



# **EXPLORERS, GUIDES AND MEANING- MAKERS**

**MISSION THEOLOGY FOR  
CATHOLIC EDUCATORS**

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## CHAPTER TEN

### Befriending a Living Tradition

For many Catholic educators “befriending their religious tradition” is probably the most difficult aspect of grassroots theology. There are a number of reasons for this, some relating to personal and family narratives, while others derive from living in a secular culture. For some there is a readiness issue, while others simply lack knowledge of their tradition. Whatever the reasons, coming to grips with the tradition is always a “work in progress”. The word “tradition” itself causes reluctance in people because they interpret it to mean “something that hardly ever changes”. There is often little appreciation that they are part of a *living tradition* and that with life comes challenge and change. In the discussion that follows, we explore the theological bases of the new understanding of mission that has emerged during the last half century, particularly as this has been expressed in the Church’s official teaching.

#### With Life Comes Challenge and Change

In dealing with the narrative of modernity we pointed out that, in the historical circumstances of the time, the leadership of the Church construed its identity as being separate from the world. While there were many reasons to justify this decision, in mission terms it proved a serious miscalculation, which isolated the Church from social and political developments, positive and negative. In adopting this stance, the Church came to be seen by many people of good will as the enemy of all that was progressive. As the optimism that characterised both the Enlightenment and modernity began to wane in the late 1950s, a new mood developed both within the Church and within society.

It was in this situation that Pope John XXIII was elected to the papacy. Within three months of his election the new Pope indicated his intention to call an ecumenical council to deal with issues associated with the nature and mission of the Church and its relationship with the modern world. The Second Vatican Council opened in October 1962 and was conducted in four sessions in the autumns of 1962 to 1965. Over 2000 bishops attended the various sessions. In 1963 after the first session and just before his untimely death, Pope John XXIII took up the theme of re-engagement with the world on a very wide front in his encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris*. His successor Paul VI, in his first encyclical letter *Ecclesiam Suam* published in 1964 before the third session of the Council, also stressed the importance of opening up a “dialogue with the modern world”, nominating this as one of three main “policies” of his

pontificate.<sup>217</sup>

While not seeking to direct the work of the Council in terms of the specific treatment of issues, the broad direction given by these two popes to the assembled bishops of the world could not have been clearer. It was left to the bishops to chart the way forward in re-engaging with the world, to determine the purpose, shape and scope of this engagement, and to put the enterprise on a sound theological footing. This they did in the various documents of the Council. A major consequence of these endeavours was a reformulation of the Church's understanding of its mission in and to the world and, in turn, a reformulation of its various vehicles for mission, including the Catholic school. The understanding of mission affirmed at the Council created the trajectory of mission on which the Catholic community has travelled ever since.

As the Church began to redefine its mission, it also began to redefine its self-understanding, its identity. It became possible for people to think of themselves as "Catholic" in new ways. This factor is an important aspect of the modern experience of being Catholic, and an unintended consequence of reformulating the mission of the Church.

### **Mission Theology and Mission Practice – The Connection**

A mutuality exists between *how a community thinks about its mission and how it engages in it*, that is, between its theology of mission and its mission practice. The demands of mission practice give impetus to developments in the theology of mission and a renewed understanding of mission, in turn, gives impetus to new forms of missional engagement. This holds true whether one's consideration is focused at the level of official Church theology as set out in authoritative documents and the global mission practice that it informs, or focused on grassroots theology and its relationship to how a school community achieves its mission. In this respect the Catholic experience is not unique, but is mirrored by that of other mainstream Christian denominations.<sup>218</sup> Given that missiology, the study of the theology and practice of mission, is now a highly ecumenical enterprise, this adds to the widely shared sense in the Christian communities that, when it comes to mission, the adage "with life comes change" holds true.

The dramatic development that has occurred in the Church's official

<sup>217</sup> Gerald Arbuckle *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Homebush: St Paul's Publications, 1993), 40.

