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*Mission to a Runaway World:
Future Citizens of the Kingdom
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I have been asked to reflect upon a spirituality of mission for our globalised world. What does it mean to be a missionary in Disneyland? When I was asked to give this lecture I was delighted, because it is a fascinating topic, but I was also hesitant, because I have never been a missionary in the usual sense of the word. At the elective General Chapter of the Order in Mexico, the brethren identified the criteria for candidates to be Master of the Order. Crucially he should have pastoral experience outside his own country. They then elected me who had only ever been an academic in England. I do not know whether all congregations act so eccentrically, but it shows why I feel rather unfitted to give this lecture.

What is so new about our world, that we must look for a new spirituality of mission? How is it so different from the world to which previous generations of missionaries were sent? We may reply automatically that what is new is globalisation. E-mails stream into our offices from all over the world. Trillions of dollars circulate around the markets of the world every day, though not around the Dominican Order! As it is so often said, we live in a global village. Missionaries are no longer dispatched on ships to unknown countries; almost everywhere is no more than a day's journey away. But I wonder if "globalisation" really identifies the new context for mission. The global village is the fruit of an historical evolution that has been taking place for at least five hundred, if not five thousand, years. Some experts argue that in many ways the world a hundred years ago was just as globalized as today.

Perhaps what is really distinctive about our world is a particular fruit of globalisation, which is that we do not know where the world is going. We do not have a shared sense of the direction of our history. Tony Blair's guru, Anthony Giddens, calls it "the runaway world".¹ History appears to be out of our control, and we do not know where we are heading. It is for this runaway world that we must discover a vision and a spirituality of mission.

The first great missions of the Church outside Europe were linked with the colonialism of the 16th to the 20th centuries.² The Spanish and the Portuguese brought their mendicant friars with them, just the Dutch and the English took their Protestant missionaries. The missionaries may have supported or criticised the *conquistadors*, but there was a shared sense of where history was going, towards the Western domination of the world. That gave the context of mission. In the second half of this century, mission occurred within a new context, that of conflict between the two great power-blocs of East and West, of communism and capitalism. Some missionaries may have prayed for the triumph of the proletariat, and others for the defeat of godless communism, but this conflict was the context of mission.

Now, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, we do not know where we are going. Are we going towards universal wealth, or is the economic system about to collapse? Will we have the Long Boom or the Big Bang? Will the Americans dominate the world economy for centuries, or are we at the end of a brief history when the West was at the centre of the world? Will the global community expand to include everyone, including the forgotten continent of Africa? Or will the global village shrink, and leave most people outside? Is it global village or global pillage? We do not know.

We do not know because globalisation has reached a new stage, with the introduction of technologies whose consequences we cannot guess. We do not know because, according to Giddens,³ we have invented a new sort of risk. Human beings have always had to cope with risk, the risk of plagues, bad harvests, storms, drought, and the occasional invasions of barbarians. But these were largely external risks, that were out of our control. You never knew when a meteorite might hit the planet, or a flea ridden rat might not arrive with the bubonic plague. But now we are principally at risk from what we ourselves have done, what Giddens calls "manufactured risk": global warming, overpopulation, pollution, unstable markets, the unforeseen consequences of genetic engineering. We do not know the effects of what we are now doing. We live in a runaway world. This produces profound anxiety. We

Christians have no special knowledge about the future. We do not know any more than anyone else, whether we are on the way to war or peace, prosperity or poverty. We too are often haunted by the anxiety of our contemporaries. I happen to be deeply optimistic about the future of humanity, but is this because I have inherited St Thomas' belief in the deep goodness of humanity, or my mother's optimistic genes?

In this runaway world, what Christians offer is not knowledge but wisdom, the wisdom of humanity's ultimate destination, the Kingdom of God. We may have no idea of how the Kingdom will come, but we believe in its triumph. The globalized world is rich in knowledge. Indeed, one of the challenges of living in this cyber world is that we are drowned with information, but there is little wisdom. There is little sense of humanity's ultimate destiny. Indeed such is our anxiety about the future, that it is easier not to think about it at all. Let us grab the present moment. Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die. So our missionary spirituality must be sapiential, the wisdom of the end to which we are called, a wisdom which liberates us from anxiety.

