

## **MISSION, MISSIONARIES, MISSIOLOGIES**

### **Lessons from the Past**

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Missionary activity was an integral part of Christianity from the beginning. Without it, there would have been no world Christianity with its more than two billion followers today. This success was, however, not achieved without struggles and problems as every age posed its own specific questions to and criticisms against mission. The pluralistic, highly secular and globalized contemporary world is no exception. Cultures and religions of the world have come closer and interact with each other in an increasingly interdependent and networked world. At the same time there is also the urge to assert one's identity, and in the process, respect and tolerance for each other and the correct way to communicate with each other have become problematic. How can Christianity meaningfully speak about mission in a world of religious and cultural pluralism with its exclusive truth claims? Such claims are viewed sceptically and are even rejected by the postmodern world. This scepticism cannot be washed away because the fact remains that there is no rational or empirical foundation for such claims, and added to that, there is the historical burden of Christian mission, although one cannot close the eyes to the immense religious and cultural contributions of Christianity to humanity. This article proposes to examine the case for Christian mission in the religiously pluralistic and globalized world, its

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possible forms and its relevance today. For that, a critical examination of Christian mission from a historical point of view is essential. More than unearthing new information, the study intends to examine critically some concepts and theories which were prominent in missionary praxis through the centuries, and place mission, understood as the continuation of Christ's mission of establishing God's Kingdom, where it belongs, namely, at the centre of Christian existence.

## **Classical Concepts and Methods**

### *Apostolic World Mission*

The disciples of Jesus, especially, the twelve apostles, had a commission to universal mission. It is evident from the mission commands in the Gospels, especially, the so called Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 28:16-20). But the New Testament gives information about the activities only of a few prominent apostles, in the Acts of the Apostles, and to make up for this deficiency, several Acts were created wherein the importance of preaching the Gospel in the whole world is clearly emphasized. Usually the pattern in these Acts, which are not part of the New Testament, is the division of the world among the Twelve and their being assigned a country or region. Although there is initially unwillingness to go for various reasons, like lack of knowledge of the language, they still go and preach the Gospel in different regions of the world and die a martyr's death. One of the best known such stories is presented in the Acts of Thomas.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of these stories has been to show that mission is universal, the apostles themselves were exemplary missionaries, and during their life time itself they had completed this task, which belief Church Fathers, like Tertullian, Jerome, Chrysostom, etc., shared. So there is little discussion about the need for a world mission in the early Church. But with better knowledge of geography, the idea gained ground that this would not have been possible. So Fathers like Augustine argued that mission to the ends of the earth has its urgency and relevance always.<sup>2</sup>

### *Encounter with Culture*

The question naturally arises, how these new peoples accepted the Christian faith. This is a vital question because the new faith had to be made part of a new culture without loss of its own identity. There

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<sup>1</sup>A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text and Commentary*, Leiden: Brill, 2003.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Sivernich, *Die Christliche Mission: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009, 110-111.

had to be a clear differentiation on the one hand, and integration, on the other. We have many examples of this process, which, at times, turned out to be very negative, but could be educative for us today.

### *Apologetics and Dialogue*

One of the first examples of dialogue is the effort of Paul in Athens to connect with the existing culture of the Greeks. Although Paul is full of rage when he sees the idolatry and polytheism of the people of Athens, he is ready to begin with this already available quest for the divine. In his famous speech in Athens (Acts 17:16-34.) he refers to the piety of the people of Athens by pointing to their altars, especially the one with the inscription, "to the Unknown God" (Acts 17: 24). A critical acceptance of culture with vigorous self defence was the method of the Church Father from North Africa, Tertullian, in his famous *Apologeticum*.<sup>3</sup> Around the same time, also from Africa, we have the writings of Minucius Felix, who in his *Octavius*,<sup>4</sup> chose the path of defence through dialogue with the elite of the society to prove that the Christianity is the continuation of the best philosophical traditions of antiquity. The *Letter to Diognetus*,<sup>5</sup> a document originated in Alexandria around the year 190, is another witness to this dialogue and apology. Justin Martyr's (d. 165) discovery of the *logos spermatikos* in ancient philosophy, and his claim that it has found its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth, the Word become Flesh, was one of the earliest Christian contributions to dialogue between Christianity and Greek culture.<sup>6</sup> When we come to the early middle ages, we are surprised by the open attitude of Pope Gregory the Great in his missionary enterprise to the Anglo-Saxons, where he explicitly tells that the pagan traditions should be respected, and where possible, Christianity should build on them.<sup>7</sup> Even in the midst of the Crusades and the resulting violence, Francis of Assisi wanted a different approach to the Muslims, the method of witness of life and dialogue, as proved by his mission to the Sultan Malik-al Kamil of Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Tertullian, *Apologeticum. Verteidigung des Christentums*, translated and introduced by Carl Becker, München: Kösel Verlag, 1984.