<sup>218</sup> Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder cite many of the relevant documents from the evangelical and pentecostal churches in Part 111 of their *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 2004). See also James Sherer and Stephen Bevans (eds) *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 3* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 1999) for some important documentation from the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches.

expression of its mission theology comes as a surprise to some, particularly given the relatively short time span of less than fifty years in which this has taken place. As has been noted above, leadership has played an important role. Key contributions have also been made by the generous involvement of those working “on the ground”. Amid the challenges inherent in a rapidly changing context, an openness to the Spirit in discerning the changing face of mission is clearly in evidence. An important element in this improved discernment has been the establishment of new organisational structures such as synods at the level of the whole Church, as well as various regional and national arrangements for promoting *dialogue within the Church*. These have enabled insights to be developed not only in a region but, with the assistance of new communication technologies, across the globe. It has breathed new life into what Walter Kasper describes as “the oldest global player”.<sup>219</sup>

A second level of mutuality exists between *how a community construes its identity and how members understand issues of mission or purpose*. For instance, a teacher construes her identity as teacher in terms of what she thinks a teacher should be doing. As the conception of what she should be doing changes, so too does the way she thinks of herself. This dynamic can work in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, many teachers seek to create a positive relational learning environment in the classroom as a condition for effective academic learning. For them, this is what teaching is all about – for such teachers learning proceeds on the basis of trust. On the negative side, when the curriculum becomes dominated by the need to achieve high marks on standardised tests in “core” subjects in order to meet predetermined targets, many teachers feel that their profession is undervalued, and that the thrust of educational policy is to make the process of learning “teacher-proof”. In such circumstances self-image and morale suffer. Teachers sense that this is not what teaching should be about. *When mission and identity lack alignment, meaning is a casualty*.

In summary, as the demands of mission change, there is an impact on the identity of those engaged in the various ministries through which Christian communities effect mission. Put another way, new mission challenges can initiate a paradigm shift not only in our mission theology but also in the understanding we have of ourselves as disciples committed to mission. This dynamic was at work in the Church during the twentieth century. The mission imperative to engage the modern world and its peoples led to a paradigm shift in mission theology, which in turn led to a re-formulation of identity, a situation with which we are still wrestling today.

<sup>219</sup> Walter Kasper *The Future of Christianity: A Meditation on the Church and Contemporary Pluralism in the Post Modern Era* (Official text, Helder Camara Lecture, July 9, 2003), 14.

## **The Church as Universal and Local**

In discussions about the mission of the Church, the word “church” can be used in a number of ways. It is important, therefore, before considering the Church’s mission theology, to take a little time to consider some of the territory mapped by the word “church” so as to better understand the ecclesial context in which a new self-understanding of both identity and mission have come about.

One of the major mission challenges for the Catholic Church in the past half century has been to come to grips with its identity as “a global Church”. While the Church has always considered itself as the “universal Church”, in the eyes of many people, particularly those in developing countries, it was experienced as a “European Church”.<sup>220</sup> Not surprisingly, Church teaching generally took European cultural assumptions as being normative, and tended to disregard other cultures in which the Church had taken root, seeing them as being of lesser significance. In this mindset, mission was seen as an essential element in the process of “civilising” peoples living in non-European cultures, one that carried a moral imperative. This Euro-centric bias derived from the fact that most of the people staffing the central bureaucracy of the Church were European. The Church was global in extent, but European in sensibility.

This state of affairs came under scrutiny during the Second Vatican Council where, for the first time in history, leaders from all the major cultural groups met together. The very nature of the gathering was likely to challenge the Euro-centric nature of the Church, and it did. The seeds of a new consciousness, one which would become more familiar with the idea of Church as a community of communities, were sown.

The Second Vatican Council recognised that the Catholic Church, as a global Church, required an organisational structure that reflected its true identity. As a result, national conferences of bishops were established or, where they already existed, were given more official recognition, thus strengthening their role. Regional assemblies covering the main cultural regions of the world – Europe, Asia, Africa and so on – are held periodically, enabling common aspirations and modes of co-operation to surface and be developed.

In the years following the Council, general synods held in Rome nurtured this development, while at the local level, groups of Catholics began to engage seriously in their own theologising processes. The 1974 Roman synod was particularly important in addressing understandings of mission and evangelisation. In regard to the understanding of “church” we have been discussing, two inter-related issues, human cultures and local church, were particularly pertinent. Coming at the close of the first turbulent decade after the

<sup>220</sup> For instance, the vast majority of the 700 bishops attending the First Vatican Council (1869–70) came from Europe and North America.

