

INTERCULTURAL FORMATION FOR MISSION

Missio Ad et Inter Gentes

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1.

INTRODUCTION

Much of what follows revolves around play with the Latin words *ad* and *inter gentes* and what that difference in images may mean in regard to how the next generation of Catholic missionaries is formed. In all that follows, I am presuming that formation for mission in a globalizing world aims at intercultural competence, for never in history has the multicultural nature of the world made it so necessary for the ministers of the gospel to function in intercultural settings. In all that follows, the background is conviction that Pope John Paul II is correct in saying that proclamation and witness to Jesus the Christ is the defining element in mission¹

In the Catholic tradition of proclaiming and living the gospel, religious communities add to the richness of the church and have the potential to put a vital face on the church's internal and *ad extra* missionary life by creatively and dynamically living out their founding charisms in new circumstances. What we are together stumbling our way toward is an understanding of how one does this in a world where no culture – including no *ecclesial culture* – holds legitimate title to universal status. Given that fact, it becomes ever more important that we take our bearings on a solidly biblical theology of mission and anchor it in the core of Catholic theology.

In my own pilgrimage on the nature of mission and formation for mission four steps were

necessary.

1. seeing the profound interrelationship between the Old and New Testaments and how deeply Jewish the gospel of Paul is.²
2. realizing that the “gospel” is the realization of the promise wherein Jesus the Messiah concretizes the promise of God to Abraham (Genesis 12: 1-3) to create a people to bring God’s saving justice into a world distorted by sin,
3. deepening insight (through interchange with Edward Schroeder, Lutheran theologian and late-life missiologist) into the fact that the gospel is not a “new law of love” but a “promise” that God offers “forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life” because of Christ, not because of our works; and then that in, the words of Zechariah, speaking of John the Baptist, God’s people will be given “knowledge of salvation . . . by the forgiveness of their sins” (Luke 2: 77);
4. grasping that Christian mission is our cooperation with God in making the world “right,” living in hope of the final revelation of God’s love and justice; according to Psalm 33: 5, where what God loves is “righteousness and justice”; and “the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.”

In that context, the words “justice,” “forgive” and “sin” require a great deal of study, but the most basic step occurs when one realizes that “sin” in the New Testament and the Septuagint comes from the word *hamartia*, the Septuagint’s translation of several Hebrew words — *hata*, *pasa*, and *’awon*. Sin is that which separates us from God and a just relationship with our fellow human beings. Those who “sin” (the verb form is *hamartanein*) wander about not knowing the way, confused about where they are going. They go from misfortune to misfortune because they are in this state of darkness, and they harm others and themselves because, in this state, they believe their own rights and needs – imagined and real – take precedence over others. Social sin is the result of being “curved in upon oneself” (St. Augustine) writ large. In the death of Jesus at the hands of men who embody this state of *hamartia*, God’s Son, who has done no evil and who has devoted his life to preaching the Way of God’s promises to those who will embrace God’s way of righteousness (*sedaqah*) and right judgment (*mishpat*), is killed.

Forgiveness (*aphienai*) of sin is the remission of the debt we owe God and our fellow human

beings but in the context of the entire New Testament, it is less the forgiveness of an external debt (even if the language of the New Testament is forensic — see, for example, Matthew 9: 6 and Romans 2-4) — than empowerment through embracing Christ in the Spirit to put the past behind and “lead a life worthy of the calling” to which we are summoned (Ephesians 4: 1).

What is the point of this excursion into the thicket of gospel and law, promise and forgiveness? The simple answer is this. In a world of *missio*, the missionary is called to make manifest God’s promises in Israel and their realization in Jesus and the Spirit. Accepting the gospel of the of Jesus as the Messiah-Christ releases the debts and burdens piled up in self- and group-centeredness and frees disciples to entrust ourselves to Christ as Way, Truth, and Life. The prime mission of all led into this Way by the Spirit is to live in ways that make this visible and to be vehicles through whom is the Spirit imparts this dynamic truth *ad omnes gentes* (“to all peoples”).