In this lecture I wish to suggest that the missionary may be the bearer of this wisdom in three ways, through presence, epiphany and through proclamation. In some places all we can do is to be present, but there is a natural thrust towards making our hope visible and our wisdom explicit. The word has become flesh and now in our mission the flesh becomes word.⁴

Presence

A missionary is sent. That is the meaning of the word. But to whom are missionaries sent in our runaway world? When I was a schoolboy with the Benedictines, missionaries came to visit us from far away places, like Africa and the Amazon. We saved up our money so that children would be baptised with our names. There should be hundreds of middle-aged Timothys around the world. So missionaries were sent from the West to other places. But from where are missionaries sent these days? They used to come especially from Ireland, Spain, Brittany, Belgium and Quebec. But few missionaries are from those countries today. The modern missionary is more likely to come from India or Indonesia. I remember the excitement in the British press when the first missionary arrived in Scotland from Jamaica. So in our globalized village, there is no centre from which missionaries are despatched. In the geography of the world-wide web, there is no centre, at least in theory. In fact we know that there are more telephone lines in Manhattan than in sub-Saharan Africa.

As the beginning of an answer I would suggest that in this new world, missionaries are sent to those who are other than us, who are distant from us because of their culture, faith or history. They are far away but not necessarily physically distant. They are strangers though they may be our neighbours. The expression "the global village" sounds cosy and intimate, as if we all belong to one big happy human family. But our global world is traversed by splits and fractures, which make us foreign to each other, incomprehensible and even sometimes enemies. The missionary is sent to be in these places. Pierre Claverie, the Dominican Bishop of Oran in Algeria, was assassinated by a bomb in 1996. Just before he died he wrote: "L'Église accomplit sa vocation quand elle est présente aux ruptures qui crucifient l'humanité dans sa chair et son unité. Jésus est mort écartelé entre ciel et terre, bras étendus pour rassembler les enfants de Dieu dispersés par le péché qui les sépare, les isole et les dresse les uns contre les autres et contre Dieu lui-même. Il s'est mis sur les lignes de fracture nées de ce péché. En Algérie, nous sommes sur l'une de ces lignes sismiques qui traversent le monde: Islam/Occident, Nord/Sud, riches/pauvres. Nous y sommes bien à notre place car c'est en ce lieu là que peut s'entrevoir la lumière de la Résurrection".⁵

These lines of fracture do not run just between parts of the world: the north and the south, the developed world and the so-called developing world. These lines traverse every country and every city: New York and Rome, Nairobi and São Paulo, Delhi and Tokyo. They divide those who have clean water and those who do not, those who have access to the Internet and those who do not, the literate and the illiterate; the left and the right, those of different faiths and none, Black and White. The missionary is to be the bearer of a wisdom, of God's "purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9,10). And this wisdom we represent by being present to those who are divided from us by the walls of division.

But we must take a further step. Being a missionary is not what I do; it is who I am. Just as Jesus is the one who is sent (Heb 3:1). Being present to the other, living on the lines of fracture, implies a transformation of who I am. In being with and for that other person I discover a new identity. I think of an old Spanish missionary whom I met in Taiwan, who had worked in China for many years and suffered imprisonment. Now he was old and sick, and his

family wished him to return to Spain. But he said, “I cannot go back. I am Chinese. I would be a stranger in Spain”. When John XXIII met a group of American Jewish leaders in 1960, he astonished them by walking into the room and saying “I am Joseph, your brother”. This is who I am, and I cannot be myself without you. So, being sent implies a dying to who one was. One lets go of a little identity. Chrys McVey, one of my American brethren who lives in Pakistan, was asked how long he would remain there, and he replied, “until I am tired of dying”. To be present for and with the other is a sort of dying to an old identity so as to be a sign of the Kingdom in which we will be one.

Nicholas Boyle wrote that “the only morally defensibly and conceptually consistent answer to the question ‘who are we now?’ is ‘future citizens of the world’”.⁶ We are not just people who work for a new world order, who try to overcome war and division. Who we are **now** is future citizens of the world. One could adapt Boyle’s words and say that **now** we are the future citizens of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is my country. Now I discover who I am to be by being close to those who are farthest away. It is precisely our Catholicism which pushes us beyond every small and sectarian identity, every narrow little sense of myself, to that which we can barely glimpse now. That is the embodiment of our wisdom.

