

REVISITING MISSION AT VATICAN II: THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE FOR TODAY'S MISSIONARY CHURCH

STEPHEN B. BEVANS, S.V.D.

The author argues that a closer and fresh reading of the Vatican II documents with an eye to the theme of mission might suggest that it is closer to the heart of the council's original intention than a cursory and dated reading might indicate. Indeed the church's mission is more urgent today than ever, given the shift of Christianity's center of gravity to the Global South, massive migration to the Global North, and widespread secularism. Revisiting the council's documents can offer substantial help for developing a theology and practice for today's missionary church.

AT FIRST GLANCE, IT MIGHT SEEM that the theme of the church's mission, particularly as developed in the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad gentes* (AG), was not seen as a major issue at the Second Vatican council, nor as a major factor in its subsequent hermeneutic. As Italian missiologist Gianni Colzani reflects, "the usual reading of Vatican II does not consider it [AG] as one of the criteria that has influenced its [the council's] course; the biblical, liturgical, patristic, and ecumenical movements are the ones cited as influential at the council while the missionary movement is set rather to the side."¹ An indication of this might be the fact that, in the judgment of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, called precisely to assess the council after 20 years, "the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council's

STEPHEN B. BEVANS, S.V.D., received the PhD from the University of Notre Dame. He is the Louis J. Luzbetak Professor of Mission and Culture at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, where he specializes in mission, ecclesiology, trinitarian theology, and contextual theology. He has recently published *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (2011), coauthored with Roger Schroeder; and two edited collections: *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak Lectures* (2012); and *A Century of Catholic Mission: 1910 to the Present* (in press). In preparation are an edited collection (with Cathy Ross) titled "Mission as Prophetic Dialogue"; "Practices of Mission: Trinitarian Practice" for an introductory text on practical theology; and essays on the New Evangelization.

¹ Gianni Colzani, *Missiologia contemporanea: Il cammino evangelico delle chiese: 1945–2007* (Milan: San Paolo, 2010) 75 (translation mine).

documents.”² The Final Report of the synod did indeed speak of the importance of the church’s mission in the world, and even quotes *AG* no. 2’s lapidary phrase regarding the church’s essential missionary nature. Nevertheless, mission seems not to have been regarded as fundamental for the council’s interpretation. Although John O’Malley, in his monumental work on what happened at Vatican II, certainly speaks about the evangelical spirit of the council, he devotes only about three pages to the development of the mission document itself. Unfortunately, he points out, the debate on the council floor on mission was held in three-and-a-half sessions, a “meager allotment of time given that about one-third of the bishops came from mission territories and were facing unprecedented difficulties in the new political, economic, and cultural situations in most of their countries.”³ Colzani’s observations are justified as well by the fact that in their important recent work, Richard Gaillardetz and Catherine Clifford do not cite any passage from *AG* as one of the “keys” to the council.⁴ They do, to be sure, include a chapter on the church’s mission in the world, and they do mention *AG* no. 2 in that chapter, but mission is understood more along the lines of living out the rich tradition of the church’s social teaching.⁵ Perhaps along with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium* (*SC*), the mission decree and the theme of mission might be classified as the “impoverished cousin of the council’s hermeneutic.”⁶

Nevertheless, a closer reading of the council and the council documents reveals that mission was very much at its heart. One might even say that in its deepest intuitions, Vatican II was a “missionary council.”⁷ My contention here is that the theme of mission at the council in general, and in the council’s document on mission in particular, needs to be revisited. This is especially true in our time of the shift in the center of gravity of

² The Church, in the Word of God, Celebrates the Mysteries of Christ for the Salvation of the World, The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, http://www.saint-mike.org/library/synod_bishops/final_report1985.html, II.b.C.1. This and all other URLs cited herein were accessed on February 8, 2013.

³ John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University, 2008) 269.

⁴ Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012).

⁵ *Ibid.* 87–94.

⁶ See Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012) 15, citing Patrick Prétot, “La Constitution sur la liturgie: Une herméneutique de la tradition liturgique,” in *Vatican II et la théologie: Perspectives pour le XXI^e siècle*, ed. Philippe Bordeyne and Laurent Villemin (Paris: Cerf, 2006) 17–34.

⁷ Johannes Schütte, “Ce que la mission attendait du Concile,” in *Vatican II: L’Activité missionnaire de l’église*, ed. Johannes Schütte (Paris: Cerf, 1967) 107–20, at 120.

Christianity to the Global South, the vast migrations of peoples, particularly toward what were formerly “mission sending countries” of the Global North,⁸ and growing secularism and unbelief in the Global South as well. This latter reality prompted Pope John Paul II to speak of a “New Evangelization,” and Benedict XVI to create the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization and convoke the 2012 Synod of Bishops to deliberate on that topic,⁹ but this article will suggest that “New Evangelization” or a “renewed evangelization” might be apt terms for *any* efforts of evangelization in what has become today a missionary church. Perhaps it is time to reaffirm the council’s missionary intentions and methods, particularly in the face of this new world situation in which we find ourselves today.

REVISITING MISSION AT THE COUNCIL

Colzani is correct in his judgment that other movements were the “drivers” of the council’s major themes of the church as community and communion, episcopal collegiality, liturgical reform, and a renewed understanding of baptism and lay identity. Underneath, however, there ran a strong missionary current evident in some of the very first aims of the council articulated by Pope John XXIII and expressed in many documents and in several ways. Another Italian missiologist, Serena Noceti, speaks of mission as a defining factor in the reception and interpretation of the council’s documents. Through the lens of mission, these texts can be understood in a new way.¹⁰

The Four Constitutions

As Giuseppe Alberigo points out, John XXIII’s understanding of the goals of the council evolved between his first announcement on January 25, 1959,

⁸ There is no satisfactory way to make the distinction I am making here. Nations of the Global North in fact include Australia and New Zealand, even though they are geographically in the Southern Hemisphere. Some scholars prefer the term “Majority World” to speak of the Global South, but do not use the terminology of “Minority World.” Some speak of the “Two-Thirds World” and the “One-Third World.” In any case these terms are certainly better than the older terms “developed” and “developing nations,” and perhaps better than “First” and “Third World,” though the latter terms are still in use.