Council, the work of this synod gave rise to a detailed treatment of evangelisation in Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* released in 1975. Prior to this synod, the word "evangelisation", while appearing occasionally in Catholic theology, was not widely used.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Paul VI, acting as a spokesperson for the bishops who had convened at the synod, as well as in his own right, taught that the evangelising process includes the culture or way of life of a people, as well as the people themselves – "what matters is to evangelise man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots)".<sup>221</sup> Those committed to the Church's missionary work are called to respect a people's culture because culture is the vehicle through which God's word comes to the people and through which they respond to God. The pope also recognises that, as human constructs, cultures have their limitations, and like persons, benefit from salvific encounter with the Gospel carried in genuinely Christian communities. This was a major development in Catholic teaching. It embodied a shift to the modern concept of culture and away from a concept of culture which linked evangelisation with "civilization", and therefore with the dissemination of European values.

One initial consequence was the development of a new language within the Church. The concept of "local church" was now juxtaposed against that of "global church". Theologies of inculturation were developed by theologians<sup>222</sup> which helped formulate the "responsibility of each local church to give shape to the faith it lived".<sup>223</sup> People became more aware of the processes of dialogue, interaction and adaptation that need to occur when the values of the Gospel carried by one community come into a living contact with the culture of another.

Local theology became the term adopted to describe a people's attempts to discern religious meaning in their collective experience. Possibly the most well known example of the emergence of local theology is the development of various "liberation theologies" in South and Central America in the sixties and seventies. Since then there have been developments of local theologies in other cultural regions. Initially, the term local theology referred to attempts to make religious sense of the experiences of "local churches" often understood as those sharing a connected culture and history. At times the idea encompassed

<sup>221</sup> Pope Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #20 (Strathfield: Society of St Paul, 1975).

<sup>222</sup> See for instance, Aylward Shorter *Towards a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988); Peter Schineller *A Handbook of Inculturation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990); Diego Irarrazaval *Inculturation* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 2000).

<sup>223</sup> Lucien Legrand *The Bible on Culture* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 2000), xi.

whole continents or extensive regions.

In more recent developments, however, the term “local church” is used in a more restricted sense, to mean *the Church in a particular diocese*. It is possible therefore to talk of the local church of Sydney, Boston, Bangalore or Dublin. This reflects Paul’s usage of the term “church” to indicate the community of believers in a particular place, for instance, when he wrote his letters to the church of Corinth or Rome or Thessalonika.

The conception of the global Church as a *community of communities*, meaning a communion of local churches, is now widespread in Catholic Church discourse. A diocese in turn is seen as the local expression of this community of communities. The Latin word *communio* is now used to reflect this understanding. *Communio* connotes communities working together in unity towards some common purpose.<sup>224</sup>

The diocese under the leadership of the bishop, as “the local church”, is the basic unit of mission in the life of the Church. It is possible therefore to talk of the mission of the local church. Local churches are becoming more adept at formulating this mission in relation to the context of the diocese. The leadership given by individual bishops is, however, exercised within general guidelines provided by Rome and directions set by national bishops’ conferences. *The global is in the local, and the local in the global*.

The conception of church as both global and local has some bearing on how we understand “the mission of the Church”. Clearly if the word “church” is used in a variety of ways, then there are likely to be corresponding ways in which communities understand their proper mission within the Church. Using the one word “evangelisation” to encompass all aspects of the Church’s mission can be problematic. Effectiveness in mission generally requires some awareness of the many forms of evangelisation called for by local contexts. On this matter, the magisterial documents of the Church are helpful.

### **Development of Mission Theology – Magisterial Documents**

Developments in Catholic Church thinking about mission have followed a number of trajectories. Foundational to these developments are the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Of particular interest in considering the links between mission and identity are the two documents dealing with the nature and purpose of the Church itself – *Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)* and *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*. The first of these deals with the identity of the Church and the second with its relationship to the “world”, including the Church’s

<sup>224</sup> The concept of *communio* is beautifully expressed in Pope John Paul II’s post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania ##10–11 (The Church in Oceania)*.

understanding of its mission in the context of the modern world. The work done at the Council created the platform, as it were, from which further developments in mission theology could be launched.

Official teaching is set out in a range of documents known collectively as *magisterial documents*, that is documents carrying the teaching authority of the church. These address a range of audiences and carry different levels of authority. The documents of a Council of the Church are considered the most authoritative. Popes also promulgate documents addressing a number of subjects, some being directed to the bishops, others to the faithful at large. Roman congregations and pontifical councils also prepare documents which are approved and sent to the universal Church for guidance in important areas of Church life.

