

## INTRODUCTION

The fiftieth anniversary celebration of Vatican II's Mission Decree, *Ad Gentes*, by the Missiology discipline of the Yarra Theological Union/ University of Divinity, Melbourne, on October 2–3, 2015, provided a platform for thirteen mission scholars drawn from different parts of the world to reflect the Council's legacy on mission in the context of the contemporary global challenges. This volume emanates from that symposium to make the reflections available to the wider Christian community.

Though fifty years in the life of an organization may not be too long, in comparison to an individual's life, it offers ample space of time to make a critical re-assessment of what was said in the Mission Decree, in the light of the rapid changes that have taken place, to affirm the points that are of lasting merit of the Council's pronouncement and to indicate what more should be said to match the church's mission to the present and into the future. This is the spirit that animates every contribution in this volume.

Despite the seminal ideas that germinated at the Council, helping the church to be renewed and rejuvenated in its mission, it remains to be said that the Council predominantly was a Western one both with regard to participation and the outcome. Themes that are significant for the Asian, African and Oceanic churches, such as harmony and complementarity, the soteriological elements of other religions in themselves, the role of traditional cultures in defining identity, and many others, remained largely peripheral to the discussion in the Council.

In a globalized world there has to be enough room for listening to the voices of the local churches and to respond to them, in contrast to the near absence of Asian, African, Oceanian and similar voices in the Council. Along with it, the world-wide demographic changes due to many factors such as migration, asylum seeking and related issues have changed the geographical and cultural context of the church's mission. An associated factor is the shifting of the Christian influence and membership from the North to the South and to the East. This has to exercise a formative impact on the church's mission thinking and practice. Hence the writers of this volume come from different parts of the world representing the geographical, cultural and the social diversity of the church.

The *Society of the Divine Word* (SVD) had an active role in the formulation of *Ad Gentes*, not only through the hosting of the drafting commission and its work at the SVD premises at Nemi, near Rome, but also because the commission's pro-president was the then Superior

General of the Society, John Schütte. Some other SVDs were members of the commission. In that spirit the SVD wishes to make a contribution to the ongoing reflection on mission for our times through this volume. Hence the writers belong to the Society, though the papers have been modified in the light of the discussions at the symposium that was participated in by scholars and practitioners from the Australian Christian community, especially from the *Australian Association of Mission Studies*. Hence it can rightly be said that the book holds the combined efforts of a number of reflective and context-conscious folk.

By now it has been generally acclaimed how the church's mission to the contemporary world had been the rallying point of the conciliar reflections. The Council itself was a process of renewal and *ressourcement* to respond to the need "of bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the gospel," as John XXIII, the architect of the Council, declared while convoking the Council.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the mission decree, *Ad Gentes*, every document of the Council has something to say about mission, especially the pastoral constitution, *The Church in the Modern World*, which describes the church's relation and service to the modern world. Due to this omnipresent role of mission in the conciliar documents, it can safely be said that "mission is the hermeneutical key" to understand the Council.

By defining the church's identity as a sacrament of the divine reign in the world (LG 1, AG 1), the Council shifted the center of gravity from the church to the world and insisted that the church is divinely constituted to serve the world by "becoming on earth the initial budding forth of that kingdom" (LG 5). This has huge significance for the nature of the church as well as for its mission. It brought in a new level of understanding of mission from proselytization to the renewal of the world. Equally, it was the affirmation of the universal responsibility for mission. As David Ranson observed, it was the "ascent of lay consciousness and the 'descent of holiness.'"<sup>2</sup>

Truly, Vatican II was a watershed event for the mission of the church in so far as the Council presented the very *raison d'être* of the church as mission (AG 1-5). Evangelization has to be the priority of the church. Pope Francis underlined this truth by describing the church as the community of "missionary disciples" (EG 120). The Council provided

---

<sup>1</sup> "Pope John Convoles the Council," in: Walter M. Abbott (General Editor), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 703.