⁹ See Robert J. Schreier, “The New Evangelization,” in *Word Remembered, Word Proclaimed: Selected Papers from Symposia Celebrating the SVD Centennial in North America*, ed. Stephen Bevans, S.V.D., and Roger Schroeder, S.V.D. (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler, 1997) 44–56; and Benedict XVI’s *Moto Proprio, Ubicumque et semper*, establishing the Pontifical Council, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper_en.html.

¹⁰ Serena Noceti, “Pensare il post-concilio: Tra recensione ed ermeneutica,” *Ad gentes: Teologia et antropologia della missione* 16.1 (2012) 11–24, at 20.

and his famous opening speech on October 11, 1962. As this understanding developed over the three years of preparation for the council, Alberigo says, it became clear that the pope “wanted a council that would mark a transition between two eras, that is, that would bring the Church out of the post-tridentine period and . . . into a new phase of witness and proclamation.” In this way “the Church would then be able to present the gospel message to the world and explain it to human beings with the same power and immediacy that marked the first Pentecost.”¹¹ The four goals outlined in the first paragraph of *SC*, comments Josef Jungmann, summarize the program that the pope had outlined in various speeches and documents during the preparatory period:¹² growth in the Christian life, becoming responsive to the present time, seeking the unity of Christians, and strengthening “those aspects of the Church which can help summon all of humanity into its embrace” (*SC* no. 1).¹³

Massimo Faggioli argues that the council understood that the liturgy could be “a powerful tool for the Church’s missionary identity and activities.”¹⁴ *SC*’s acceptance of the vernacular (no. 36.2) and the sensitivity of the liturgy document to local cultures and customs (no. 37) won the support of many missionary bishops. In addition, the famous statement that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows” is a missionary statement. The liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, I submit, is a missionary act, to which we come to be nourished for more selfless and more effective apostolic service.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* (*LG*), opens with a missionary vision. By proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth, Christ’s light will be shed on all peoples. The church is, as it were, a *sacrament*—not only a *sign* but also an *instrument* of the unity of God and humanity and women and men with each other (see *LG* no. 1). In *LG* no. 5 the council cautiously but certainly distinguishes between the church and the reign of God, intimating that the church receives its *raison d’être* from its missionary witness, service, and proclamation of that

¹¹ Giuseppe Alberigo, “The Announcement of the Council: From the Security of the Fortress to the Lure of the Quest,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II: Toward a New Era in Catholicism*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis) 1–54, at 42.

¹² Josef Andreas Jungmann, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, vol. 1 of *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967) 8.

¹³ Quotations from Vatican II are from Walter M. Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966). I have altered some citations for inclusive language.

¹⁴ Faggioli, *True Reform* 38.

reign. Unfortunately, remarks Gaillardetz, this phrase was a late addition, and so did not influence the overall document as much as it might have.¹⁵ It would be the postconciliar documents *Evangelii nuntiandi* (*EN*), *Redemptoris missio* (*RM*), and the 1991 statement Dialogue and Proclamation (*DP*) that would develop this important distinction further—though always insisting on the close connection between the church and God’s reign.¹⁶ *LG* nos. 13–17 lay out how various people belong to, are linked with, or related to the church, stating that while non-Christians and those not yet with faith can, with God’s grace, find salvation, such salvation is difficult to achieve without the full means of grace that the church, in its missionary activity, offers. The end of *LG* no. 16 and the whole of *LG* no. 17 sketch out the motives, content, and method of mission. *LG* no. 17 insists both that mission should treat cultures with respect and that “the obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his or her ability.”

The Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (*DV*), like *LG*, opens with a missionary vision. Like Trent and Vatican I, the preface states, the document intends to present the church’s authentic teaching on revelation and tradition, “so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe; by believing, it may hope; and by hoping, it may love” (*DV* no. 1). The second paragraph, which presents a more personal rather than propositional understanding of revelation, also describes the *missio Dei*: God speaks to women and men as friends, lives among them, and invites and takes them into communion with Godself.¹⁷ This revelation, then, is entrusted to the apostles, who are commissioned “to preach to all women and men that gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching” (*DV* no. 7). Australian theologian Ormond Rush notes how the development of *DV* over the four sessions of the council also traces the history of the council’s theological development. As the council progressed, he writes, the original more christological focus became more balanced with a pneumatological dimension “that pervades the 16 documents taken as a whole. The council’s desire to renew and reform the Catholic Church spiritually and institutionally was for the sake of making the church a more effective sacrament of *God’s mission* in the world.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (New York: Paulist, 2006) 22.

¹⁶ These developments are found in *EN* no. 8, *RM* nos. 12–20, and *DP* nos. 34, 35, 58.

¹⁷ See Ronald D. Witherup, *Scripture: Dei Verbum* (New York: Paulist, 2006) 34.

¹⁸ Ormond Rush, “Toward a Comprehensive Interpretation of the Council and Its Documents,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 547–69, at 568, emphasis original.

Cardinal Suenens's famous speech calling for the council to treat the church both in its *ad intra* and *ad extra* dimensions bore fruit in the development and promulgation of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* (*GS*).¹⁹ Behind this document is the conviction that the church finds its identity and purpose by being fully immersed in the service of and dialogue with the world—a marked contrast with attitudes held only a century earlier. So powerful and often quoted are the opening words of the constitution, proclaiming that the joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties of every human being also those of Christians, that the next missionary lines are often neglected: “United in Christ, they [Christians] are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every human being” (*GS* no. 1). The whole document is a mission document *par excellence*, but several passages are particularly significant. Part 1 of chapter 4, for example, deals with the role of the church in the world as one of mutuality. Not only is the church in mission to and among individuals (*GS* no. 41), within society (no. 42), and in terms of human development (no. 43), but the document also goes on to say that the church is helped in its mission by the world's various cultures and by women and men “versed in different institutions and specialties” (no. 44), no doubt in terms of scientific expertise, political savvy, scholarly wisdom, and artistic creativity. Here and in part 2 of chapter 2, the role of culture in the church's life and evangelizing mission takes on real prominence. Preaching the gospel in tune with particular cultures and contemporary movements “ought to remain the law of all evangelization” (no. 44).