This is not easy, and above all it requires fidelity. The missionary is not a tourist. The tourist can go to exotic places, take photographs, enjoy the food and the views, and go back home proudly bearing T-shirts. The missionary is only a sign of the Kingdom in staying there. As one of my brethren said, “you do not only unpack your bags, you throw your bags away”.

I do not mean that every missionary must stay until death. There may be many good reasons to leave: a new challenge to be faced elsewhere, illness or exhaustion, and so on. But I am suggesting that mission implies fidelity. It is the fidelity of a Spanish missionary whom I met in the Peruvian Amazon, who just goes on being there year after year, visiting his people, making his way around the little settlements, faithfully remaining even if not much appears to happen. Often the pain of the missionary is discovering that one is not wanted. Maybe the local people, or even the local vocations to one’s Order, wait for him or her to go. It is the stamina to go on being there, sometimes unappreciated. The heroism of the missionary is in daring to discover who I am with and for these others, even if they do not wish to discover who they are with and for me. It is remaining there faithfully, even if it may cost one one’s life, as it did for Pierre Claverie and the Trappist monks in Algeria.

I escaped from Rome just before the World Youth Day. But in my meeting there with some of the young Dominican laity, I was struck by their delight in being with those who are different, who are unlike themselves. Germans and French, Poles and Pakistanis, there is an astonishing openness which reaches across the boundaries of race and culture and generation and faith. This is a gift of the young to the mission of the Church, and a sign of the Kingdom. Perhaps the challenge for the young missionary is learning that stamina, that enduring fidelity to the other, faced with our own fragility and anxiety. Our houses of formation should be schools of fidelity, where we learn to hang in there, stay put, even when we fail, even when there are misunderstandings, crises in relationship, even when we feel that our brethren or sisters are not faithful to us. The answer is not then to run away, to start again, to join another Order or to get married. We have to unpack our bags and throw them away. Presence is not merely being there. It is staying there. It takes the form of a life lived through history, the shape of a life that points to the Kingdom. The enduring presence of the missionary is indeed a sign of the Real Presence of the Lord who gave his body to us forever.

Epiphany

In many parts of the world, all that the missionary can do is to be there. In some Communist and Islamic countries nothing more is possible, just being an implicit sign of the Kingdom. Sometimes in our inner cities or working with the young or the alienated, the mission must begin anonymously. The worker-priest is simply there in the factory. But our faith yearns to take visible form, to be seen. This year Neil MacGregor, the Director of the National Gallery in London organised an exhibition called “Seeing Salvation”. For most of European history, our faith has been made visible, in glass and painting and sculpture. The celebration of Christ’s birth used to begin with Epiphany, the disclosure of the glory of God among us. When Simeon receives the child Jesus in the Temple he rejoices, “for my eyes have seen thy salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples” (Lk 2:30, 31f). As St John says, we proclaim “that which we have heard, and which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands” (1 Jn 1:1f). Mission pushes beyond presence to epiphany.

Ever since the Iconoclastic Controversy in the ninth century, Christianity has sought to show God's face. In the Europe in the Middle Ages, people rarely saw the image of any face except those of Christ and the saints, but in our world we are bombarded by faces. We have new icons on our walls: Madonna, Princess Diana, Tiger Woods, the Spice Girls. To be someone important today is to achieve "icon status"! Everywhere there are faces: Politicians, actors, footballers, the rich, people who are famous just for being famous. They smile at us from the billboards in our streets and our television screens. But we believe that all of humanity hungers to see another face, the face of God, the beatific vision. How can we manifest that face?

It would not be enough just to add Christ's face to the crowd. It would be good but insufficient for Walt Disney to make a cartoon of the Gospels. Putting Jesus' face on the screen along with Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck would not achieve epiphany. Many Protestant churches in Britain have signs outside their churches with the words of the Gospel competing with the adverts in the streets. This may be admirable, but I always find it rather embarrassing. I remember our giggles as children when we drove past the sign outside a local church which asked "whether we watched with the wise virgins or slept with the foolish virgins?"