<sup>2</sup> David Ranson, *Between the "Mysticism of Politics" and the "Politics of Mysticism"* (Adelaide: AFT Theology, 2014), xiii. By the "Descent of Holiness," Ranson meant the universal call to holiness and the accessibility of holiness for all the members of the church.

also ever widening perspectives in missionary engagement rather than locking it in certain narrow notions like proclamation and church planting, however important they are. By highlighting the source of mission as the creative love of God (AG 2, LG 2), along with the retrieval of St. Augustine's description of the divine nature as mission (*Missio Dei*) (AG 2-4),<sup>3</sup> and by stating that the missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany/manifestation of the divine plan and its fulfillment in world history (AG 9), the Council expanded the horizon of mission. No wonder then, that ten years later, Pope Paul VI teaching about mission wrote how only the Kingdom is absolute making everything else subsidiary (EN 8). Mission is sacramental, centrifugal and extroverted service to transform the world into being more Kingdom-like.

One thing that cannot escape the attention of a critical reader of the Council's teaching on mission is its insistence on the need to respond to the context. As we said earlier, the very Council was prompted by this need to be able to respond to the modern world with its new challenges.

These new challenges were the focus of the Melbourne symposium. Each of the writers tries to articulate the fresh developments in the respective area that the chapter develops and points out new orientations for mission in the area. The symposium was a conversation around the meaning of mission in the twenty-first century, though always shaped by conciliar statements, but suggesting ways to go beyond what has been said, due to the changed situations. The history of the Catholic church's understanding of mission does not come to an end with *Ad Gentes*, as amply shown by the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI, just ten years after the Council. The Christian call is not just to conform to the world but to rise up to the church's prophetic task and transform the world. In the post-modern world this is a daunting task for mission theoreticians and practitioners alike as shown by the chapters of this book.

The choice of the topics was guided by the contemporary experience of the church. It reflects a "Francis" effect in as much as the topics are subjects that the Pope frequently refers to. The over-arching concern is the "acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:19), proclaiming the "mercy of God."

In the opening chapter, *Missio Dei and Missio Ecclesiae*, renowned US missiologist Stephen Bevans, SVD, argues how *Ad Gentes 2* has articulated one of the most radical statements of the Second Vatican Council: that Christian mission is the result not of an external com-

---

<sup>3</sup> De natura boni, 27.

mand of Christ but of an inner dynamism within God as such. This chapter explores this idea, focusing first on the *Missio Dei* that grounds all Christian mission, and then on the *Missio Ecclesiae*, which makes women and men partners in God's continuing work of creation and redemption of the universe. That Christians are called to partnership with God in mission reveals the nature of God as self-emptying, humble, and participative—amazing good news to share with the world.

In the next chapter on *A Missionary Ecclesiology* the Ghanaian missiologist Gabriel Lionel Afagbegee, SVD, shows how we, all the members of the “Body of Christ” who form the “People of God,” are the church, which is missionary by its very nature. The church exists to evangelize. Hence, “we”—the disciples of Jesus Christ by virtue of our baptism—have a responsibility to be missionaries, evangelizers of the Good News. Evangelization demands bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity and transforming them through the influence of the Good News. The parish is an ideal structure as it offers the opportunity for each member of Christ's body to grow in discipleship and assume his/her missionary responsibilities. For that to happen the parish must be structured as a life-giving communion of communities in which neighboring parishioners are formed into and empowered as missionary communities who joyfully and enthusiastically evangelize themselves (*ad intra*) and evangelize others (*ad extra*).

This reflection is followed by a chapter on *Women and Mission* by missiologist Sr. Mary John, SSsP, belonging to the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit, a sister Congregation of the SVD as both have the common founder, St. Arnold Janssen. Mary John, from India, is the Assistant General of her Congregation and brings home the idea how the duty of spreading the faith is not only in virtue of what we have inherited from the apostles, but also in virtue of that life which flows from Christ into all his members. The Christian tradition is replete with allusions to the great contribution of women in the life and mission of the church. This chapter is an attempt to shed light on the understanding of mission *Ad Gentes* and women's role in the mission of the church. It highlights the progressive steps in the emergence of women in mission, the church's approach to women missionaries, the actual experience of women and the future directions of mission in the changing contexts. The chapter argues how recognizing the feminine abilities and talents in the mission of the Church and assigning to women roles proper to their special charism should not come from a shortage of male personnel but as an acknowledgement of the intrinsic and God-given qualities of women.