The Decrees and Declarations

Chapter 1 of the Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication, *Inter mirifica* (*IM*), anchors the church's interest in the means of social communication in Christ's commission “to bring salvation to every person,” and so is “bound to proclaim the gospel” (*IM* no. 3). The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio* (*UR*), begins with the ecumenical movement's motives that seeking the unity of the church is not only against the will of Christ, but it also “inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature” (*UR* no. 1). The council's Decree on Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, *Christus Dominus* (*CD*), opens with the statement that the Holy Spirit has been poured upon the church so that it might glorify God and “save humanity” (*CD* no. 1). It also understands an aspect of episcopal collegiality as bishops'

¹⁹ See Gaillardetz, *Church in the Making* 14.

duty “to be especially concerned about those parts of the world where the Word of God has not yet been proclaimed” (*CD* no. 6). In its Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem* (*AA*), the council declares that the lay apostolate is founded in the church’s mission, in which the laity participate directly (*AA* nos. 3–4). “For this the Church was founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father, it might bring all peoples to share in Christ’s saving redemption; and that through them the whole world might in actual fact be brought into relationship with Him” (no. 2).

Mission concerns figure prominently as well in the two declarations that, though brief, have had a huge impact in the postconciliar church: the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate* (*NA*), and the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae* (*DH*). In the former document, the “deeper study” that the church gives to other religious ways is part of its mission, namely, the “task of fostering unity and love among women and men, and even among nations” (*NA* no. 1). And although the religions of humankind “reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all humanity,” there is still the necessity of always proclaiming Christ, “in whom humanity finds the fullness of religious life and in whom God has reconciled all things to Godself” (*NA* no. 2). Respect and dialogue does not take away the importance of the missionary task. Indeed, it points to the attitudes by which such work is to be carried out. *DH* no. 1 asserts forthrightly the need to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19), but nevertheless insists that “truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.” It is because of every person’s “right to religious freedom” (no. 2) that the council has abrogated the traditional doctrine that “error has no rights,” but that right is also the basis for the council’s insistence that “religious bodies also have the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith, whether by the spoken or by the written word” (no. 4). It is this dual aspect of religious freedom—expressing the right of the church to evangelize and guiding it in its basic method—that prompted eminent churchman Thomas Stransky to encourage Paulist Press to publish its recent commentaries on *AG* and *DH* in the same volume.²⁰

Beyond the Documents

Revisiting mission in the texts of Vatican II makes it evident that mission is a significant perspective in the council’s overall hermeneutic, and a theme that might well shape postconciliar thinking and practice. Perhaps

²⁰ Stephen B. Bevans and Jeffrey Gros, *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes and Dignitatis Humanae* (New York: Paulist, 2009) ix.

more important, however, than the *fact* that mission is a constant theme in the council documents is what they presented regarding the *way* mission should be engaged, employing the symbols and attitudes of cultures and broader contexts, respecting the freedom of women and men to respond to the gospel and recognizing the truth in other religious ways and the goodness of women and men as they search for meaning in their lives. In other words mission is to be done in a way that appreciates culture, takes into account the way the gospel is proclaimed and more deeply reflected upon, and this in ways that recognize the prior presence of God's Spirit among the world's peoples. Mission is to reflect Pope Paul VI's powerful conviction in his 1964 encyclical, *Ecclesiam suam*, that, while other methods of evangelization are certainly possible, "the sort of relationship for the Church to establish with the world should be more in the nature of a dialogue" (no. 78).²¹

O'Malley's keen insight about the distinctive *style* of the council documents is also relevant to the hermeneutical importance of mission both for the interpretation of Vatican II and for mission's relevance today. This distinctive style is perhaps signaled already in John XXIII's opening speech, in which he spoke of how the church today prefers, rather than condemnation, "the medicine of mercy."²² O'Malley notes that instead of a vocabulary of pessimism, juridicism, and dismissal of peoples and institutions beyond the church, the documents are filled with words like "brothers/sisters, friendship, cooperation, collaboration, partnership, freedom, dialogue, pilgrim, servant ('king'), development, evolution, charism, dignity, holiness, conscience, collegiality, people of God, priesthood of believers."²³ The implications of such language for mission are far-reaching. It is to be carried out in full confidence in the life-giving and liberating power of Jesus the Christ and the saving significance of membership in the church; at the same time it is to be lived out in vulnerability, respect, and gentleness. Witness and proclamation of the gospel should be done—to use two contemporary phrases rooted in the council's style—in "bold humility" and "prophetic dialogue."²⁴

In his seventh principle for understanding the council, Rush points beyond the written texts to the full meaning of the "event" that was

²¹ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam_en.html.

²² "Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council" 710–19, at 716.

²³ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* 306.

²⁴ See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) 489; Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

Vatican II. Like *DV*, which speaks of revelation in terms of both words and deeds, Rush indicates several conciliar and papal actions during the council that reveal its underlying missionary and evangelical intent. The council's invitation to Protestant observers certainly connected with its ecumenical aims, which, as I indicated above, had a missionary dimension to them. The invitation to lay observers—first men and then women—was a concrete manifestation of the council's dialogical attitude. Rush also mentions Paul VI's donation of his tiara for the poor, and his visits to India, the Holy Land, and the United Nations, and the donation to the Greek Orthodox Church of a reliquary of the Apostle Andrew are all connected to the council's meaning. These “were, and are still, significant in shaping the contemporary reception of what the council was intending to do and the kind of church it was attempting to fashion.”²⁵

Revisiting *Ad Gentes*

The centerpiece of the council's explicit reflections on mission was its Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes*. Drafted toward the end of the council, and approved only after a tortuous development,²⁶ it was able to incorporate many of the key ideas in other documents. *AG* is grounded in the missionary, trinitarian ecclesiology that was more subtly developed in *LG* (*AG* no. 2) and had emerged as the council progressed. Indeed, it seems no accident that the titles of both documents speak of *Gentes/Gentium*. *AG* takes for granted the theology of the local church in the church constitution (chap. 3), and expresses a practical episcopal collegiality in regard to the fact that it is the episcopal college, in union with the pope, that has the primary responsibility “to proclaim the gospel throughout the world” (*AG* no. 29; see also no. 5). *AG* contains a robust theology of the laity that reflects both *LG* chapter 4 and *AA*. It has the positive regard toward non-Christian religions present in *LG* no. 16 and *NA*. It contains several important and even lyrical passages on the importance of context in general and cultures in particular, reflecting *SC* no. 37 and *GS* part 2, chapter 2. Finally, it possesses the same sensitivity of style highlighted by O'Malley as so significant for engaging in ministry and mission worthy of the God who sends. *AG* is definitely worth revisiting.