<sup>4</sup>Carl Becker, *Der "Octavius" des Minucius Felix. Heidnische Philosophie und frühchristliche Apologetik*, München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1967.

<sup>5</sup>*An Diognet*, translated and introduced by Horacio E. Lona (Kommentar zu frühchristlichen Apologeten, 8), Freiburg, 2001.

<sup>6</sup>Justin der Märtyrer, *Die beiden Apologien in Frühchristliche Apologeten und Märtyrerakten*, Kempten/München, 1932.

<sup>7</sup>Beda der Ehrwürdige, *Kirchengeschichte des englischen Volkes*, I, translated by Günter Spitzbart, Darmstadt, 1997, 30.

<sup>8</sup>Helmut Feld, *Franziskus von Assisi und seine Bewegung*, Darmstadt, 1994, 295-302.

Another witness to this tradition of dialogue was Ramon Lull (1293-1316),<sup>9</sup> who, too, was convinced that the best way to preach about one's religion to others was through reason and dialogue. He said that in the field of religion only the spiritual weapon of reason is to be used. Physical force was permitted as *ultima ratio*, after all peaceful negotiations had failed because the Church has also temporal power. We could even say that the concept of interreligious dialogue was introduced into theology by him. He did not advocate relativism, but stood for search for truth with openness and understanding of the other. In general, up to the age of modern mission which began with the so-called discoveries and conquests initiated by the Iberian powers, especially Spain, violence and force were exceptions, like the conversion of Saxons by Charles the Great, and there were many explicit instructions from Popes, like Nicholas I, Innocent II, etc., which said that in matters of faith there is no place whatsoever for compulsion or force.<sup>10</sup>

### *Confrontation with Culture*

It is ironical that the Franciscans were among the first to develop theories which justified violence and force in mission, in the context of the conquest and Christianization of South America. Convinced of the urgency of mission rooted in their millenarian thinking, they saw the discovery of and subsequent missionary activity in South America as providential, and therefore, violence or force could be justified as part of it, if necessary, although the process was called "spiritual conquest." One of them even compared the cruelties inflicted on the people there to the plagues of Egypt through which God liberated the people of Israel from Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

But there were others who rejected force and violence and defended the rights of the Indians, like Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolome de Las Casas, Jose de Acosta, etc., arguing that the natives also have reason and culture. Bartolome de Las Casas said that there is only one proper missionary method, namely, the use of intellect and will or that of conviction through reason and persuasion of the will (*intellectus rationibus persuasivus and voluntatis suaviter allectivus vel exhortativus*).<sup>12</sup> This position was taken up by Pope Paul III in his bull *Sublimis Deus* in 1537. These arguments were refined by Jose de Acosta in his *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* published in 1588. He saw

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<sup>9</sup>Sievernich, 119-122.

<sup>10</sup>Sievernich, 115-116.

<sup>11</sup>Sievernich, 122.

<sup>12</sup>Bartolome de Las Casas, *Theologische Schriften*, ed. by Mariano Delgado, Paderborn, 1994, 107.

a crisis in the missionary and political ideologies of the time, and reminded both the missionaries and the conquerors about their responsibility, warning them against mixing up colonialism and mission. He said that the first condition for mission is knowledge of the people and culture of a place which the missionaries and the conquerors lacked. While rejecting violence in mission as totally perverse, he said that military protection could be given to the missionaries as a means of self defence only, and can never be used as a means of mission. The missionaries must convince others through their knowledge, faith and integrity of life. His theory was a milestone in the history of mission.<sup>13</sup>

### *Appreciation of Culture*

This was the method which a group of Jesuits tried to apply in mission, first among the Guarani Indians in Paraguay, calling it, after the Franciscan terminology, spiritual conquest of Paraguay, and later on, also in Asia. In South America, it was done by segregating the natives from the conquerors, and thus, enabling a peaceful meeting of the two cultures. Called the Reductions of Paraguay, it guaranteed protection from violence from the colonizers on the one hand, and brought about intellectual, cultural and religious development for the people, on the other. In spite of the criticism of paternalism, it was a more civilized way to missionize and a unique experiment.<sup>14</sup>