At a second level, insights from two scholar-practitioners (who between them have spent more than fifty years trying to help nurture “missional” congregations among a variety of Protestant, Anabaptist, and Anglican churches around the world) offered me several basic insights. One of those men, Pat Keifert, begins his most recent book noting that the temptation of a consultant on how to nurture a missional spirit is to say that she would not want to start from where that church now is. That, says, Keifert, is a mistake. Instead, he invites a congregation, — and I apply that word to the religious and apostolic life congregations who are members of SEDOS —

to put your own X on the map, not only because it makes sense to start where you are, but because . . . God provides all the gifts necessary for the future that God prefers and promises each local church. Unfortunately, most local churches either don’t believe this or aren’t interested, or don’t know how to attend to those gifts; they fail to engage in the spiritual discernment of God’s preferred and promised future.

Be that as it may, each journey begins where you are, not where you should be or where the ideal church is or should be. The journey begins with “We are here now.” So, where are we?”³

One answer to that question is provided by Keifert’s colleague, Alan Roxburgh. We are in an age where one group resolutely believes we can return to the past. A second (“liminals”) has experienced the inability of past methods to meet to the needs of the new missional era. But

aware of the many treasures of tradition, they try to bring their church along. A third (“emergents”) abandon older church structures and try to invent new ways of being missional Christians in the world.⁴ Catholics, though, don’t become “emergents.” Instead – as we see dramatically illustrated in Latin America today – they leave a church unable to meet their needs and often embrace other Christian paths. SEDOS members, I believe, tend to be Roxburgh’s “liminals” as they struggle to form members for mission in a multicultural world in which the viability of the centralized “Constantinian” model of governance is called into serious question.

In what follows, I reflect on insights I have gained from several Asian Theologians. In particular, my thoughts revolve around what these insights may mean for the members of SEDOS, especially for congregations of men and women (1) whose *raison d'être* has been defined as *missio ad gentes* and (2) whose life ways and structures were formed in an era when that mission went in a North-South direction in which the North was viewed as the actor and the South as a recipient. The title of my paper, of course, signals that I think today’s missional era is one in which *missio inter gentes* is increasingly the paradigm within which *missio ad gentes* is carried on.

2.

**WHAT IS MISSIO INTER GENTES?
AND WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?**

A number of matters I had been pondering on the future of mission in our new ecumenical climate came together in a Eureka moment in June 2001, when I was invited to respond to a speech by Father Michael Amaladoss, SJ, at a meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.⁵ I observed that, without denying the validity of *missio ad gentes* (“mission ‘to’ the nations” — that is, *to* followers of other religious traditions), Michael put the accent on a particularly Asian dimension of mission in our day. Although he did not use the term in his address, my response characterized the evolution as a move toward *missio inter gentes* (“mission ‘among’ the nations”). By this I mean that a plethora of concrete realities leads us to a situation in which mission outside the circle of believers will become mission *among* followers of other religious traditions who are one’s neighbors, friends, and fellow countrymen.⁶ This reflects the reality that mission in the sense that Pope John Paul II so clearly defines it in *Redemptoris Missio* (§ 44) is shifting from activities of foreigners and cross-cultural missionaries to an activity carried on among one’s neighbors. And when foreigners engage in mission, they will be invited by local churches and assisting local ministers of the gospel. In the context of SEDOS, member congregations are made up of men and women who: (1) do missionary work among other peoples far from their countries and cultures of origin; (2) labor among people of other faiths that include their neighbors and fellow citizens within their own cultures; (3) live in religious communities with persons of diverse cultural backgrounds in both the previous two situations; and (4) carry on primarily pastoral work among their fellow Catholics in each of the three previous situations. Permutations and combinations of these situations can be spun out almost endlessly. But what remains a constant is that in all of them, one is increasingly called upon to carry on missionary life in an *intercultural* situation. What I want to suggest is that our view of *missio ad gentes* changes when one thinks of oneself doing it as *missio inter gentes*. To help unpack what I mean by that we move now to examine the thought of four Asian missiologists whose work may help us not just grapple with but appropriate a vision of mission and strategies for embodying that vision.