The chapter *Consecrated Life and Prophetic Mission – A Latin American Perspective* by Thomas Hughes, SVD, from Brazil, examines the

changes in Consecrated Religious Life (CRL) in the half-century since Vatican II from a Latin American perspective. Situating CRL in the broader ecclesial context, it emphasizes the influence of the Conferences of Bishops and Religious through their evangelical option for the poor. The author stresses the search by CRL to recover its identifying nucleus, based on the tripod of experience of God, community life and prophetic mission. The chapter proposes that the present crisis of CRL is not a sign of decadence but an opportunity for a renewed commitment in prophetic mission.

In the ensuing chapter *The Incarnational Thrust of the Gospel*, Leo Kleden, SVD, an Indonesian scholar and current provincial superior of one of the major SVD units, making use of Paul Ricœur's narrative methodology of multiple interpretations to decontextualize and to recontextualize the narrative, argues how God's narrative, the Word of God, is to be reincarnated each time a believing community reads the gospel, the written account of Jesus the Living Gospel. Kleden equates the written gospel as the second moment in Ricœur's methodology. Following the third moment of Ricœur, Leo Kleden shows how that written text is to be appropriated by the community that makes the message of the gospel its own, so that the gospel becomes the source of creative transformation of the world and of the human community through the triple prophetic dialogue.

The volume continues with a chapter on *Mission Spirituality* by Jac Kuepers, SVD, a missiologist from the Netherlands teaching in Taiwan. The term mission spirituality or missionary spirituality has slowly developed since Vatican II. Spirituality as a generic term with or without religious content has also become quite popular in recent times in movements like New Age. It can be seen as a general trait of the human mind, which is always geared to some goal in life. Spirituality implies self-integration as well as self-transcendence. Mission spirituality is a special Christian spirituality for people dedicated to evangelization. It is a life project for the missionary in which the person hopes to find personal fulfillment, and where, because of the transcendent horizon of God's Reign, one can integrate all the values and all that one encounters in life, toward self-perfection. In related church documents elements for a mission spirituality are quoted and also other sources of mission spiritualities are mentioned. In the development of mission spirituality one can discover a tendency toward more personal involvement of the missionary both with the transcendent origin of mission, with the people one is sent to, and also with oneself in the sense of becoming more aware of the need of conversion and being evangelized. Furthermore, there is the widening of the scope of mission, from religious conversions to concern and care for the whole of the world.

The chapter on *Mission and Social Communication in a new Culture for Evangelization* by Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, a missiologist and specialist in communication from Germany teaching in the Philippines, addresses not so much the technical questions but looks into communicating for a “new culture” under the perspective of missiology and social communication. The chapter sketches *first* some developments and indicates directions in the field of social communication to clarify developments which shape our communication situation in a *digital world* as the environment wherein evangelization takes place. This is followed, *second*, by presenting two mission documents and their communication consequences and shows—*third*—how this is reflected in the Asian church. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the need for a proper communication spirituality to be based on a mission spirituality as proposed by Pope John Paul II.

In the chapter *Reconciliation as Mission*, Zenon Szablowinski, SVD, a Polish theologian teaching in Papua New Guinea, explains how the Decree *Ad Gentes* places reconciliation at the heart of God’s mission. But its focus is mostly on the vertical dimension of reconciliation—on what God has done for people through Christ. What has been developing in mission over the last quarter of the century is the horizontal dimension of reconciliation, which aims to restore harmony between individual persons and groups of people. The cosmic dimension, that makes reconciliation complete, has recently brought greater awareness of environmental issues. The reintegration of reconciliation into mission means implementing this broader understanding of reconciliation at every level of human life, wherever broken relationships, enmity, hatred or separation are present.