The challenge is this: how can we disclose the glory of God, God's beauty? In this world filled with images, how can God's beauty be manifested. Balthasar talks of the "self-evidence" of beauty, "its intrinsic authority"⁷. We recognise in beauty a summons that we cannot easily ignore. C.S. Lewis said that beauty rouses up the desire for "our own far-off country",⁸ the home for which we long and have never seen. Beauty discloses our ultimate end, that for which we are made, our wisdom. In this runaway world, with its unknown future, the missionary is the bearer of wisdom, the wisdom of humanity's final destiny. This final destiny is glimpsed in the beauty of God's face. How can we show it now?

This question is easier to ask than to answer; I hope that you may be able to come up with some more stimulating answers than I have! I would suggest that we need to present images, faces which are different in type from the faces that we see in our streets. In the first place, beauty is disclosed not in the faces of the rich and the famous but the poor and the powerless. And secondly, the images of the global village offer entertainment, distraction, whereas the beauty of God is disclosed in transformation.

The images of the global village show the beauty of power and wealth. It is the beauty of the young and the fit who have everything. It is the beauty of a consumerist society. Now, do not think that I am jealous of the young and fit, however nostalgic I may be, but the Gospels locate beauty elsewhere. The disclosure of the glory of God is the cross, a dying and deserted man. This is such a scandalous idea that it seems to have taken four hundred years for this to be represented. Possibly the first representation of the crucified Christ is on the doors of Santa Sabina, where I live, which were made in 432, after the destruction of Rome by the barbarians. God's irresistible beauty shines through utter poverty.

This may seem a crazy idea, until one thinks of one of the most attractive and beautiful of all saints, St Francis of Assisi. I made a little pilgrimage to Assisi this summer. The Basilica was filled with crowds, who were drawn by the beauty of his life. The frescoes of Giotto are lovely, but the deeper loveliness is that of *il poverello*. His life is hollowed by a void, a poverty, which can only be filled by God. Cardinal Suhard wrote that to be a missionary "does not consist in engaging in propaganda nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would make no sense if God did not exist".⁹ We see God's beauty in Francis, because his life would make no sense if God is not.

Just as important, Francis found a new image for God's own poverty (though why I am doing all this advertising for the Franciscans, I cannot imagine!). Neil MacGregor says that it was Francis who invented the crib, the sign of God embracing our poverty. In 1223 he wrote to the Lord of Greccio, "I would like to represent the birth of the Child just as it took place at Bethlehem, so that people should **see with their own eyes** the hardships he suffered as an infant, how he was laid on hay in a manger with the ox and the ass standing by".¹⁰ In the world of the 13th century Renaissance, with its new frescoes, new exotic consumer goods, its new urban civilisation, its mini-globalisation, Francis revealed the beauty of God with a new image of poverty.

That is our challenge in the global village, to show the beauty of the poor and powerless God. It is especially hard because often our mission is in the places of most terrible poverty, in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia, where poverty is evidently ugly. Missionaries build schools, universities and hospitals. We run powerful and absolutely vital institutions. We are seen as rich. But in many countries the health and educational system would collapse if it were not for the Church. How then can we show the beauty of the glory of God, visible in poverty? How can we offer these irreplaceable services, and still lead lives which are mysteries, and which make no sense without God?

I now glance quickly at a second way in which we can manifest God's beauty, and that is through acts of transformation. I began this lecture by suggesting that what is perhaps unique about our world is not so much that it is global, as that we do not know where it is going. We have no idea what sort of future we are creating for ourselves. Even the north-pole has melted and become a pool of water. What next? This uncertainty provokes a deep anxiety. We even hardly dare to contemplate the future, and so it is easier to live just for now. This is the culture of instant gratification. As Kessler writes, "Most people live today less from great overarching hopes and perspectives than from short-term intentions and tangible goals. 'Experience your life – now' is the imperative of the secondary culture which now spans the globe. It is enough to live life like this, in the present – without a goal".¹¹

When I fly into London, I often see the Millennium wheel, the city's proud celebration of two thousands years since the birth of Christ. But all it does is to go round and round, and that is on good days! It goes nowhere. It offers us the chance to be spectators, who observe the world without commitment. It entertains us, and enables us momentarily to escape the hectic city. It is a good symbol of how often we seek to survive in this runaway world. We are content to be entertained, to escape a while. And this is what so many of our images offer, entertainment which lets us forget¹². Computer games, soap operas, films offer us amnesia in the face of an unknown future. Mind you, I am still waiting for one of my nieces to take me on the Millennium wheel!