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*Magisterial documents*<sup>225</sup> form an enduring record of the Church's official self-understanding across time. They provide a kind of theological "base camp" in the life of a faith community. A document, such as a papal encyclical, generally represents a point that the Church as a whole has reached, and with which most within the local churches can identify. The metaphor of Church as a pilgrim people on a journey is a useful reference point in understanding the role played by these documents. The pilgrims (the baptised, those responsible for mission) are presently working through some very difficult terrain as Christian faith interacts with modernity/post-modernity. In such a situation a major magisterial document might be likened to a sheltered area in which people can gather, check their orientation, rest a little and then move on. The image of a base camp is a useful one. Such documents also function as "places" to which one can return in order to check bearings, if in trekking through complex theological ground beyond the base camp, one realises that the path one is on is not heading in a helpful direction.

### **Key "Moments" in the Development of the Theology of Mission**

In the sections which now follow, we seek to explore elements in the Church's understanding of its theology of mission as these emerged from the Second Vatican Council and have developed to the present. In doing so, we will use as a navigation aid three key "moments" in the Church's developing sense of mission as captured in its authoritative teaching. These three "moments" are: the Second Vatican Council (1962-5), the Synod on Evangelisation (1974), and Pope John Paul II's teaching on mission (1990s). These moments track the emergence of the new paradigm in the Catholic understanding of the Church's

<sup>225</sup> Francis Sullivan *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1985), 24-34.

mission.

Associated with each “moment” are a number of official documents that frame the discussion.<sup>226</sup>

1. **Documents of Second Vatican Council – *Lumen Gentium*** (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*), *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*), *Ad Gentes* (*Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*), and *Nostra Aetate* (*Decree on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*).
2. ***Evangelii Nuntiandi*** (*On the Evangelisation of Peoples*), apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI.
3. ***Redemptoris Missio*** (*On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*) encyclical of Pope John Paul II. Associated with this document, and in some ways explanatory of it, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) from the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. Also addressing some unresolved issues associated with inter-religious dialogue was the instruction from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (2000).

In the ongoing theologising processes that have helped the Church move forward in the area of mission, we need to recognise not only the importance of local experiences of mission, but the interaction that occurs between what happens locally and its global impact.<sup>227</sup> The Church has a global character which complements the life of local communities. It can, therefore, interpret human experience from both a global and local perspective.

### First Moment – “The Church is by Nature Missionary”

In the light of these considerations, then, let us return to our discussion of the key markers along the route of the Church’s journey in self-understanding in regard to mission. The insight which paved the way for the new paradigm of mission is to be found most succinctly stated in *Ad Gentes* 2 – “The whole Church is missionary by its very nature...”. Since mission is of the very nature of the Church, it is of central importance to *all the faithful*. This key insight was complemented by other important understandings about the Church’s relationship with the modern world and its peoples found in *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium*, and *Nostra Aetate*. In *Lumen Gentium* #5 the Kingdom parables from the synoptic gospels set the Church’s mission in the context of God’s Kingdom. The importance for mission theology of treating the nature

<sup>226</sup> Bevans and Schroeder 2004, Part 3, uses a variant of this framework.

<sup>227</sup> Robert Schreiter *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 1–27.

and purpose of the Church in this way can scarcely be overestimated.

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In order to understand the nature of the paradigm shift which occurred in the Second Vatican Council, we need to set the change within its historical context. Prior to the Council and during the course of it, two schools of thought about the goals of mission had been vying for supremacy. Neither were new approaches. Indeed both are rooted in the experience of the early Church, as recorded in the New Testament. The first held that the priority of mission should be to proclaim the Gospel by whatever means are appropriate in a particular context. In terms of New Testament models this approach can be sourced to St Paul who, under the impression that the second coming of Jesus was imminent, sought to proclaim the good news to as many people as possible with all speed. The second held that priority in mission should be to establish the Church and its structures, thus ensuring the practice and stability of Church life and the formation of a community to continue the mission of Jesus. In the New Testament period, as time elapsed, it became necessary to structure communities to keep the faith alive, and to provide a means to take it to the ends of the earth.<sup>228</sup> In the *Acts of the Apostles* Luke presents the Spirit as the source of cohesion in this ongoing journey of the Christian communities.