Trinitarian Ecclesiology

The first four paragraphs of *LG* root the church in the missions of the Trinity, concluding with Cyprian of Carthage's dictum that the church

²⁵ Rush, “Interpretation of Vatican II” 552.

²⁶ See Bevans and Gros, *Evangelization and Religious Freedom* 9–29.

is “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (*AG* no. 4). *AG*’s ecclesiology of mission is no less trinitarian, but perhaps more dynamic. In what missiologist William Burrows calls the document’s “most memorable line,” the one that “the decree’s promoters wanted etched in the minds both of the council fathers and the church at large,”²⁷ *AG* defines the church and its radical missionary nature: “The pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that it takes its origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (*AG* no. 2). This passage leaves no doubt that mission is not simply one among many of the things that the church does or an activity that is optional. Rather, mission is constitutive of the church itself, existing, as missiologist Wilbert Shenk expresses it, *prior* to the church.²⁸ As the saying goes, the church does not have a mission; the mission has a church. We could say in the light of this statement in *AG* that Trinitarian faith is about engagement in mission—if one professes belief in the Trinity, one is caught up in the Trinity’s saving work.

Connected with the trinitarian perspective of mission—but little commented on—is a rather fresh and powerful theology of the Holy Spirit, one that grounds the openness to cultures and religions that mark *AG*’s and the council’s approach to mission. Acknowledging that the Spirit was sent by Christ from the Father at Pentecost, the text notes that “doubtless, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (*AG* no. 4). This is because, as a note citing Leo the Great explains, Pentecost “was not so much the beginning of a gift as it was the completion of one already bountifully possessed: because the patriarchs, the prophets, the priests, and all the holy men who preceded them were already quickened by the life of the same Spirit, . . . although they did not possess his gifts to the same degree.”²⁹ This presence of the Spirit already in Israel’s history might well be extended, as theologians like Elizabeth Johnson and Denis Edwards acknowledge, to an active presence of the Spirit since the first instant of creation, pervading all things and people always and everywhere with God’s grace and gentle prompting toward the good.³⁰

²⁷ William R. Burrows, “Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity: *Ad Gentes Divinitus*,” in *Vatican II and Its Documents: An American Reappraisal*, ed. Timothy E. O’Connell (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986) 180–96, at 180.

²⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999) 7.

²⁹ The reference is to Leo the Great, Sermon 76, Migne, PL 54.405–6.

³⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 124–49; Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004) 171–79.

It points to the truth that, in the famous phrase of Anglican missiologist Max Warren, God was present long before the missionaries' arrival.³¹

Attention to Context and Culture

It may well be that the aspect of *AG* that deserves revisiting the most is the attention paid throughout the text to the importance, the usefulness, and even the holiness of contexts and cultures in which missionaries work. This attention to culture appears in *AG* no. 9, toward the end of the long chapter (the longest of the document) on the theological foundation of mission. It states that "truth and grace are to be found among the nations, as a secret presence of God," and that the work of Christian mission is in large part the task of freeing and perfecting that truth and grace, so that nothing is really lost in an encounter with the gospel. *AG* no. 11 repeats this idea in some of the most eloquent words of the decree. "Truth and grace" are now spoken of in terms of Justin Martyr's "seeds of the word," and missionaries are encouraged to immerse themselves in the continuing and changing history of people, be in critical contact with science and technology, and know the people among whom they live. "Thus they themselves can learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth."

In the context of a discussion of seminary training in a local church, students are to be taught ways of connecting "with the particular way of thinking and acting characteristic of their own people" and enabled to be in critical conversation with their culture (*AG* no. 16). In both philosophical and theological studies, students should be helped to discern "the points of contact between the traditions and religion of their homeland and the Christian religion" (*AG* no. 16). In other words, theological education should be geared to training in effective evangelization. In their ministry, bishops and clergy alike should live in contact with the universal church, but in a way that, while preserving communion with the whole, the wider traditions of the church should be embedded in their own cultures, "thereby increasing the life of the Mystical Body by a certain mutual exchange of energies" (*AG* no. 19).

AG no. 22 speaks straightforwardly about the need to adapt theology to local contexts and cultures (today we would say "inculturate" or engage in "contextual theology"). "From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to

³¹ M. A. C. Warren, introduction to John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963) 5–12, at 10.

the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Savior's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life." As faith seeks understanding in this way, the document says, a whole new interpretation of the biblical witness and the witness of the early theologians and the church's theological tradition will be developed. If this process is done well, misunderstandings of the faith and interpretations that ignore the wider tradition will be avoided.

Proclamation in Dialogue

Like the language and attitude of the council in general, *AG* is shot through with passages that call for mission to be lived out in solidarity and dialogue. The trinitarian rooting of mission suggests that mission is done not so much to save women and men from wickedness and depravity—although they are caught often in the “devil’s domain” and the “manifold malice of vice” (*AG* no. 9)—but in the overflowing love and life of a “bountiful God” (*AG* no. 11). *AG* no. 9 proclaims that “missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than a manifestation or epiphany of God’s will, and the fulfillment of that will in the world and in world history.” Proclamation and witness to the gospel offer to women and men in today’s world new, astounding knowledge that can reshape, re-color, and transform their lives.³² Salvation, in other words, is not so much a negative reality—being snatched from eternal punishment, from the hands, as it were, of an “angry God.” Rather, salvation is here conceived as the entry into a new way of being human, into a community that can offer fullness of life through relationship and celebration, into a way of life that finds the greatest fulfillment in service and sharing of the gospel with others.