This escapism is above all expressed in that late "20th century phenomenon, the "happening". There is even the French word for it, "*Le happening*". When France celebrated the Millennium with a 1,000 kilometre breakfast, it was "*un uncroyable happening*"! A happening may be a disco, a football match, a concert, a party, a fiesta, the Olympics. A happening is a moment of exuberance, of ecstasy, where we are transported out of our dull, unmalleable world, so that we can forget. When Disneyland built a new town in Florida, in which people could try to escape from the anxieties of modern America, it was named Celebration.

But Christianity finds its centre also in "*un uncroyable happening*", which is the Resurrection. But it is an utterly different sort of happening. It does not offer escapism, but transformation. It does not invite us to forget tomorrow, but is the future breaking in now. Faced with all our anxiety in this runaway world, not knowing where we are going, Christians cannot respond either with amnesia or with optimistic predications about the future. But we find signs of the Resurrection breaking in with gestures of transformation and liberation. Our celebrations are not an escape but a foretaste of the future. They offer not opium, as Marx thought, but promise.

An English Dominican, called Cornelius Ernst, once wrote that the experience of God is what he calls the "genetic moment". The genetic moment is transformation, newness, creativity, in which God irrupts into our lives. He wrote: "Every genetic moment is a mystery. It is dawn, discovery, spring, new birth, coming to the light, awakening, transcendence, liberation, ecstasy, bridal consent, gift, forgiveness, reconciliation, revolution, faith, hope, love. It could be said that Christianity is the consecration of the genetic moment, the living centre from which it reviews the indefinitely various and shifting perspectives of human experience in history. That, at least is or ought to be its claim: that it is the power to transform and renew all things: 'Behold, I make all things new' (Apoc 21:5)".¹³

So the challenge for our mission is how to make God visible through gestures of freedom, liberation, transformation, little "happenings" that are signs of the end. We need little irruptions of God's uncontainable freedom and his victory over death. Strangely enough, I have found it easier to think of rather obvious secular images than religious ones: the small figure in front of the tank in Tienanmen Square, the fall of the Berlin war.

What might be explicitly religious images? Perhaps a community of Dominican nuns in northern Burundi, Tutsis and Hutus living and praying together in peace in a land of death. The little monastery, surrounded by the greenery of cultivated fields in a countryside that is burnt and barren, is a sign of God, who does not let death have the last word. Another example might be an ecumenical community which I visited in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Catholics and Protestants lived together, and when anyone was killed in the sectarian battles, then a Catholic and a Protestant would go from the community to visit the relatives, and to pray with them. This community was an embodiment of our wisdom, a sign that we are not fated to violence, a little epiphany of the Kingdom. We do not know whether peace is around the corner or whether the violence will get worse, but here was a word made flesh which spoke of God's ultimate purpose.

Proclamation

We have progressed from mission as presence to mission as epiphany. Our eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord. But we must make one last step, which is to proclamation. Our gospel must come to word. At the end of

Matthew's Gospel, the disciples are sent out to all the nations to make disciples, and to teach all that Jesus has commanded. The Word becomes flesh, but the flesh also becomes word.

Here we encounter what is perhaps the deepest crisis in our mission today. There is a profound suspicion of anyone who claims to teach, unless they come from the East or have some strange New Age doctrine. Missionaries who teach are suspected of indoctrination, of cultural imperialism, of arrogance. Who are we to tell anyone what they should believe? To teach that Jesus is God is seen as indoctrination, whereas to teach that God is a sacred mushroom is part of the rich tapestry of human tradition! Anyway our society is deeply sceptical of any truth claims. We live in Disneyland, in which the truth can be reinvented as we wish. In the virtual age, the truth is what you conjure up on your computer screen. I read of a pilot who took off from an airport in Peru, but all his controls went crazy. When he turned left, the controls said that he was going right, when he went up, they said that he was going down. His last recorded words were "It's all fiction". Alas, the mountain he hit was not.