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The Council did not choose between these two worthwhile goals, but rather opted for something more fundamental in nature. It asked what is the purpose of mission, and from where does it gain its *raison d'être*? Bypassing the existing schools of thought, the Council returned to an earlier understanding of mission, identifying its nature and source as lying in the very life of God:

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The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This plan flows from "fountain-like love", the love of God the Father.<sup>229</sup>

This statement challenged the older conception of mission in which missionary work was handled largely by Propaganda Fide (popularly known as the Church's "Department of Foreign Affairs") and an elite force of missionaries. Mission was no longer to be the sole responsibility of "experts", it was now a challenge for *all Christians*.<sup>230</sup> This teaching recalls anew that, *in sharing the life of the triune God, each baptised person also shares in God's mission*. Mission lies at

<sup>228</sup> Lucien Legrand, 124–130.

<sup>229</sup> *Ad Gentes* #2 in Austin Flannery *Vatican Council II* (Northport New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 444.

<sup>230</sup> This understanding led at first to a "crisis in mission" as people sought to understand its implications. The statement was intended to affirm the role of all Christians in mission but had the unintended consequence of questioning the worth and role of those engaged in specialist missionary work. Pope John Paul II sought to address this issue in *Redemptoris Missio* by affirming the need for mission in the traditional understanding, again opting for a "both/and" solution to the problem.

the centre of each Christian life, and the life of each faith community.

Secondly, the Council Fathers drew the attention of the whole Church to the fact that, since mission is first and foremost God's work, Church communities and individuals are privileged participants in *what God is effecting in the world*. This understanding provides the basis for the Church's dialogue with the world. The bishops of the Council recognised that the understanding of mission that had developed since the sixteenth century was flawed. Mission is not primarily the Church's work, rather it is God's work in which the Christian community is privileged to participate. This change in outlook is often summed up as a change from *God's Church has a mission* to *God's mission has a Church*. Since mission belongs in the first instance to God, it is God who is responsible for mission, not the Church.

In this new understanding, Jesus Christ remains the exemplar for how God's mission is to be carried out in time. His teaching becomes the substance of mission and the Kingdom of God becomes the goal or end of mission. The Church and the world are heading ultimately for the same end, the Kingdom. The Church's role is to be in the service of the world so that it reaches the goal for which it is destined. In this sense the Church's role is an extension of the mission of Jesus; it is engaged in setting up the possibility of the Kingdom coming both in history and beyond history. Far from being in charge of mission, the Church under the guidance of the Spirit, is at the service of God's mission in the world.

During the decades following the Second Vatican Council, faith communities would wrestle with the implications of this paradigm shift. The consciousness that, in terms of Brunner's insightful comment, the "Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning"<sup>231</sup> would spread unevenly and with a degree of difficulty, but spread it has.

By holding that the whole Church community participates in God's mission, the bishops at the Council were also providing a perspective on a new and broader understanding of salvation. This perspective recognises that God has been at work in the world since the beginning of time among all peoples and cultures. As Bevens and Schroeder point out<sup>232</sup> the Second Vatican Council affirmed an insight that has been present in the Church since patristic times, but lost in the Middle Ages. However the Council went further. In the shortest of its documents, *Nostra Aetate*, the Church is called upon to collaborate with members of other religions "to preserve and encourage the moral truths" found among their adherents.<sup>233</sup> There is acknowledgment in this document

<sup>231</sup> Emile Brunner *The Word in the World*, (London: SCM Press, 1931), 11.

<sup>232</sup> Bevens and Schroeder, 25.

that people of other religions can attain salvation through faithful adherence to their own religious traditions. There is also a reaffirmation of the duties that Christians have to witness to their own faith. Two theological principles are finely balanced here: God's universal will that all be saved and the unique role of Jesus as saviour. What are the implications for Christian mission? Exploration of this question continues fruitfully, if at times painfully, to the present.<sup>234</sup>

### Second Moment – “Making Present the Kingdom of God”

The 1974 synod on evangelisation wrestled not only with the implications of the Council's teaching on mission, but also with the results of working with the Council's insights on the ground during the decade following the Council. This decade saw an explosion of energy as people “unpacked” the mission theology we have just discussed. It was a time for widespread experimentation in mission thinking and practice. In this period it also became clearer that the traditional paradigm in mission theology was becoming highly problematic. The roll-back of the colonial processes added to the confusion. A new understanding of the various forms of mission had to be worked out. Also, if mission was the province of all Christians, then the normal pastoral ministry of the Church had to be considered as an expression of mission. This represented a significant change in outlook for diocesan clergy, in particular, who had been formed in a theological tradition that made a clear distinction between pastoral work and missionary work.<sup>235</sup>

By the end of the first decade after the Second Vatican Council there seemed a clear need to develop greater clarity around the purpose and goals of mission. The 1974 synod on evangelisation was the Church's response to this need. The range of issues covered at the synod was extensive and the bishops left the task of summarising discussions to Pope Paul VI. This he did in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, released the following year.