In Japan the initiator of this process was Alessandro Valignano (1539-1609), the delegate of the Jesuits to the East. He emphasized that acceptance of Japanese culture is possible without accepting the religion, a principle which was hitherto unknown, and, therefore, can be called a paradigm change in missionary method. This method of appreciation of culture by accepting elements from it was used by the Jesuits in China, India, Vietnam, etc. later on. He elaborated two levels at which this could be done: at the level of communication, which means knowledge of the language, and at the level of life style, that is, acceptance of the lifestyle of the people by the missionary.<sup>15</sup>

The Jesuits in China, especially Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), put into concrete practice these instructions of Valignano, and showed great openness to Chinese traditions and culture. He said that through the use of reason, which is the chief instrument of dialogue, one can show that Christianity and Chinese religion are in harmony with each

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<sup>13</sup>See Jose de Acosta, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute*, 2 vols., Madrid, 1984, 1987.

<sup>14</sup>Sievernich, 127-129.

<sup>15</sup>Franz Josef Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan*, 2 vols., Rome, 1951, 1958.

other, and that Christianity fulfills Confucianism. He addressed his message to the elite of the society and did everything to attract them to the new faith, like introducing western science and technological knowledge of the time to them, and thus advocated indirect mission rather than direct preaching. This eventually led to the Chinese Rites controversy.<sup>16</sup>

In India, Robert de Nobili (1577-1656) did the same, directing his mission to the high caste Hindus of Tamil Nadu. He, too, believed that Christianity could adapt harmless social customs of the Hindus, and thus create a bridge between Hinduism and Christianity. This eventually led to a similar controversy in India, the so called Malabar Rites Controversy.<sup>17</sup>

One can clearly say that the Jesuit missionaries had no intention of sacrificing the identity of Christianity, but at the same time there was the desire to accept the harmless aspects of alien cultures which finally would lead to an enrichment of Christianity on the one hand, and easy acceptance of the faith by the people, on the other. An attempt was made to differentiate between religion and culture, although Christianity can never be separated from a particular culture at any given time. Moreover, they believed that this form of dialogue was the only way to enter into these cultures in any meaningful way.

### Centralization

But in the Church there was apprehension about these practices as was shown by the prohibition of these practices, which remain catastrophic blunders in mission history, and the urge to centralize the entire missionary enterprise in Rome. This was the thesis of the Carmelite Thomas á Jesu (1564-1627) in his *De procuranda omnium gentium salute* (1613), in which he gave justification for mission and its urgency but said that its agents are primarily the Pope and the religious orders. Standing in the tradition of the time, he said that mission is to be directed to heretics, schismatics and unbelievers, and no force is to be used against them as a rule; but if they refuse to listen to the preaching of the Gospel, force can be used at least to make them listen to it. He also said that the best way to missionize people is through a Christian way of life and intellectual ability, especially, knowledge of the language and culture of the people. The

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<sup>16</sup>J. Gernet, *Christus kam bis nach China. Eine erste Begegnung und ihr Scheitern*, Zürich-München, 1984.

<sup>17</sup>Isaac Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement of the 19th and 20th Centuries and Its Encounter with India*, Frankfurt am Main, 1995, 45-47.

subsequent founding of the *Propagande Fide* in 1622 goes back to this centralizing tendency which he espoused.<sup>18</sup>

### The Protestants

Martin Luther (1483-1546) and the other Reformers have not left behind any writing on mission. They were engaged in the consolidation of the Reformation movement in Europe and besides, they had no missionaries, like the religious orders of the Catholic Churches. Added to that was a probable theological reason, namely, their conviction that the mission command of Jesus had already been fulfilled by the apostles. Therefore, only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century we see some reflections about the need for missionary activity, and the beginning of missionary work outside Europe, for example, to India in 1706 by the German Lutherans from Halle.

One of the first to take this initiative was the German Philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1640-1716). He had known about the Jesuit missionaries in China and appreciated their indirect missionary method of introducing western scientific and technological knowledge into the missions and using them as a means to attract the elite of the society to Christianity, and wanted the Protestants to follow it. He believed that western knowledge would make the non-Christians aware of their errors and help them accept Christianity; it would also help the introduction of non-western cultures to the West.<sup>19</sup>

But William Carey (1761-1834), who became a famous Protestant missionary to India believed that the State is not responsible for mission, nor is it an enterprise of sharing scientific or technological knowledge. It is an activity of the Christian community, and, therefore, committed Christians must join together and form into missionary societies which are fully dedicated to this task. Thus he founded the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, the forerunner of the numerous missionary societies that were founded in subsequent decades. His ideas are found in his handbook *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, published in 1792.<sup>20</sup> He said that the mission command is valid for all ages and peoples, and that the Christian community is the primary agent of mission.