Witness begins with solidarity. Christians in mission must identify themselves with those among whom they live. They need to know and appreciate the culture; they need to understand the national and religious traditions where they live, because in that way they will lay bare “the seeds of the Word which lie hidden in them” (*AG* no. 11). They treat the local people equally, “without distinction of race, social condition, or religion, and they should identify with the poor and suffering and “take part in the strivings of those peoples who are waging war on famine, ignorance, and disease and thereby struggling to better their way of life and to secure peace in the world” (*AG* no. 13).

³² For an important reflection on this, see Clemens Sedmak, “Mission as Transformation: Commemorating the Second Vatican Council,” The Thirteenth Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD Lecture on Mission and Culture, in *New Theology Review* 25.2 (March 2013) 35–55.

The gospel cannot be proclaimed indiscriminately, but “wherever God opens a door of speech,” it should be announced “with confidence and constancy.” In no uncertain words, the decree “strictly forbids” any kind of cheap proselytism (*AG* no. 13). It is perhaps said obliquely, but *AG* recognizes that there are places where the gospel cannot be openly preached, and where only a gradual, careful approach is appropriate (*AG* no. 6). In any case, missionaries need to be adequately trained—in the local language, in local customs and culture, but especially in respect for these (*AG* no. 26). The most famous speech at the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference was given by Indian churchman V. S. Azariah; it concluded with the words, “Give us FRIENDS!”³³ It is this attitude that is expressed over and over again in *AG*. To witness and preach effectively, cultivating relationships is fundamental.

MISSION, *AD GENTES*, AND TODAY’S MISSIONARY CHURCH

Exactly *where* mission is to be carried out is ambiguous in the texts and in the “event” of the council.³⁴ This is the case both in regard to mission in general and in particular to the council’s document that addresses mission. When the council speaks of mission, does it mean the basic task of the church wherever it finds itself? Or does it mean the work of “Christian” “sending” churches moving beyond borders and cultures—i.e., the “mission”? On the one hand we read that “the pilgrim Church is missionary by its very nature” (*AG* no. 2), that “the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God” (*AG* no. 35), that the church is a sacrament, a sign and instrument of unity in the world (*LG* no. 1), and—albeit in a more tentative way—that the church takes its existence from its mission to witness to and proclaim the reign of God (*LG* no. 5). On the other hand, the council distinguishes between missionary work as such and “pastoral activity exercised among the faithful (*AG* no. 6). *LG* no. 16 speaks of the need of the church painstakingly to promote “missionary work,” and the whole tenor of *AG*, especially after chapter 1, seems finally to refer to “foreign missions.” The decree still seems to have in its imagination the white “First World” missionary working in exotic lands and cultures. On the one hand mission can be read as *constitutive* of the church; on the other it can be read as a very important, even

³³ See Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009) 124.

³⁴ On the meaning of “event” in this context, see Joseph A. Komonchak, “Vatican II as ‘Event,’” in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* ed. David G. Schultenover (New York: Continuum, 2007) 24–51.

indispensable, activity, but one of very many activities carried out by women and men with a specific “missionary” vocation.

In today’s world, however, a half-century later, this ambiguity may no longer obtain. Today there is no Christian center. Every church exists in a “missionary situation.” Today there is only a missionary church, as the church expands rapidly, and yet often without adequate personnel resources, in lands formerly considered “missionary”; as members of those “missionary churches” migrate into lands where there exist what were formerly considered “sending churches”; as missionaries come from the “missionary churches” to care for those who have migrated there, or to evangelize their former evangelizers; as the church in the West finds itself in numerical decline, and recognizes a need to witness to and preach the gospel in new ways and with new urgency in pluralist and secularist societies. It is this missionary church that can revisit the doctrine of mission in the Vatican II documents with profit.

Revisiting missiology at Vatican II in the light of today’s universal missionary situation will point to the fact that there is no more dichotomy between every church’s missionary nature and its task of preaching the gospel in a way that requires dialogue, knowledge of and empathy for the concrete contexts in which women and men live, and skills of intercultural communication. The church is indeed “missionary by its very nature,” requiring missionary practice for its very existence. Without mission the church will cease to exist as church—both literally and theologically. Mission today is lived out among people of varying cultures, and/or of the world’s many religions, and/or people who do not believe or who have ceased to believe. Mission in every situation might well profit from the experience of traditional “cross-cultural” missionaries, for that is the situation in which every church today exists.³⁵ What was originally meant at Vatican II for certain kinds of ministers in certain kinds of churches now has relevance for all ministers and all churches. What was seen as basically irrelevant for some churches, and so was pushed to the side, is now amazingly relevant for all.

A Missionary Theology

In theology, this recognition of today’s missionary church calls for radical rethinking of theological methods and content in the light of its missionary task. Theology has to serve an evangelical purpose. It has to reflect on the faith with real attention to the particular customs and traditions, wisdom and learning, scientific knowledge, and artistic achievement,

³⁵ See Severino Dianich, “Evangelizzare: Dal Vaticano II alla problematica contemporanea,” *Ad gentes* 16.1 (2012) 77–87, at 82.

as *AG* no. 22 and *GS* no. 44 encourage missionaries and ministers to do. Iliia Delio, reflecting on doing theology in the context of contemporary physics and evolutionary thinking, insists that as a result of such thinking all of theology needs to be rethought.³⁶ The same goes for theology in the political, social, cultural, and artistic contexts in which the church witnesses to and preaches the gospel. Contextual theology in today's missionary church is no option. It is more than ever a "theological imperative."³⁷ In addition, because of the multicultural and intercultural nature of today's world, theology needs to be done, on the one hand, in a dialogue with individual contextual theologies, that is, in "global perspective."³⁸ On the other hand, in our highly interreligious world, theology has to be done, as Peter Phan has put it, "interreligiously," with a comparative method.³⁹ Of course, every effort of theologizing cannot include all these dimensions, but the context should dictate which methods and perspectives should be included.

Ecclesiology in particular needs to be conceived as a consistent *missionary* ecclesiology in order to give a theological foundation to today's missionary church. Some efforts have been made in this regard by members of the largely Protestant "Gospel and Our Culture Network," and Gaillardetz has offered an important volume from a Catholic perspective.⁴⁰ Work still needs to be done, however, in connecting ecclesiology even more closely with mission. Such an ecclesiology—working out the church's essential missionary nature according to *AG* no. 2—could, in a first move, begin with the trinitarian missions. Starting, however, with the Holy Spirit "already at work in the world before Christ was glorified"

³⁶ Iliia Delio, *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011) 32, u.a.

³⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) 3–15.

³⁸ Stephen Bevans, "A Theology for the Ephesian Moment," *Anvil* 27.2 (November 2011), <http://anviljournal.org/174>; The "Theology in Global Perspective" series, published by Orbis Books and edited by Peter Phan, is one attempt, with varied success, to think theologically in this way.

³⁹ Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004); Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1993); Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); Craig van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000); Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008)—this volume appears in Phan's "Theology in Global Perspective" series.

(*AG* no. 4) and present from the first nanosecond of creation, the missionary God sent the Son to take on flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. At his baptism, Jesus was anointed with this Spirit for mission and so preached, served, and witnessed to the reign of God, calling all who would listen to communion with “that fountain of love” (*AG* no. 2) that is overwhelming, ineffable Holy Mystery. Such witness and preaching led, sadly yet inexorably, to the cross, but his way of life was vindicated in his being raised from the dead, and the Spirit by which he was anointed is now lavished upon his disciples and their disciples after them. God’s mission, active from the first instant of creation, shared by Jesus the Christ, is now the mission of Jesus’ disciples. Sharing his mission is indeed constitutive of the church, which, like the Trinity, is a communion-in-mission (a more dynamic understanding of the quotation from Cyprian in *LG* no. 4).

In a second move, reflection could focus on the *communion* aspect of the church, still recognizing its essential missionary nature. This might be done, first, by focusing on the three major images cited at the end of chapter 2 of *LG* (no. 17), and giving them a distinct missionary interpretation. The church is the pilgrim people of God (*LG* nos. 48–51; *AG* no. 2), receiving its identity in its service of the reign of God and striving to live as its sacrament. The church is the Body of Christ, embodying and continuing Jesus’ mission of preaching, serving, and witnessing to God’s reign. And the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, called into being by that Spirit, challenged by the Spirit to cross new boundaries and to respond to new contexts, and, like a temple, being the place where God’s mystery is palpably present within the world. A second section reflecting on the church’s nature as a missionary communion might focus on the four traditional marks of the church, recognizing that each one is three-fold in the light of mission: the church *is* apostolic, one, catholic, and holy; it is called to *become* more fully what it is; and it is called to *make* all peoples servants of the gospel (apostolic), all peoples one, all peoples clear in their cultural distinctiveness and yet connected in communion, and all peoples conscious of their beloved, holy status in the eyes of God.

Finally a missionary ecclesiology in service of today’s missionary church would reflect on its structure as a communion-of-ministers-in-mission. This section takes as a starting point the fundamental equality and basic call to ministry and mission of all believers (*LG* nos. 10–12, 32; *AG* nos. 28, 35). Then it would develop a theology of the laity as rooted in the church’s mission (*LG* no. 33; *AA* no. 3; *AG* no. 21), and a theology of ordained ministry as having its chief duty the ordering of the entire church—depending on one’s level of responsibility, whether presbyteral, episcopal, or papal—in its faith, its worship, and its ministry. It would be in the context of church leadership for mission that a reflection could be made regarding the autonomy and universal responsibility of the local church at the

regional, diocesan, parochial, or small-community level. *AG*'s fresh approach to the local church in its third chapter (especially no. 19) would be an important source for this. Through their vows and in community life, religious serve the church by being radical signs of the church's commitment to the reign of God and unencumbered workers at the church's edges, challenging the church to new and creative forms of missionary engagement.

The "Age of Migration,"⁴¹ in which we live, challenges theology to reflect on mission and migration and develop a theology of migration. Some work in this area has been done, but much work remains.⁴² Already important connections have been made between migration as a way to understand better the pilgrim nature of the church and Christian life, and new and intriguing images of God such as pilgrim, refugee, migrant, and guest. Recognizing the dialogical nature of mission as prescribed in *AG*, mission is not so much directed *at* migrants as carried out *among* them. And realizing that every Christian has a ministerial and missionary call, an essential part of the church's missionary work among migrants is their empowerment as missionary subjects.

Other issues that might be taken up in a missionary theology are reflections on the meaning of salvation, a theological anthropology adequate to particular cultural contexts and in relationship to a more cosmic, less anthropocentric vision, the uniqueness of Christ in a pluralistic world of religions, the criteria by which a particular ethical or doctrinal expression might be judged adequate and orthodox, and the increasing importance of reconciliation and peacemaking. A missionary theology of the Trinity will be crucial for a solid ecclesiological and missiological foundation. A missionary theology will serve missionary practice.

Missionary Practice

Revisiting Vatican II on mission urges the church to engage in what might be called "prophetic dialogue."⁴³ Such a stance anchors all mission

⁴¹ See Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4th ed. (New York: Guilford, 2009).

⁴² See in particular Gaetano Parolin, *Chiesa postconciliare e migrazioni: Quale teologia per la missione con i migranti* (Rome: Gregorian University, 2010); Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese, eds., *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2008); Gioacchino Campese, "The Irruption of Migrants: Theology of Migration in the 21st Century," *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 3–32; Stephen Bevens, "Migration and Mission: Pastoral Challenges, Theological Insights," in *Theology and Migration in World Christianity*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Elaine Padilla (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) (forthcoming).