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* re-affirms the central insight of the Council's mission theology, that mission is a sharing in the life of God. As well, it acknowledged the insights of *Nostra Aetate*. The document also expands the Council's theology of mission by bringing more clearly to the fore the main motif with which Jesus framed his own teaching about his mission, namely the Kingdom or Reign of God.<sup>236</sup>

<sup>233</sup> *Nostra Aetate* #2 in Flannery, 570–571.

<sup>234</sup> John Paul II was to return to the theme of Jesus Christ as universal saviour in his encyclicals *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) and *Dominus Jesus* (2000).

<sup>235</sup> This is still an issue to be addressed at parish level. It remains difficult to find an answer to the question: what is the mission of the parish? Lack of clarity on this question can make parish–school and parish–diocese relations quite complex.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #6–12.

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* proved something of a watershed for those engaged in mission and the study of mission. It clarified key elements in the emerging field of missiology by:

- reclaiming the theology of the Kingdom of God as a basis for mission
- identifying conversion as vital for the evangelising church, as well as those to whom the good news is offered
- recognising that evangelisation applies not only to persons, but also to human institutions and cultures
- recognising that evangelisation is multi-faceted
- identifying the central place of proclamation through word and witness
- accepting the unique way local peoples express their religiosity. "Popular religiosity" is to be not only respected, but valued (#48).

Nearly four decades after its publication, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* continues to be regarded as a seminal document in mission theology. In particular it acknowledges that evangelisation encompasses many forms: pastoral ministry, liberation, development of people, work on behalf of justice, evangelisation of cultures and so on. It also recognises that within these forms there is a critical modality – proclamation of the Gospel is integral to all forms of evangelisation. Proclamation in Paul VI's teaching requires both word and witness. In his view witness that remains unexplained is inadequate as proclamation. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* emphasises the need for Christians to speak to the hope that is in them (1 Peter 3:15) as an integral part of mission. *Witness* (and therefore mission) *must be articulated if it is to be effective*.

Paul VI, in respecting the range of views expressed at the synod, employs two understandings of evangelisation in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Used in the "narrow" sense, evangelisation can be understood in terms of its principal modality, proclamation by word and witness. Paul VI, however, also opted for a "broader" understanding, which includes both this basic modality and the many forms through which the modality finds expression. He makes his own preference for this second understanding quite clear. This is a good example of the "both/and" approach adopted in many magisterial documents when popes do not wish to finally settle a disputed matter.<sup>237</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* stands as the "magna carta" of evangelisation.

<sup>237</sup> A Google search of diocesan websites under "evangelisation" reveals that both these constructions of mission still have currency.

### Third Moment – “Proclaiming a Person, Jesus Christ”

Pope John Paul II’s 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* offered a rich source of theological reflection on mission. In the decade following the death of Paul VI there was considerable debate about mission theology and the forms of mission not only in Catholic circles but also in Protestant circles as well. For instance, the dictum of Pope Paul VI that “if you want peace then work for justice”<sup>238</sup> was extended to embrace not only people but *creation itself*. Preserving the “integrity of creation” was first identified by missionaries, particularly those dealing with indigenous people whose livelihood was threatened by deforestation as a result of logging, as a form of mission. The concept of human liberation was extended so that advocacy on behalf of dispossessed peoples became a form of mission during the pontificate of John Paul II leading to the Church adopting a “preferential option for the poor”<sup>239</sup> as a central tenet. Peace emerged more specifically as a form of mission in the 1980s, particularly following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa. It grew in importance with the troubles in Ireland, Rwanda and Bosnia.<sup>240</sup>

*Redemptoris Missio* was promulgated in 1990 in the context of a new phase of globalisation, and as post-modernity gathered pace. One of its key aims was to remind Catholics of the need to persevere with the task of making the Gospel known and presenting Christ to those who have not yet had an opportunity to know him or his gospel. While the document strongly affirmed the continuing need for mission *ad gentes*, as we understand it from the Acts of the Apostles, it had a wider objective. It also sought to address emerging issues as initiatives in inter-religious dialogue grew in frequency following the example set by the Pope himself. Pope John Paul II was personally committed to inter-faith dialogue, as is demonstrated by his pastoral practice as well as his writing. The great gathering of the leaders of the world religions at Assisi on 27 October 1986, which he initiated, stands as practical testimony to this commitment. His understanding of dialogue and the space given to it in *Redemptoris Missio* entrenched it as a second *modality of mission*, complementing Pope Paul VI’s identification of proclamation as the foundational modality.