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<sup>18</sup>Sievernich, 134-136.

<sup>19</sup>Christian Zangger, *Welt und Konversion. Die theologische Begründung der Mission bei Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, Zürich, 1997.

<sup>20</sup>London, 1934.

Another Protestant theorist of mission was the theologian Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834). He said that the responsibility for spreading the message of Christ was with the Christian community. It is one of the important activities of the community. It is part of pastoral care and should form part of its instructional activities. He was skeptical of the mushrooming missionary societies. He, as a European Christian living in the colonial context, believed also in the socio cultural dimensions of mission in which the entire Christian community in the colonies should participate. So the exemplary life of the community is important.<sup>21</sup>

### **Missionary Concepts and Theories of the Present**

At the beginning of the third millennium Christianity presents itself as a global religion but a divided one. What is the meaning of mission in the contemporary world? The process of developing a missiology for the modern world began after the decolonization process in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in the process, a critique of colonial mission was undertaken and the link between colonialism and mission was brought to light. Let us consider the nature of this early missiology from its historical background, so that we can see the present and the future in a better light.

One of the first to develop a Christian missiology was the Protestant theologian Gustav Warneck (1834-1910). He said that Christian mission is the planting and organization of the Christian Church among the non Christians, Jews, Muslims and heathens, and gives biblical, ecclesiological, historical and ethnological reasons for the same. It begins with the conversion of the individual but is completed only with the founding of the Church or the Christian community, and is not a sporadic activity but an organized one. In this process the colonial activity of the Europeans has proved to be providential, because it helps the missionary activity. The uplift of the natives, religiously, morally and culturally is part of mission, and in this way it is a blessing for the colonizers as well, and, therefore, they have a duty to support. Moreover, this humanitarian service in some measure makes up for the evils of colonialism.<sup>22</sup>

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), the well known German missionary to Africa emphasized the ethical dimension of mission, and said that one must speak less about religion and practice it more. Mission,

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<sup>21</sup>His ideas are found in *Die Praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche*, ed. By Jacob Frerichs.

<sup>22</sup>Padinjarekuttu, 44-45.

according to him, originates from sympathy or pity for the heathen, but also is a penance for the sins of the Europeans who don't practice their faith, and who have inflicted great injustice in the colonies. He said that the non Christians needed to be freed from their superstitions, and therefore, mission has also humanitarian, educational and civilizational aspects. So proceeding from a Eurocentric understanding of culture and mission, he emphasized its civilizing aspect and said that it is an ethical obligation.<sup>23</sup>

Another theologian, Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) said that colonialism is a vehicle of mission and prepares the way for it. But he went a step further and discussed mission from the point of view of the future of Christianity in an increasingly unified world. So he pleads for a modern missionary concept, which is not focused on saving souls or on the deficiencies of other religions. But at the same time he wants the missionaries to spread the religious and humanistic ideals of Europe and America, the ultimate aim of which is the cultural and ethical unity of the whole of humanity. In this process the missionary can show that Christianity, together with European culture, is the best spiritual power, but the final goal of all missionary activity is the unity of all religions and mutual recognition and appreciation of each other. One of the primary aims of mission is understanding, enriching, recognizing, and appreciating the common features in all religions. This is the precondition for religious development in the future.<sup>24</sup>

The initiative for a Catholic missiology came from Joseph Schmidlin (1876-1944) who, in fact, is considered its founder. His ideas are not very different from that of his Protestant counterparts, like Gustav Warneck. He also believed that both individual conversion and planting of the Church are important goals of mission. By conversion he understands inner transformation and outward turning to Christianity through baptism, and by planting of the Church he means the creation of a community and establishment of a hierarchy, with the ultimate aim of converting entire nations and the whole world to Christianity. He is also convinced of the superiority of European culture, and the importance of colonial support in mission. But Schmidlin's credit lies in his pioneering efforts to establish

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<sup>23</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *Predigten 1898-1948*, ed. Richard Brüllmann and Erich Gräßer, München, 2001; Albert Schweitzer, *Von der Mission. Gedanken und Erfahrungen*, in Albert Schweitzer, *Vorträge, Vorlesungen, Aufsätze*, ed. Claus Günzler, Ulrich Luz and Johann Zürcher, München, 2003, 316-359.