⁴³ Bevens and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*; the entire issue of *Missiology: An International Review* 41.1 (January 2013) is on prophetic dialogue, including

in deep listening, respectful attitudes toward the world (business, art, science, culture, current trends) in which the church witnesses reverence for the heritage of people's religions, readiness to learn from people's experiential wisdom, and sensitivity to those who do not or cannot believe. At the same time, however, as a result of such a dialogical posture, Christians humbly, yet clearly and confidently, witness to and proclaim the gospel—telling the marvelous story that “God is like Jesus,”⁴⁴ offering his perspectives on life and life's problems, embodying a future of human and cosmic harmony, demonstrating an alternative yet attractive way to live, denouncing any and all evil and injustice, and working toward a just society both within and outside the church. Any kind of missionary practice, therefore, should always be tempered with what John XXIII called the “medicine of mercy.”⁴⁵

In his recent book on the council's teaching in regard to the motive of missionary work, Ralph Martin argues that—particularly in terms of contemporary Western society but applying this to *ad gentes* evangelization as well—“while there were many sound reasons to emphasize the positive in the Church's relations with the modern world, it has also become clear that an adjustment in her pastoral strategy is needed.”⁴⁶ For Martin, this new strategy—which is actually a return to a previous strategy—emphasizes the sinfulness and corruption of women and men who do not believe in the gospel, very many of whom will most likely not be saved. Martin believes that such a strategy reaffirms the urgency of mission and will provide a more effective motive for mission than mere obedience to Christ's command and the enhancement of human and religious life. It is this strategy that he urges for the New Evangelization.

Much of what Martin argues is well taken. There has been, perhaps, a reading of Vatican II on mission that has glossed over human sinfulness, minimized the danger of the possibility of losing salvation, minimized the help of Christian faith, Christian community, and Christian sacraments in achieving salvation, and offered what Martin calls (referring to Karl Rahner, Richard McBrien, and Francis Sullivan) a “salvation optimism” that quickly slides down a slippery slope to a facile universalism.⁴⁷

Roger P. Schroeder's presidential address at the June 2012 annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology.

⁴⁴ Juan Luis Segundo, *Christ in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987) 22–26, quoted in Roger Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999) 116.

⁴⁵ John XXIII, “Opening Speech” 716.

⁴⁶ Martin, *Will Many Be Saved?* 195. Martin's extension of the context is seen, for example, on p. 208.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 54–55.

Nevertheless, Martin's caution does not seem to warrant a reversal of Vatican II's basic dialogical stance toward the world and basic pastoral strategy.⁴⁸ Perhaps rather than reversing such a strategy, a revisiting of Vatican II's missionary practice should be a renewal of efforts to concretize at every turn a practice of prophetic witness and proclamation that is rooted not in severe condemnations but in the medicine of mercy.⁴⁹ Thus revisiting Vatican II on mission will bring about a true New Evangelization in the Majority World, in an "Age of Migration," and in a world of the unchurched and secular unbelief.

We have already seen how Faggioli connects the council's liturgical renewal to mission, as indeed the council itself did.⁵⁰ Any kind of renewal of evangelization efforts in today's world surely must pay heed to the evangelizing power of liturgy and the challenge to cultural relevance proposed by *SC* no. 37. Ideally, a New Evangelization will make further efforts at liturgical inculturation not only in the countries of the Global North but also among migrant groups, contemporary Western congregations, youth, young adults, and other particular groups. Sadly, however, with the abandonment of the conciliar principle of decisions being made at a more local level, the liturgical movement has reached something of an impasse. Nevertheless liturgy as it is celebrated today presents all sorts of opportunities for more worthy celebrations, cultural adaptations within the parameters allowed, more beautiful and relevant music, more graceful presiding, prayers that reflect international and local concerns, greater lay participation, particularly by women, and better prepared, better informed, evangelically focused homilies. People are either attracted or repelled by liturgy. It is a missionary act.

GS no. 44 speaks about how "accommodated preaching" (we might say "inculturated" or "contextual" preaching) "ought to remain the law of all evangelization." This need not be confined to liturgical preaching or the homily. In a renewed practice of evangelization, *any* church communication needs to be attuned to the "signs of the times," the local culture, or broad cultural movements like contemporary movements in the United States toward social equality. It is not always a question of *agreeing* with what is going on—i.e., agreeing with current cultural values or social movements. However, a church that preaches the gospel needs to

⁴⁸ Gilles Routhier points out that official Vatican documents do not at all understand the New Evangelization as an adjustment of Vatican II's basic perspectives. See Routhier, *Un concilio per il XXI secolo: Il Vaticano II cinquant'anni dopo* (Milan: Vita et Pensiero, 2012) 39.

⁴⁹ See the review of Martin's work by Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37.2 (April 2013) (forthcoming).

⁵⁰ See Faggioli, *True Reform* 37–38.

have a deep respect for the opinions of people of apparent good will, and needs to teach its own, perhaps countercultural, position in ways that are clear and well argued, based on scientific and philosophical truth, and presented clearly and nonjudgmentally. Truth, *DH* says, “cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power” (no. 1). Mission eschews all “unworthy techniques” of preaching the gospel (see *AG* no. 13); real prophecy, however strong, is not violent.

And a missionary church should know when to keep silent. The council’s dialogical approach to mission is beautifully summed up in the intervention of the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization of (now Cardinal) Luis Antonio Tagle, archbishop of Manila. He called for an evangelization in humility, respect, and silence, saying in respect to the third: “The Church must discover the power of silence. Confronted with the sorrows, doubts and uncertainties of people, she cannot pretend to give easy solutions. In Jesus, silence becomes the way of attentive listening, compassion and prayer. It is the way to truth.”⁵¹ Perhaps the church in its official teachings and official pronouncements should indeed keep silent more than it does. A sense of humility and listening—essential to dialogue—might proclaim the gospel more clearly. This might in itself be a prophetic stance. As *AG* no. 6 wisely counsels, “The appropriate actions and tools must be brought to bear on any given circumstance or situation.” Perhaps, as the subtitle to Maryknoller John Sivalon’s recent book suggests, the missionary church today might profit from “the gift of uncertainty.”⁵²

The council, and especially *AG* no. 15, calls for the formation of Christian communities that are examples of the power of the gospel to transform lives. The evangelizing influence of such communities can hardly be exaggerated, because “people will always believe their eyes first.”⁵³ Communities in which Christians are seen to support one another, share deeply with one another, celebrate joyfully, challenge one another, console one another are truly what the great 20th-century missiologist Lesslie Newbigin called “a hermeneutic of the gospel.”⁵⁴ The formation of this

⁵¹ Thirteenth Synod of Bishops, October 7–28, 2012, on the New Evangelization, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/xx_plurilingue/b07_xx.html (unofficial translation).

⁵² John C. Sivalon, *God’s Mission and Postmodern Culture: The Gift of Uncertainty* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012).