Jonathan Y. Tan

Professor Jonathan Tan of Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, a lawyer and Catholic theologian, has fleshed out the meaning of *missio inter gentes* in two impressive articles.⁷ For Tan, the distinction between *missio ad* and *inter gentes* is not between an outmoded and bad model, on the one hand, or modern and good model, on the other hand. Rather, what this Malay of Chinese ethnic extraction, who was first trained as a lawyer in Singapore and who later obtained a PhD in theology at Catholic University of America under Peter Phan, is driving at is something quite different. Although sensitive to the accusation that Christianity is a Western religion and that Christian mission was a colonial imposition, for him that is not the whole story.

It is important to stress Tan's *experience*. Addressing the American Society of Missiology several years ago, he recounted how he himself was fired with enthusiasm for proclaiming the gospel and did so intentionally and explicitly as a young man. When he took stock of his efforts after several years of zealous witness, he realized that his mother had brought more people to faith by her life of prayer, fidelity, neighborliness, and service in the community. Reflecting further, he realized that Malaysia is a country in which many tribal people follow traditional religions, Indian migrants follow their traditions, ethnic Chinese follow various strands of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and Christians from every ethnic group, members of numerous denominations, live side by side with a Muslim majority that is highly influenced by revival movements imported from Western Asia. An assertive evangelistic posture is simply impossible and counterproductive, says Tan.

To a large extent, this situation is duplicated throughout Asia. Asian Christians, except for Filipinos, live as minorities in the midst of immense cultural and religious diversity. As we consider what *missio inter gentes* means practically and operationally, it is important, above all, to realize that the ethnicity and national identities are, ironically, becoming more important even as globalization proceeds apace. Tan's two articles on *missio inter gentes* in *Vidyajyoti* are masterpieces of careful analysis. Even so, critics have said that he is downplaying the need for mission as proclamation. I think that the critics miss Tan's sense that proclamation needs to be carried out in manners adapted to local contexts and belief that over the long haul methods of mission that resemble the "hard sell" of marketers will produce scant results.

The question is, I believe, What sort of message needs to be shaped to make it more readily understandable in Asia? Hwa Yung, the Methodist bishop of Malaysia, has written a book that puts the question succinctly when he asks whether Asian Christian theology and identity more nearly resemble a mango or a banana.⁸ The mango, he notes, is an indisputably Asian fruit, green before it matures. Depending on the variety of mango and growing conditions, it ripens to shades in the yellow range. The fruit beneath the skin, however, is yellow through and through. The banana's origins are uncertain, but when it ripens, the green changes to yellow, while the fruit is always white. Surveying Asian theology and attempts at Asian theologizing, Hwa Yung sees them vitiated by tendencies to borrow from the progressive Western social agenda, advocating liberation and overthrowing structures of domination imposed by colonialism and globalization, as if that were the whole gospel. The ability of such theology to reach into Asian hearts and resonate with their deepest religious impulses is compromised. While such theologies dissociate Christianity from Western political hegemony, a question arises. Although they appear yellow on the surface, have they really sunk deep roots into Asian religious traditions? Is Christian theology in Asia, in other words, more like a mango or a banana? Hwa Yung concludes his book with the observation that Asian Christian identity is not yet clear, but he is clear also in saying, "What we need are more theological 'mangos' and not 'bananas' " (Hwa Yung, p. 241).