In *Christianity Rediscovered* Vincent Donovan describes how he worked for many years as a missionary with the Maasai, building schools and hospitals, but never proclaiming his faith. He was not encouraged to do so by his superiors. Finally he could restrain himself no longer and he gathered together the people and told them about his belief in Jesus. And then (if I remember correctly since my copy of the book is lost) the elders said, "We always wondered why you were here, and now at last we know. Why did you not tell us before?" This is why we are sent, to tell people about our faith. We do not always have the freedom to speak, and we must choose well the moment, but it would ultimately be patronising and condescending not to proclaim what we believe to be true. Indeed it is part of the Good News that human beings are made for the truth and can attain it. As *Fides et Ratio* puts it, "One may define the human being ... as the one who seeks the truth" (n. 28), and that search is not in vain. We have, as the Dominican Constitutions say, a "*propensio ad veritatem*", (LCO 77.2), an inclination to the truth. Any spirituality of mission has to include a passion for the truth.

At the same time, it is central to traditional Catholic teaching that we stand at the very limits of language, barely glimpsing the edge of the mystery. St Thomas says that the object of faith is not the words we speak, but God whom we cannot see and know. The object of our faith is beyond the grasp and dominion of our words. We do not own the truth or master it. Faced with the beliefs and claims of others we must have a profound humility. As Claverie wrote "*je ne possède pas la vérité, j'ai besoin de la vérité des autres*", I am a beggar after the truth.

At the heart of a spirituality of mission is surely an understanding of the right relationship between the *confidence* that we have in the revelation of the truth and the *humility* that we have before the mystery. The missionary must seek that right integration between confidence and humility. This is a source of an immense tension within the Church, between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and some Asian theologians, and indeed within many religious orders. It can be a fruitful tension at the heart of our proclamation of the mystery. I remember a General Chapter of the Dominicans in which a fierce argument broke out between those who staked their whole lives and vocations on the proclamation of the truth, and those who stressed how little Aquinas thought we could know of God. It ended with a seminar in the bar on a text of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, and the consumption of much beer and cognac! To live that tension well, between proclamation and dialogue, I believe that the missionary needs a spirituality of truthfulness and a life of contemplation.

It may appear strange to talk of a spirituality of truthfulness. Obviously the preacher must say only what is true. But I believe that one will only know when to speak and when to be silent, that balance of confidence and humility, if one has been trained in acute discipline of truthfulness. This is a slow and painful asceticism, becoming attentive to one's use of words, in one's attention to what others say, in an awareness of all the ways in which we use words to dominate, to subvert, to manipulate rather than to reveal and disclose.

Nicholas Lash wrote, "Commissioned as ministers of God's redemptive Word, we are required, in politics and in private life, in work and in play, in commerce and scholarship, to practise and foster that philology, that word-caring, that meticulous and conscientious concern for the quality of conversation and the truthfulness of memory, which is the first causality of sin. The Church accordingly is, or should be, a school of philology, an academy of word-care".¹⁴ The idea of the theologian as a philologist sounds very dry and dusty. How can a missionary have time for that sort of a thing? But to be a preacher is to learn the asceticism of truthfulness in all the words we speak, how we talk about other people, our friends and our enemies, people when they have left the room, the Vatican, ourselves. It is only if we learn this truth in the heart that we will be able to tell the difference between a good confidence in the proclamation of the truth, and the arrogance of those who claim to know more than they can; between humility in the face of the mystery and a wishy-washy relativism which does not dare to speak at all. The discipline is part of our assimilation to the one who is the Truth, and whose word "is living and active, sharper than any two-edged

sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

Secondly, we will only be confident and humble preachers if we become contemplative. Chrys McVey said that “mission begins in humility and ends in mystery”. It is only if we learn to rest in God’s silence, that we can discover the right words, words that are neither arrogant nor vacuous, words that are both truthful and humble. It is only if the centre of our lives is God’s own silence that we will know when language ends and when silence begins, when to proclaim and when to be quiet. Rowan Williams wrote that “what we must rediscover is the discipline of silence – not an absolute, unbroken inarticulacy, but the discipline of letting go of our own easy chattering about the Gospel so that our words may come again from a new and different depth or force from something beyond our fantasies”.¹⁵ It is this contemplative dimension that destroys the false images of God that we may be tempted to worship, and which liberates us from the traps of ideology and arrogance.

