the Bible, and Catholics mostly by means of the catechism. The emphasis is laid on the *verbal communication* of a message or a doctrine, and the preferred if not exclusive means are *words*. The main content of the proclamation is the truth that Jesus is "the only Savior," "the one mediator between God and mankind" (RM, 5).

Though this is admittedly the common meaning of "proclamation," it is most interesting that John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, where he re-affirms both the necessity and primacy of proclamation, nowhere emphasizes the exclusive use of *words* or *doctrinal formulas* to convey the message that Jesus is the only Savior for all humankind. On the contrary, he says, "[t]he presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Savior needs to follow a pedagogy that will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery. Clearly, the initial evangelization of non-Christians and the continuing proclamation of Jesus to believers will have to be different in their approach" (EA, 20). As examples of these approaches, the Pope mentions stories, parables, symbols, personal contact, and inculturation (EA, 20-22). More importantly, he also mentions "Christian life as proclamation," a life marked by "prayer, fasting and various forms of asceticism ... renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence" (EA, 23). No less important is John Paul II's remark that in Asia "people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument" (EA, 42). Furthermore, the Pope notes that in many places in Asia, where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted, "the silent witness of life still remains the only way of proclaiming God's kingdom" (EA, 23). In sum, the Pope recognizes that there is a "legitimate variety of approaches to the proclamation of Jesus, provided that the faith itself is respected in all its integrity" (EA, 23).



Church

Lastly, we come to the church, last not only in the chronological but also theological order. As has been said above, the church no longer occupies the center nor the top position in the new theology of mission. It is, as John Paul II puts it, "effectively and concretely at the service of the

Kingdom of God" (*RM*, 20). It does so by "establishing communities and founding new particular Churches, and by guiding them into mature faith and charity in openness toward others, in service to individuals and societies, and in understanding and esteem for human institutions." Furthermore, the church serves the Kingdom of God "by spreading throughout the world the 'Gospel values' which are an expression of the Kingdom and which people are to accept God's plan." Finally, it serves the Kingdom of God "by her intercession, since the Kingdom by its very nature is God's gift and work" (*RM*, 20).

Clearly, in this service of the church to the Kingdom of God, "saving souls" and "church planting" still remain, but their meaning and scope have been fundamentally changed. Gone are the individualization and ecclesiasticization of salvation prevalent in the older theology; instead, concerns for the formation of a mature faith, the transformation of societal structures, and the valorization of and a genuine respect for human cultures are clearly in evidence.

By the same token, the church is not set in opposition to the Reign of God and vice versa. John Paul II rejects the kind of "kingdom-centeredness" that leaves little or no room for Christ or the church: "The Kingdom cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church" (*RM*, 18).

In light of this new theology of mission, it is useful to revisit the five questions and their answers given above.

1. For what is mission? Exclusively for the Reign of God, or simply God. Anything else that is made into the goal of mission, even as noble as church growth or salvation of souls, smacks of idolatry.

2. To whom? To the world, primarily. Mission is not primarily for the benefit of Christians; it is not inward but outward looking. This world is a complex reality and includes at least the three situations outlined by the Pope. Mission is therefore not primarily, much less exclusively mission *ad gentes*. The geographical frontiers that once served as useful markers between what is Christian and what is non-Christian are now superseded. Mission is in the midst of the Christian community.

3. By whom? By the whole community of believers, as we have said, but above all by God, or more specifically, by the Holy Spirit. In one of the best chapters of his encyclical, John Paul II affirms that the Holy Spirit is "the principal agent of mission." The Holy Spirit is said "to direct the mission of the church," to make "the whole church missionary," and to be "present and active in every time and place." It is here that we find John Paul II's one of the most revolutionary statements about the mission of the church: "The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history" (*RM*, 28). If this statement is true, then Christian mission can no longer be what it was, a one-way proclamation of a message of salvation to a world of pagans totally bereft of God's self-revelation and grace, but first of all a search for and recognition of the presence and activities of the Holy Spirit among the peoples to be evangelized, and in this humble and attentive process of listening, the evangelizers become the evangelized, and the evangelized become the evangelizers.

4. With whom? Of course, with all Catholics, each in his or her position in the church and the world. However, in mission oriented toward the Kingdom of God and not to the growth of one's own church, missionary collaboration must not be limited to fellow Catholics. Rather, crossing denominational barriers, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant missionaries must abandon mutual antagonism and competition and work together in a common witness to the Gospel. It is well known that divisions within Christianity have been a scandal to non-Christians and a serious obstacle to a credible evangelization. There is no reason why church divisions, which are the results of internal quarrels among the Western churches, should be exported to the churches in the other parts of the world.