<sup>24</sup>Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Mission in der modernen Welt in Zur religiösen Lage. Religionsphilosophie und Ethik, Gesammelte Werke 2*, Tübingen, 1922, 779-804.

missiology as a scientific discipline in Catholic theology with a first faculty of missiology in the University of Münster.<sup>25</sup> Pierre Charles (1883-1954) and Andre Seumois (1917-2000) who taught in Louvain, stressed the central role of the Church in mission, and emphasized that the planting of the Church in the missions is the chief aim of mission, because the Church is the sacrament of salvation. This plant should grow and spread its branches throughout the world with a native clergy and episcopate, and every member of the Christian community is an active agent in this task.<sup>26</sup> Thomas Ohm (1892-1962) who was the successor of Schmidlin in the university of Münster followed his thought, but had a more positive understanding of non Christian religions.<sup>27</sup>

This short historical survey of missiological thought during the decades that preceded the Second Vatican Council makes us understand the importance of the shift in attitudes that the Council brought about. The Council clarified the Church's self understanding and presented itself to a modern world which it viewed in a more positive light. This change is reflected in its understanding of mission as reflected in the documents, *Lumen Gentium*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes*.

Human rights, religious freedom, etc. found their way into Church documents for the first time after the Council, which at one time, were condemned as modern errors. Force and violence in religious matters came to be seen as abhorrent by the Church. Similarly, non Christian religions were no more mere heathenism or barbarism, culturally and morally inferior, but contained at least a ray of truth. But that does not make mission superfluous. *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes the unity of all human beings and says that all peoples are called to this unity. This is the horizon in which the Churches do their missionary work. (LG 3-17). The document on mission, *Ad Gentes*, speaks of mission as a sign of the catholicity of the Church and it is necessary, because the Church is the sacrament of salvation. The Church's mission is the continuation of the divine mission in which God shares his life with human beings. The goal of mission is the planting of the Church (AG 5), but this planting has a definite local character, that is, establishing a genuine local Church.

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<sup>25</sup>Padinjarekuttu, 147-196.

<sup>26</sup>Pierre Charles, *Missiologie. Etudes-Rapports-Conferences* I, Louvain, Bruxelles, Paris, 1939.

<sup>27</sup>Padinjarekuttu, 197-248.

These Council documents created a fundamental problem for missiology which has remained unresolved till today, namely, the maintenance of the balance between religious freedom on the one hand, and the claim of Christianity to absolute truth, on the other. Religious freedom and mission with claim to absolute truth in a global and religiously plural world need a clear conceptual and intellectual framework and proper rules of engagement. The Church tried to create this conceptual and intellectual framework with the help of two important concepts: evangelization and inculturation.

### **Evangelization**

The Council paved the way for a gradual substitution of the word mission with evangelization. The understanding of evangelization that the Council proposed is that it is a basic obligation of the people of God. It is proclamation of the Gospel through word and life. This must be so adapted to the context that all peoples are able to accept the Gospel in the language and thought pattern that is understandable to them, and in this way there will be a real exchange between the culture of a people and the Gospel.

But it was Paul VI, who in his Magna Charta, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,<sup>28</sup> dealt with it systematically, calling it the real task of the Church in the contemporary world. The Church is there to evangelize and nothing else (14). It is renewal of humanity through the Gospel, and calls for a courageous encounter with the cultures of the world (20). It is intimately connected with the history and development of human communities. Its methods are witness of life and proclamation of the Gospel, and, in fact, everything that the Church does should be directed to this end (21-24). And who are to be evangelized? Non Christians, atheists, and also those who are baptized, but do not practice their faith or those who have abandoned their Christian faith. In short, the whole world needs to be evangelized (59-58). The document placed evangelization in the local context and demanded that the Gospel respond to that context. This call to indigenize the Gospel was the impetus for the emergence of various local theologies after the Council, like, the Latin American Liberation theology, Dalit theology, etc., and the various movements that addressed the burning issues of the world, like, human rights, ecology, poverty, unemployment, economic and political order, family, protection of life, etc.

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<sup>28</sup> Apostolisches Schreiben „*Evangelii nuntiandi*“ Seiner Heiligkeit Papst Pauls VI. an den Episkopat, den Klerus und alle Gläubigen der Katholischen Kirche über die Evangelisierung in der Welt von heute. 8. Dezember 1975.