Dialogue as understood by Pope John Paul II can take place at a number of levels.<sup>241</sup> The Pope’s work on inter-religious dialogue was complemented

<sup>238</sup> Pope Paul VI Message for Day of Peace, 1 January 1972.

<sup>239</sup> See for example the material provided by the Office of Peace and Justice, Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St Pauls <[http://www.osjspm.org/option\\_for\\_the\\_poor.aspx](http://www.osjspm.org/option_for_the_poor.aspx)>.

<sup>240</sup> See Robert Schreiter “Globalization and Reconciliation” in Robert Schreiter (ed.) *Mission in the Third Millennium* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 2001), 139–143; and Robert Schreiter *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 1998).

<sup>241</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Missio* #57.

and enhanced by the work of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, which produced in 1991 the important document *Dialogue and Proclamation*. Work on this document had begun prior to the Pope's decision to produce an encyclical and its publication was delayed so that it could serve as a commentary on some parts of it. The document identifies inter-religious dialogue as a form of evangelisation. It provides an extended treatment of both dialogue and proclamation and of the connection between them, identifying four types of dialogue. *Dialogue of life* sees people living together as friends; *dialogue of action* enables people to come together around a common project, for example, justice, peace and reconciliation or, we might add, the education of young people; *dialogue of religious experience*, or what might be described as a dialogue of spiritualities, enables people to understand each other's human experience in being religious, and in some cases this enables them to pray together; and *dialogue of theological exchange* proceeds, both formally and informally, between those with theological expertise. *Dialogue and Proclamation* is an important reference for any student of mission.

As we have indicated, *Nostra Aetate* had opened the way for dialogue with other faith traditions. The multi-faith nature of modern societies has heightened interest in the teaching of *Nostra Aetate* and the document is likely to continue to have an impact over the longer term. Already dialogue with faiths other than Christian is widely recognised as contributing significantly to the mission agendas of the next generation.

Under the impact of the global movement of peoples, significant numbers of adherents of the major faith traditions are to be found across the world especially in cities. Many seek a place in faith-based schools including Catholic schools, which are challenged to respond in appropriate ways. In this dialogue of life and action, we can expect an enrichment of spiritual experience. The evidence is that this is already occurring in schools, colleges and theological institutions in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. This is a new frontier for the Church's mission and as educators we find ourselves immersed in its challenges. Moving backwards is simply not an option. The bishops who at the Second Vatican Council accepted that the identity of the Church should be understood in terms of its role as servant, herald and sign of the Kingdom of God, also set a trajectory for a new agenda in mission, although they could not have fully realised this at the time. *Redemptoris Missio* has assisted in the ongoing response of faith communities to the demands of this agenda.

*Redemptoris Missio* also calls for a "new evangelisation" (#3), that is, a renewed effort in regard to evangelisation, and specifically names three groups to whom the Gospel should be directed – those who have never heard the

Gospel, those in whom the light of faith has grown dim, and the community of the faithful (##31–32). All three of these groups are present in significant numbers in Catholics schools, which by this very fact, become important places as well as vehicles of evangelisation.

### Charting the Church’s Understanding of Evangelisation

The conception of mission as it has developed over the past four decades can be summed up schematically in the diagram below. Evangelisation has two primary modalities that are implemented through a number of forms. Proclamation involves both witness and word. Witness is provided in a number of forms, as is word. Witness, word and dialogue are integrally related in any form of evangelisation.

The forms of mission will vary with context – both in terms of place and time. For instance, Figure 9 contains certain forms of evangelisation that were not considered in 1975 when *Evangelii Nuntiandi* was written. Not all forms will apply equally in all contexts. New forms, or new variations, are likely to occur in the future because of the needs of people and the demands of their context.