⁵³ World Conference on Mission and Evangelization (San Antonio, Texas, 1989), “Mission in Christ’s Way: Your Will Be Done” no. 22, in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization*, vol. 1, *Basic Statements 1974–1991*, ed. James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992) 73–81, at 78.

⁵⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) 222–33.

kind of community should be a real priority for the church's leadership, particularly at the parish and small-community level. In his intervention at the 2012 Synod, Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, the Philippines, suggested that the New Evangelization calls for new saints—and that *we* must be those saints.⁵⁵ It is in the witness of true holiness, which is ultimately authentic, vibrant humanity found in individuals and pulsating in a community, that women and men will be attracted to ask the questions that can lead them to faith in Christ.

Something that has perhaps been lost in the years since the council has been the close tie between mission and ecumenism. Along with “missionary activity among the nations,” *AG* no. 6 mentions both pastoral work and “undertakings aimed at restoring unity among Christians” as “most closely connected with the missionary zeal of the Church.” As *UR* has said, the continuing divisions among Christians constitute a real scandal to people among whom Christians witness to and proclaim the gospel today. Doctrinal differences are real and in many cases fundamental. There still remain, however, many ways in which Christians can work together, especially in the areas of theological education, action for social and ecological justice, and reconciliation work. Praying together, as the council recommends, is also a witness to a more profound unity than appears on the surface. There needs to be a new ecumenism for the renewed evangelization that revisiting Vatican II requires.

Often one of the most prophetic actions Christians can take is to continue the practice of dialogue, especially in the face of the many religious tensions—in Nigeria, for example, or India, France, or the post-9/11 United States. As Hans Küng has constantly insisted, there can be no real peace without peace among the world's religions, and this peace is the hoped-for fruit of interreligious dialogue.⁵⁶ Whether it is the dialogue of life, of common action, of theological exchange, or of spiritual experience,⁵⁷ dialogue is a *sine qua non* of mission today. Often this will not be easy; often, as has been the case in several places in the world, the price of dialogue is martyrdom.⁵⁸ But openness and vulnerability are key aspects of mission that we discover when we visit Vatican II on

⁵⁵ Thirteenth Synod of Bishops.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 783.

⁵⁷ See Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Dialogue and Proclamation no. 42, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

⁵⁸ Perhaps the most famous recent example of this is the martyrdom of the Trappist monks in Tibhirine, Algeria, powerfully portrayed in the film *Of Gods*

mission, and key as well to a renewed vision of evangelization in the light of the council. Clemens Sedmak suggests that the church set up “intellectual base communities” in which “ethical issues (such as abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage) can be discussed in a climate of friendship. There is as yet little real encounter between Church members and representatives of positions that cannot be reconciled with the Church.”⁵⁹ In a similar way, Proposition 55 of the 2012 Synod of Bishops suggests that various churches and institutions open a kind of “Courtyard of the Gentiles” “where believers and non-believers can dialogue about fundamental themes.”⁶⁰ A missionary church in dialogue could not only be a teaching church; it could be a learning church as well.

Over and over again the council reminds us in so many words that the joys, the hopes, the griefs, and the anxieties of humanity—“especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” (*GS* no. 1; see also *AG* no. 12) are the same as those of Christians. If this was not clear enough, the 1971 Synod of Bishops made a direct link between preaching the gospel and working for justice.⁶¹ Although ecological concerns hardly appear in the Vatican II documents, today work for justice needs to be extended to the entire cosmos in ecological commitment, moving beyond the rather strong anthropocentrism of the council (e.g., *GS* nos. 9, 33). More than ever today, the church needs to work for justice and transparency within its own boundaries. How the church’s leadership has treated women in some cases, how it has gone about its task of preserving the faith from error, and how it has treated victims of sexual abuse have greatly hindered Christian credibility in the world today. On the other hand, the brave acknowledgments of guilt that the church has made at Vatican II in terms of its partial blame for the lack of Christian unity (*UR* no. 3) or, perhaps obliquely, anti-Semitism (*UR* no. 5), and the humble apologies made during the Jubilee Year of the millennium have been powerful proclamations of how the gospel claims Christian life. A new, renewed evangelization can in no way be reduced to witnessing to and working for justice, but it surely is the condition of the possibility for the believability of a church that preaches and lives the gospel with the new ardor, new methods, and new expression that the New Evangelization calls for.

and Men. See John Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine: Faith, Love, and Terror in Algeria* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2003). See also Jean-Jacques Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out: Pierre Claverie of Algeria* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007).

⁵⁹ Sedmak, “Mission as Transfiguration” 55.

⁶⁰ “Final List of Propositions of the Synod of Bishops,” Proposition no. 55, <http://www.zenit.org/article-35831?|=english>.

⁶¹ World Synod of Bishops 1971, *Justice in the World* no. 6, <http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/file/view/Catholic+Bishops+on+Justice+in+the+world+1971.pdf>.

CONCLUSION: MISSION AT THE CENTER

Revisiting mission at Vatican II, in its rather pervasive presence in the council's documents and in the decree dedicated to it specifically, can be a fruitful task, particularly in this time of seismic shifts in the world's Christian population. Such a shift calls the church in every part of the world to realize its essential missionary nature in a way not completely clear at the council itself. Nevertheless, the council gives us in its missionary emphases and missionary document—to borrow the words of John Paul II—a “sure compass by which to take our bearings”⁶² in this extraordinary time of World Christianity, great migrations, and seemingly inevitable secularism and unbelief. That compass points in the direction of the church's duty to witness to and preach the gospel not only because of Christ's command, but especially because Christians are caught up in that overflowing fountain of the triune God's love and mercy toward the world. At the same time, that compass calls the missionary church to preach and witness in a way that—in the words of Paul VI at the end of the council—feels the need “to know, to approach, to understand, to penetrate, to serve . . . the surrounding society, and to comprehend it, almost to pursue it in its rapid and continuous change.”⁶³ Fifty years after the council, this is a reliable compass indeed.

⁶² John Paul II, apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (January 6, 2001) no. 57, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html.

⁶³ Paul VI, *Discorso di chiusura del concilio ecumenico Vaticano II*, http://www.unavox.it/doc25_PVI_chiusura.htm (my translation).