## Inculturation

The second concept that became popular and important in theology in the post-Conciliar period was inculturation. Its origin may be traced to the concept of enculturation developed by American cultural anthropologists.<sup>29</sup> Its first use in Catholic theology may be traced to the Louvain School, to Pierre Charles<sup>30</sup> and Joseph Masson,<sup>31</sup> and the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1974/75.<sup>32</sup> It was used to mean the incarnation of the Gospel in individual cultures, whether they were Christian or non Christian, so that the Gospel becomes a principle of transformation and renewal of culture universally and for all times. This idea, but not the word, was used for the first time in a Church document in the post apostolic exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*. From then on, the word is used profusely in Catholic theology to define a number of processes in the encounter between Gospel and culture, and has become an important concept in missiology. But then, there were also other concerns that the Churches had to address in the post-Conciliar period: conflict between local Churches and Rome which was accused of paternalism in mission, neocolonial structures and patterns in mission, rejection of proselytism and the secularization and privatisation of religion in the western world.

To answer these questions was the aim of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*.<sup>33</sup> In the face of the enormous problems the world faces, the Pope said, the missionary mandate of the Churches is more relevant than ever.

He said that mission is *ad gentes*, that is, to all peoples and cultures where Christ is not known. Secondly, mission should reach out to those who have given up their faith for whatever reason. He also pointed out to the new social realities, like urbanization, the youth and its alienation from the Church, the migrants, the situation of poverty, mass media, scientific and technological developments, the international situation, religious revival world wide, etc. to which missiology has to respond. Although he repeated the age old method of mission, namely, personal witness and proclamation, he also spoke of basic Christian communities, inculturation, interreligious dialogue,

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<sup>29</sup>Sievernich, 150.

<sup>30</sup>Pierre Charles, *Etudes Missiologiques*, Paris, 1956, 137ff.

<sup>31</sup>Joseph Masson, "L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde," in *Nouvelle Tevue Theologique*, 84 (1962), 1032-1043.

<sup>32</sup>Sievernich, 150-151.

<sup>33</sup>*Redemptoris Missio*. On the permanent validity of the missionary mandate. Encyclical letter of his Holiness Pope John Paul II, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1990.

development of peoples, action on behalf of peace and justice in the world, etc., as effective ways of missionary praxis.

### **The Future of Mission**

Now the question arises: what do the Christian Churches think about mission in the third millennium, because at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have more new challenges and problems at hand. On the one hand, there are people who categorically reject mission with its violent legacy, saying that it is mere cultural and religious imperialism with the aim of exterminating the non-Christian world, unfortunately closing their eyes to the enormous contributions Christians have made to humanity through their educational, cultural, medical and charitable activities. On the other hand, Christianity cannot give up the missionary mandate because it belongs to its essence. But there is an increasing awareness that the best way to do it is through dialogue. Universal religions are missionary by nature but they must undertake it peacefully. Their claims to truth cannot be imposed on others but they can be made known, theoretically and practically. Mission is only an attempt at this, to make people know about the Christian faith, so that they are able to decide for themselves. The best way to do this is through dialogue so that the positive values in other religions are accepted without giving up one's own. This dialogue itself could create conflicts but that is the result of freedom.<sup>34</sup>

Mission essentially is border or frontier crossing, geographic, social, cultural, ethnic, religious. Universal religions like Christianity have done this constantly. It is encounter with a stranger or alien, and accepting the stranger as he or she is, is a biblical mandate. Encounter with a stranger always results in the widening of one's own horizon. So mission, finally, is communication with the stranger or alien, about the good news about salvation. The question is how to do it meaningfully in a globalized, religiously pluralistic world. Looking at the spectrum of missiologies world wide, one can see an ecumenical consensus regarding this task. We can describe this consensus in the following way: mission is the participation in the mission of the Trinitarian God, which found expression in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and it is done through liberative service to humanity for the establishment of the kingdom of God. The best method to achieve this is through prophetic dialogue. It is prophetic dialogue because it

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<sup>34</sup>Robert Spaemann, *Das unsterbliche Gerücht. Die Frage nach Gott und die Täuschung der Moderne*, Stuttgart, 2007.

is related to the social context of poverty, the cultural context of plurality of cultures, and the religious context of multiplicity of religions.<sup>35</sup>