Furthermore, mission must be carried out in collaboration with followers of religion as well. Since these are not "objects" but "subjects" of the church's mission, they must be treated as responsible agents of the church's mission with whom missionaries must enter into dialogue of the various kinds described below. In addition, where the Christians form only a tiny minority of the population, for example in Asia, the church's mission of promoting liberation and integral development cannot be carried out successfully without an effective collaboration of non-Christians. [\[15\]](#)

5. Finally, how? Because of the presence and activities of the Holy Spirit in every time and place, the most effective method of evangelization is dialogue. By dialogue is meant a fourfold activity: dialogue of *life*, i.e., sharing of joys and sorrows; dialogue of *action*, i.e., collaboration in furthering liberation and human development; dialogue of *theological exchange*, i.e., deeper understanding of the religious heritages of others and better appreciation of their spiritual values; and finally, dialogue of *religious experience*, i.e., sharing of spiritual riches through common prayer and other religious practices. [\[16\]](#)

This dialogical method in mission, which includes inculturation, liberation, and interreligious dialogue as an integral and intertwined process, therefore rejects the one-way replication model of the old theology of mission described above. But it also moves beyond what is called the "indigenization model" in which Western Christendom is reproduced in another culture by drawing on the resources of that culture. The original is still brought in from the outside, only this time, it is clothed in the local garb. To vary the metaphor, the script remains the same, only the cast of actors has been changed, and the director is still the outside agent. In the dialogue as has been described above, the way now is open for what has been called the "contextualization model" or what I prefer "interculturalization," which is the "process whereby the gospel message encounters a particular culture, calling forth faith and leading to the formation of a faith community, which is culturally authentic and authentically Christian." Here, "control of the process resides within the context rather than with an external agent or agency." Finally, in this model, "culture is understood to be dynamic and evolving system of values, patterns of behavior, and a matrix shaping the life of the members of that society." [\[17\]](#)

Mission understood in this way is both a gift and a task. Whether we are ready and willing to accept this gift and meet this challenge remains to be seen. But there is little doubt that if the mission of the church is to flourish in this new millennium, it must tread the path that the new theology of mission has outlined. [\[18\]](#)

Notes:

[1] For a brief analysis of the factors contributing to the collapse of Christian mission, see Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 16-26 and Richard G. Cote, *Re-Visioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) 3-19.

[2] See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991) 214-19.

[3] On the institutional model of the church, see Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) 31-42.

[4] Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre: Ein missionstheologischer Versuch*, 3 vols. (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1905). Here vol. 1, 1.

[5] See Josef Schmidlin, *Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss* (Münster: Verlag der Aschendorffschen, 1923). English translation: *Catholic Mission Theory*, trans. Matthias Braun (Techny, IL: Mission Press, S.V.D., 1931).

[6] See Robert Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999) 51-53.

[7] See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998) 42-43; 81.

[8] For recent bibliography on the Kingdom of God, see Peter C. Phan, "Kingdom of God: A Theological Symbol for Asians?" *Gregorianum* 79/2 (1998) 295-422. For a detailed study of the Kingdom of God from the New Testament perspective, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume II: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 237-506. For helpful reflections on the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church, see the works of John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Central Message* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); idem, *Proclaiming his Kingdom* (Manila: Logos Publications, 1994); and *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2000).

[9] For various ways of understanding the time of the reign of God, see Peter C. Phan, *Eternity in Time: A Study of Karl Rahner's Eschatology* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1987) 26-31.

[10] Some of these ideas include: (1) the idea of the encounter of the dying with Christ the Judge on the afterlife. (2) the idea of a spiritual-mystical union between the immortal soul and Christ the Spouse; (3) the idea that the Kingdom of God is a purely future, supernatural, otherworldly, and apolitical reality; (4) and the idea that the kingdom is identical with the historical church.

[11] It is well known the Kingdom of God is given a central place in liberation theologies. See, for instance, Jon Sobrino's thesis that the starting point for Christology is the Kingdom of God. See his *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987) 81-97), and *Jesus the Liberator: A*

Historical-Theological View, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993) 67-134.

[12] *RM*, 32: “To say that the whole Church is missionary does not preclude the existence of a specific mission *ad gentes*, just as saying that all Catholics must be missionaries not only does not exclude, but actually requires that there be persons who have a specific vocation to be ‘life-long missionaries *ad gentes*’.” Indeed, the Pope says that one of the purposes of his encyclical is “to clear up doubts and ambiguities regarding missionary activity *ad gentes*, and to confirm in their commitment those exemplary brothers and sisters dedicated to missionary activity and those who assist them” (*RM*, 2).

[13] The term “new evangelization” is confusing. It may mean evangelization for the first time; or evangelization again, in the same modality; or evangelization again, but in a different form.

[14] Ultimately, this threefold distinction is not very helpful. For one thing, it is impossible to find any local church that fully corresponds to the description given in this second situation. In addition, to call the church’s mission in this second category “pastoral care of the faithful” blunts the very point of the encyclical, namely, mission pervades all the church’s activities.

[15] This point has been strongly stressed by Aloysius Pieris. See his *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), especially 69-86.

[16] See the document of The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (1991), 42.

[17] Wilbert Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission*, 56.

[18] This paper was originally delivered at the 2001 Conference and Annual Meeting of the United States Catholic Mission Association in Memphis, Tennessee, October 26-28, 2001. The theme of the conference was: “Proclaiming the Good News: Yesterday, Today ... Always.”

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