Jonathan Tan is trying to produce mangos in a brilliant article demonstrating that the symbol and reality of the Crucified Christ are vitally important for Asia and translatable into Asian thought forms.⁹ I am not qualified to judge the adequacy of detailed exegetical work of Tan on Confucian and Taoist texts. What becomes indisputably clear is that the resources of Asian philosophy for articulating the deepest insights and paradoxes of Christ's revelation of God should not be doubted. Moreover, Tan's work shows that the death and resurrection of Jesus and the salvation prefigured and accomplished in them can be expressed in Confucian categories and that Asian soteriology need not be expressed solely in terms of socio-political liberation. Rather than bifurcating soteriology into transcendent and immanent (socio-political) dimensions, Tan shows that the Crucified Sage embodies the total Way of discerning and manifesting what the Sage has learned from God for all humanity. Jesus, the crucified and risen sage, according to Tan, in the climax of his life in his death and resurrection, proclaims and makes manifest the

“Way of the Lord of heaven . . . the Reign of God to all peoples.”¹⁰

In regard to formation for mission, Tan’s work shows the importance of offering those candidates who are capable of advanced studies the opportunity to enter deeply both into the religious and philosophical texts of Asia and those of the Christian tradition. The religious congregation that lacks a critical mass of members who can help their fellow religious understand and appreciate the depths of other people’s original religion is a congregation whose insertion into other cultural contexts runs the risk of superficiality.

Amos Yong

Amos Yong of Regent University, Virginia Beach, Virginia describes himself as a “Chinese-Malaysian-born, American-educated, systematic-and-constructive-theologian.” In an address to the American Society of Missiology in June 2006, Yong addressed one of the key problems facing Christianity in an era when recognition of religious plurality and tolerance are seen to be essential.¹¹ How, he asks, does one reconcile that tolerance with the standard interpretation of the Luke-Acts narratives in which one reads words like “there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12)? Yong’s speech examines how Pentecostals should respond to the missionary call of the Spirit, but his splendid exegesis has lessons for the broader Christian world. It is also an example of the depths of both Evangelical and Pentecostal theology, a depth many Catholics have never encountered.

Yong sees need for recovering forgotten universal horizons of Luke-Acts wherein the Holy Spirit is portrayed as “poured out on all flesh” (Acts 2: 17). He notes that “this does not mean that entire religious traditions are to be uncritically accepted or that every aspect of any particular religion is divinely sanctioned.”¹² But one finds in the Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and elsewhere an image of Jesus ready to enjoy the hospitality of non-Jews and a Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts is active in the world, the Holy Spirit whose behavior is manifested in the story of Cornelius (Acts 10) as forcing Peter to recognize God’s saving presence outside Jewish communities.

At risk of moving to summarize Yong’s conclusions without giving a sense of the careful

attention he gives to the Biblical texts, I refer to his analysis of Acts 10, where it is precisely through the relationship of those “inside” and “outside” the faith that leads to “the changed lives of both the missionized and the missionary” and then to the assertion, “that it is the religious other who shows the Jews how to embody God’s love for the neighbor.” For Yong, this implies “that Christians can learn from religious others and that God might choose to reveal Godself through religious others in ways that we might not expect” (Yong p. 60).

The religiously “other,” in essence, is not a mere object of efforts to convert but a person who can be the guest and friend of the Christian and who can extend friendship and hospitality to the Christian. In other words, in the full gospel sense of the word, those outside the family of faith are neighbors. One of the legacies of the traditional way of reading Luke-Acts is to see the other solely as someone to be converted. Yong moves, although he does not use the term *missio inter gentes*, toward an idea of Christian mission exercised as one would among one’s neighbors. Speaking explicitly of his fellow Pentecostals and Evangelicals, he has, I believe, some wisdom for Catholics in this present age:

Whereas conservative evangelical and fundamentalist theologies of exclusivism focus on proclamation, apologetics, and conversion, and whereas liberal theologies of pluralism emphasize socio-political activism, the pneumatological theology I am recommending requires that we discern the best approach among the many different situations we might encounter (p. 65).

I submit, Pentecostals and all Christians can and should bear witness to Jesus the Christ in word and in deed, while listening to, observing, and receiving from the hospitality shown them by those in other faiths. The result may be either mutual transformation of an unexpected kind, perhaps akin to the transformation experienced by Peter as a result of his encounter with Cornelius, or perhaps even our very salvation, such as described in the parable of one whose life was received as a gift through the hands of the good Samaritan (p. 66).