But at the same time, there is a new concept of mission emerging from the pentecostal and evangelical Christian groups, for whom, too, evangelization and Church growth are important concerns. But it is characterized by a negative attitude to the modern world, the non-Christian religions and even other Christian Churches. Their eschatological expectation leads to urgency in mission, stressing quantitative growth. Mission is directed not only to the non-Christians but also to other Christians who do not follow their brand of Christianity. These movements and their ideology are to be taken seriously because they represent one of the fastest growing Christian movements in the world today, constituting a fourth of world Christianity. Objectively seen their understanding of mission is problematic in many ways: it prevents an ecumenical understanding of Christian mission and is characterized by a negative attitude to modernity; they are skeptical towards human reason and have a dualistic and pessimistic understanding of the world and human beings; they have a negative attitude to other religions, other Churches and forms of religiosity; their exclusivism negates plurality of cultures and religions. In this way they reject the fundamental Christian belief in the universal salvific will of God.

### A Prognosis

The thrust of this article has been that the history of Christian mission in the last two millennia, in spite of many problems and setbacks like competition from other religions and ideologies, persecution, etc., was a success on many counts, because it was able to communicate with different cultures and civilizations; this was possible because there was openness to communicate with the other, encounter the other and exchange with the other. Intercultural communication lay at the root of the success of mission and it will remain the condition for its success also in the future. This communication is possible because there is a common language based on an anthropological foundation, the religious and ethical unity of humankind, and the acceptance of the dignity and equality of the human person as a universal value.

This ability at intercultural communication was manifested in many ways: the translation of the bible into numerous languages, the creation of catechisms in local languages, creation of hymns, poetry

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<sup>35</sup>Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today*, New York: Maryknoll, 2004; Peter Phan, *In Our Own Tongues. Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, New York: Maryknoll, 2003.

and literature, linguistic contributions like development of languages and creation of grammars and dictionaries, scientific and technological contributions and exchange, contributions to historical and cultural studies, etc. This communication must have to continue but communication with the modern world needs a new language, with own grammar and idioms.

We shall comment now only on one particular aspect of this intercultural communication, namely, the specifically, religious, and as far as the language for it is concerned, we can say with certainty that there is only one language and that is the language of dialogue. The history of this communication was not a felicitous one, as we very well know. There were failures and shadows, in the form of force and violence, but there was also realization of these mistakes, as the historic event of Pope John Paul II asking pardon for the sins of the Church in the year 2000 clearly manifests. Christianity was, and is, also an agent of love, compassion and hope in the world through its immense services to humanity. Christianity was accepted not always because it was forced upon people with violence, but because it also possessed an attraction and convincing power of its own. The Gospel rules out force and violence but the same Gospel was used, at times, to justify it. The best example that comes to mind is the theory of Just War, justified by none other than an intellectual giant of the Church, St. Augustine himself through a literal interpretation of Luke 14:16-24, later on used by the missionaries South America, like Juan Focher, Juan Sepulveda, etc. Sepulveda was also the author of the bizarre theory that the very conversion of Paul in Acts 9:3-9 offers an example of force being used by God to bring about the conversion of Paul by being thrown from his horse and blinded. This shows that even God uses force to bring about something good, which the Church is now justified in doing. Equally violent was the Europeanism that justified the imposition of European culture on other peoples on the assumption that it was superior to all others and Christianity was a better religion than other religions whose followers were thought to be possessing inferior morals and were idolaters.

On the other hand, there was always the way of tolerance, too. A classical example is the instruction of the Propaganda Fide to the missionaries in China that the missionaries should show tolerance not only toward the culture but also to the religions and morals of the people.<sup>36</sup> This is, after all, a Christian duty which says that we should love our neighbour as we love ourselves, and even love our enemies.

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<sup>36</sup>*Collectanea S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide seu decreta, instructiones, rescripta pro apostolicis missionibus*, vol I, ann 1622-1866, Rome 1907, 42.

The Gospel is the Gospel of tolerance. There are also parables of tolerance, for example, the parable of the wheat and the tares (Mat 13:24-30), which was used by Bede the Venerable, Rhabanus Maurus, Bartolome de Las Casas, Friedrich Spee, etc. to show God's tolerance of "the other".<sup>37</sup> One must say that the advocates of the use of force was always a minority, an exception, but this minority is often given prominence in mission history, which, unfortunately, is a consistent pattern in historiography.