Future Citizens of the Kingdom

I must now conclude by gathering together the threads. I have suggested that the beginning of all mission is presence; it is being there as a sign of the Kingdom, with those who are most different, separated from us by history, culture or faith. But this is just the beginning. Our mission pushes us towards epiphany and ultimately to proclamation. The Word becomes flesh, and flesh becomes word. Each stage in the development of our mission asks of the missionary different qualities: fidelity, poverty, freedom, truthfulness and silence. Am I offering a picture of an impossibly saintly missionary, unlike any actual missionary? Does this add up to a coherent “Spirituality of mission”?

I have suggested that at this stage in the history of the Church’s mission, we might best think of the missionary as the future citizen of the Kingdom. Our runaway world is out of control. We do not know where it is going, whether to happiness or misery, to prosperity or poverty. We Christians have no privileged information. But we do believe that ultimately the Kingdom will come. That is our wisdom, and it is a wisdom that missionaries embody in their very lives.

St Paul writes to the Philippians, that “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13f). This is a wonderfully dynamic image. St Paul is stretched out, pressed forward like an Olympic athlete in Sidney going for gold! To be a future citizen of the Kingdom is to live by this dynamism. It is to be stretched, reaching out, pressed forward. The missionary endures incompleteness; he or she is half made until the Kingdom, when all will be one. We stretch out to the other, to those most distant, incomplete until we are one with them in the Kingdom. We reach out for a fullness of truth, which now we only glimpse dimly; all that we proclaim is haunted by silence. We are hollowed out by a longing for God, whose beauty may be glimpsed in our poverty. To be a future citizen of the Kingdom is to be dynamically, radiantly, joyfully incomplete.

Eckhart wrote that, “just as much as you go out of all things, just so much, neither more nor less, does God come enter in with all that is His – if indeed you go right out of all that is yours”.¹⁶ The beauty of Eckhart is that the less one knows what he is talking about, the more wonderful it sounds! Perhaps he is inviting us to that radical exodus from ourselves that makes a hollow for God to enter. We stretch out to God in our neighbour, God who is most other, so to discover God in the centre of our being, God as most inward. For God is utterly other and utterly inward. Which is why to love God we must both love our neighbour and ourselves. But that is another lecture!

This love is very risky. Giddens says that in this dangerous world, careering away towards an unknown future, the only solution is to take risks. Risk is the characteristic of a society that looks to the future. He says that “a positive embrace of risk is the very source of that energy which creates wealth in a modern economy.... Risk is the mobilising dynamic of a society bent on change, that wants to determine its own future rather than leaving it to religion, tradition, or the vagaries of nature”.¹⁷ He clearly sees religion as a refuge from risk, but our mission invites us to a risk beyond his imagining. This is the risk of love. It is the risk of living for the other who might not want me; the risk of living for a fullness of truth, that I cannot capture; the risk of letting myself be hollowed out by yearning for the God whose Kingdom will come. This is most risky and yet most sure.

Notes:

¹ *Runaway World. How Globalisation is Reshaping our Lives*. London, 1999.

² On the first two stages of mission, cf. Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity. Theology Between the Global and the Local*. New York, 1997.

³ *Runaway World. How Globalisation is Reshaping Our Lives*. London, 1999.

⁴ I am sure that that is a quote from someone, but I cannot remember whom!

⁵ *Lettres et Messages d'Algerie*. Paris, 1996.

⁶ Nicholas Boyle, "Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney", Edinburgh, 1998, p. 120.

⁷ Aidan Nichols, OP, *The Word Has Been Abroad*. Edinburgh, 1998, p.1.

⁸ Quoted by R. Harries *Art and the Beauty of God: A Christian Understanding*, London 1993, p. 4.

⁹ Quoted by S. Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, Edinburgh, 1998, p. 38.

¹⁰ Neil MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, BBC London, 2000, p. 49.

¹¹ Hans Kessler, "Fulfilment – Experienced for a Moment Yet Painfully Lacking?", *Concilium*, September 1999, p. 103.

¹² cf. Alberto Moreira, "The Dangerous Memory of Jesus Christ in a Post-Traditional Society", and Ferdinand D. Dagmang, "Gratification and Instantaneous Liberation", both in *Concilium*, September 1999.

¹³ *The Theology of Grace*, Dublin, 1974, p. 74f.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.166

¹⁵ *Open to Judgment*, London, 1996, p. 268f.

¹⁶ Meister Eckhart, *Sermons and Treatises*, vol. IV, London, p.14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23f.

Ref.. Text from the Author.