Lazar Thanuzraj Stanislaus, SVD, a missiologist from India, in his chapter on *Mission in the Multi-religious Context* articulates how Vatican II was the first Council in the history of the church to speak positively of other religions and encouraged the church to have collaboration with them. The Declaration on Other Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, and other documents of the Council gave positive signs regarding the value of other religions and the importance of having dialogue with them. The post-Conciliar documents have taken further the arguments of dialogue with people of other faiths as a dimension of mission and articulated, “inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission” (RM 55). Asian Churches have advanced the understanding of mission in the midst of a multi-religious context and Asian theologians have shown new ways of mission in this context. In the multi-religious context, fresh prospects of mission are positioning themselves from a dialogue in donor paradigm to a recognitional paradigm, or to other paradigms as inter-hope dialogue, inter-relational dialogue, social dialogue

in the activities of mission, reconciliation as mission, prophetic dialogue and mission *inter gentes*. In the situation of the variety of rich religious traditions, interreligious dialogue will be a prominent form of evangelization and may be the only way to exercise mission.

In the succeeding chapter, *Divine Hospitality and Migration*, Martin Üffing, SVD, a German theologian, spells out how migration has become one of the biggest challenges of our times and divine hospitality is the theological foundation for reaching out to the migrants as participation in God's mission towards people on the move. The chapter steers through the staggering numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in our times as well as the need for encounter and solidarity as expressions of mission. This is in line with what Pope Francis has advocated: a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better and more just world.

This is continued by the chapter on *Mission and Ecology* by Christian Tauchner, SVD, an Austrian theologian who has worked many years in Ecuador, South America. He shows how the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes* has little to say for ecological concerns, at least at first sight. However, fifty years ago, the perspectives of ecology and sustainable development were absent also in other fields, like development planning. Ecology is understood in a wide sense of relationships, which include the entire world. The question of the anthropological turn arises and must be leveled out to avoid an anthropocentric reductionism. However, the reference to *missio Dei* and the Trinitarian perspective in grounding the church's mission in *Ad Gentes* offers a fundamentally ecological perspective. From pragmatic considerations, the question remains about the impact such perspectives as *missio Dei* have had for missionaries. Newer missiological developments show rather the difficulties in coming to terms with ecological perspectives than success in the implementation. Finally, if a wider ecological perspective should be adopted for mission beyond *Ad Gentes*, some conditions will have to be met.

Paul Steffen, SVD, Professor of Missiology at the Urbaniana, Rome, in the chapter *Missiological Education* gives an orientation on *missiological education* in the Catholic world. For that purpose the post-Vatican II understanding of mission, missiology and new branches of contextualized missiology and theology are outlined, followed by a brief exploration of the interrelatedness of missiological education and missionary formation in the Catholic practice. The treatise further investigates the people who are in need of missiological education and the places, institutions and centers that are actually offering missiological education especially in Africa, in Spain and in pastoral institutes in the non-Western world. The paradigm shift from missionary work carried

out by some mandated missionaries to the local church and the Christian community nowadays makes us aware that any person or group involved in the evangelizing mission of the Church is in need of receiving an adequate missiological education.

In the concluding chapter, *Mission – An Epiphany of Love and Service*, Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, of the Yarra Theological Union, Melbourne, describes how the process of globalization with the accompanying mass migration has made religious pluralism a living reality anywhere in the world, compounded by a depletion of the resources of the former Christian nations including their Christian faith. These latter suffer a loss of the sense of transcendence even more than the former mission territories. On the other hand the bible is a narrative of a God whose very being is love, reaching out in creation, and eventually through the incarnation of God's Word who became God with us by going about doing good. The church, formed to sacramentalize this love in all cultures by having good eyes to seek the full humanity of fellow human beings, opens a window to the divine heart for the modern world through its reaching out to all.

The orientation provided by the Council continues to give impetus for the ongoing renewal and to seek fresh paths in responding to the changing demands of the times. The Symposium was a moment of search on how to integrate the two: the teachings and the changes. Hopefully, this volume will serve as a step in the ongoing search to be faithful to the missionary call relevantly and meaningfully.

*Jacob Kavunkal, SVD*