The second question concerns the way the Church looked at the rights of "the other," what we call human rights today. Here, too, there were courageous advocates of the same. On the one hand there was the theory of Just War and its interpretation that even "moral otherness" could be a reason for war. This was taught, for example by Pope Innocent IV, who, in the context of papal absolutism, claimed that he could, as vicar of Christ, use force on people who worship idols or false gods or sin against nature to listen to the Gospel. He does not advocate violence to force others to convert to Christianity but for making them listen to the preaching of the Gospel. This idea of the Pope that the sins of others could be a reason for war had already been rejected by Thomas of Aquinas. But the situation after the discoveries and conquests helped its revival by people like Juan Sepulveda.<sup>38</sup>

It was against such grotesque interpretations that the Dominican Francisco de Vitoria (1483-1546) formulated his theories on human rights and international law, which remain valid to the present day. He rejected any rights of anyone to wage war on another, including the king of Spain or the Pope. He also claimed that there was no superior or inferior among humans because all are equal.

In his famous lecture of 1539 in the university of Salamanca titled *De indis recenter inventis* ("the recently discovered Indians"), he rejected the theory of Sepulveda. But he clearly said that it did not mean an end to mission. It only meant that mission has to be undertaken under new conditions. He said the first condition is the removal of enmity towards the people for whom mission is undertaken, the acknowledgement of the "otherness" of the people, and preaching through one's life. The right to mission is founded on the right to free communication which has biblical, philosophical and theological roots. He founded mission on natural law, international law and human nature. He wanted that the cultural, moral and religious

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<sup>37</sup>Sievernich, 223.

<sup>38</sup>Sievernich, 225-226.

rights of the other are always protected and clearly stated that difference in religion is no reason for war and hence, religious wars are basically unacceptable. Human beings should be "human" to other human beings and every Christian should be a neighbour to the other. This is Jesus' teaching and the neighbour is one who helps the other who is in need (Lk 10:30-37) and not one who wages war against him. Vitoria was the first to raise the voice against ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism, and enunciated the principles of international communication and human rights. This can be considered the basis of dialogue which we advocate today.<sup>39</sup>

So in our pluralistic and globalized world, there is only the way of dialogue without loss of one's identity. Only dialogue can help intercultural communication and it is needed more than ever today, especially in the field of religion. All Christian Churches, except the fundamentalist, marginal sects, emphasize its need but let it be clear that it is not a modern discovery but as old as Christianity itself.<sup>40</sup> It is not a tactic for mission, nor a necessary evil tolerated grudgingly in the face of the uncomfortable Christian history, but a consistent trend that has always been present in the Church. A dialogical understanding of mission is possible and is desirable, and is based on the universal salvific will of God, which does not exclude any culture or religion, and the II Vatican Council has strongly emphasized its importance and relevance, as also many post conciliar documents.<sup>41</sup> This is also the thrust of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, which represent most of the Protestant Churches.

But still the problem remains how real dialogue is possible when some religions still claim truth as their own in a religiously pluralistic world. Some people say that since these claims are difficult to be reconciled, it is better to relativise them or to bracket them from discussion. The postmodern thought would say that a radically pluralistic world also needs a plural divinity, and so polytheism is better than a narrow monotheism. Whatever position one takes, for serious Christians it should stand the test of biblical criticism and twenty centuries of tradition. One could argue that the plurality of religions is a chance to accord respect to all religions since all of them have positive and negative elements but offer answers regarding transcendence, the human situation, etc. In other words, all religions

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<sup>39</sup>Sievernich, 226-230.

<sup>40</sup>See Sievernich, 231-236 for a short survey.

<sup>41</sup>GS, 92; NA, 2; Ecclesiam Suam 72; CIC 787;1, Dialogue and Proclamation, 1991, 42.

are salvific, but through different ways. On the other side there is exclusivism which sees Christianity as the only true religion and the others as false. This line of thought had influenced the mission of the Church for a long time. Then there is inclusivism which says that Jesus is the mediator of salvation, but other religions also have elements of truth and grace. But will the acknowledgement by the Church that the other religions contain some elements of truth and grace satisfy them? It is quite unlikely. But at least it supports a real dialogue without fear. According to this view, there is no contradiction between proclamation and dialogue nor is dialogue an alternative to mission. It is part of it. No one needs to give up his convictions but can be open to the other without relativisation and false compromises. So as the document Dialogue and Proclamation said in 1991, let us engage in the different ways of dialogue, dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of religious experience, dialogue of theological exchange, etc. because such dialogue is the future of Christianity and all religions. It is founded on the fundamental dialogue of God with humanity and is based on human freedom.