		Modalities of Mission		
		Proclamation by Word and Witness		Dialogue
Forms of Mission	Pastoral Ministry of the Church			
	Human Liberation – Personal and Societal			
	Reconciliation – People and Cultures			
	Justice and Peace			
	Integrity of Creation			
	Inter-religious Dialogue			
	Inculturation			

Figure 9. Evangelisation as the Totality of the Church’s Mission

Dialogue as understood in current Church teaching is not seen as a means to get people to change their religion, although it does not preclude that this may occur as a possible outcome. The purpose of dialogue is better understanding, deeper spirituality and more peaceful living, which is seen as progress towards the Kingdom. Dialogue seeks to understand the other *in the other’s own frame of reference*, not within one’s own frame of reference. Dialogue is seen as an

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essential aspect of being human, a reflection of the dialogue which is essential to the life of God in whose image we are made and whose life we share through baptism.

All the forms of mission represent ways of carrying on the mission of Jesus and of realising the Kingdom in history, but none of them is an end in itself. They are means to an end. People understand and contribute to mission in different ways. This is how the Spirit works. Mission is always linked to need and to aspiration. It is based on hope – hope for what is not yet but for what can become. This is central to Jesus’ understanding of the Kingdom. In this sense mission always has a Kingdom orientation. Being Catholic in this sense is living a life oriented to the Kingdom.

### **Mission as Local within the Global**

The grid in Figure 9 can be used to map mission for a particular faith community, be it a parish, a diocese or a school. It does so by identifying the forms and modalities of the Church’s mission and posing the questions where do we fit in and how do we fit in? Every community needs to ask the question which forms of the Church’s mission are appropriate for us? They then need to formulate an answer. The answers will reflect the local context and, as a consequence, no two communities will respond in the same manner. It is the collective witness of all communities that most fully effects God’s mission. God’s mission is carried out by people in Christian communities as well as by people outside these communities. Dialogue helps people see this and work together in a common cause.

When mission is looked at in this way, Catholic schools are rich in opportunity. If, for instance, we focus on the “integrity of creation” as a *form of mission*, the following questions will arise:

- How do we understand this as a mission imperative?
- How do we understand this as related to the coming of God’s Kingdom?

In other words, how does “integrity of creation” fit into our school’s mission?

Switching to the *modalities of mission* we can ask with regard to this form:

- What do we seek to proclaim about this issue? to whom? and how?
- What sort of witness do we seek to provide? to whom? and how?

Going a step further we can ask:

- What types of dialogue do we engage in when pursuing this matter? and with what intention?

The answers to these questions will span the full gamut of what happens in

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a school. A similar exercise could be carried out on the other forms of mission, for instance, the place reconciliation has in how the school deals with student well-being.

All the forms of mission listed above represent ways in which people can engage in the mission of Jesus. Since identity is tied up with mission, they are all “ways of being Catholic”. There are many possible linkage points between the individual and the Church community in contributing to the mission of the Church. As people make one linkage, other possibilities open up for them. This is often how the process of “befriending our religious tradition” unfolds in practice. As Paul VI has pointed out, as we engage in evangelisation we are ourselves evangelised!<sup>242</sup>

As the fruits of the Second Vatican Council have unfolded over half a century, the official teaching of the Church under successive popes has facilitated the development of significant insights into the mission of the Church, taking it in directions beyond what could possibly have been imagined at the time. The theological building blocks generated have proved to be of core importance to the task of mission. From bishops’ conferences, to dioceses, to small Christian communities, people of faith have been able to identify with the themes of this teaching and work with them because they strike an authentic chord with lived experience. In addition, theologians and those with technical expertise to do so, have also been able to work with these “building blocks” and, secure in the position reached, have been able to move ahead exploring territory beyond these “base camps”.

We began this chapter by saying that as Catholics we are part of a living tradition and “with life comes challenge and change”. Mission lies at the core of the Catholic worldview and provides an entry point in incorporating the principle of purpose into the life of a school community. The Church’s recent teaching on mission contains a full measure of challenge for all those committed to the mission of Jesus and provides a road-map for change.

The official teaching of the Church is at its best when it functions in dynamic relationship to the lived experience of the faithful, with each contributing to the reflective process in a spirit of faith and engagement. The issue for this millennium will be whether this dynamic can be sustained, and whether those engaged on the frontier, such as Catholic educators, have the wisdom and energy to take heart from this authoritative support and do it justice “on the ground”.

<sup>242</sup> In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #41 Pope Paul VI quoted his own words to the Council on the Laity as follows: “Modern man (sic) listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” These are some of the most-quoted words from *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.