In terms of a formation of young religious for mission in today’s context, at least this much needs to be said. All need face-to-face experiences with persons of other faiths in relations marked by friendship and neighborliness. Both our formation and work communities need to be places where non-Christians feel welcome as friends and neighbors. The SEDOS conference theme speaks of intercultural formation for *missio ad gentes*. A solid part of all initial and ongoing formation for such *missio ad gentes* must involve living in situations where interreligious interchange takes place.

Vinoth Ramachandra

Our third figure is one of the best missiologists I know anywhere in the world today, Vinoth Ramachandra. Trained as a nuclear physicist in Britain, Ramachandra, a Sri Lankan, came to a deepening of faith and began a life-altering change that led eventually to his return to Sri Lanka becoming the regional secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.¹³ He is based in Colombo but travels widely.

In an incisive essay in a book from a conference of the British and Irish Association of Mission Studies, Ramachandra shows himself aware that imperialism and colonialism sought to alienate those they dominated by devaluing the original culture and religion of the colonized.¹⁴ He does not deny that studies on the part of the colonizers aimed at gaining “... ‘knowledge’ about non-Europeans was part of the process of maintaining power over them” (p. 124). But neither is Ramachandra blind to the fact that Christianity embodies an ideal of equality that subverts and delegitimizes all hierarchical structures (pp. 133-40) and that its accent on the worth of the individual and the importance of the personal means its social message goes far deeper than

a secular liberal agenda that can only see people as ‘victims’ of evil systems (or as ‘sinned against’ and never as ‘sinners’ except in the sense of passivity in the face of structural evil) ... [that needs] to be challenged to recover a biblical realism about our own responsible agency as well as our endless capacities for self-deception and self-destruction (p. 138).

It should be noted that this case is illustrated in rich historical detail by Lamin Sanneh in his study of how and why Christianity began to flourish in West Africa when freed slaves who had followed a circuitous route from the American South to Nova Scotia, to England came back to Africa as missionaries. They brought a gospel that had nurtured resistance on the part of slaves to their domination, a resistance that intensified when they realized the Bible subverted the rationalization of the slaveholders.¹⁵ In turn, one way to understand the life work of the eminent Edinburgh historian Andrew F. Walls is to see it revolving around the notion that one of the greatest accomplishments of mission and missionary societies is the fortunate “subversion” both of the “sending” church and the colonial enterprise.¹⁶

Ramachandra asks, Who speaks for the poor and oppressed? And he notes that many of those

who put themselves forward to do so also espouse a Western “progressive” agenda on issues such as same-sex partnerships, abortion rights, and the equal value of all religious worldviews (p. 142). I could spend the rest of my talk unpacking other dimensions of Ramachandra’s paper. I will refrain from that however and say only that he exemplifies an approach that has confidence that the Bible witnesses to a living Jesus, who is the Christ of the entire universe. The pattern of God’s full immersion in human life in Jesus and the attempt to make Israel aware of and respond to the paradoxes of God’s subtle presence and reign led the unjust — dramatically represented by the leaders of Rome and the leaders of Israel — to turn against Jesus when he began to develop a large popular following. The next chapter in his life entails an unjust condemnation of Jesus, so that neither the rule of Rome nor the patterns of privilege enjoyed by the priestly Sanhedrin would be disturbed. But the crucifixion is only the first event of a three-part paschal drama. It is followed by the resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit, which in its turn becomes the foundation of the church’s *missio ad omnes gentes*.

A section commenting on the liberation promised in Luke 4: 16-30 in a book co-authored by Ramachandra with Howard Peskett shows their contention that the

biblical diagnosis of human sin gives us unique insights into the nature of human conflict. Trapped in self-centeredness, we tend to see others as competitors to be feared, as means to further our own ends, or as threats to our well-being. We have an innate bias towards defending and advancing our own interests. We always tend to speak of the wrongs we have suffered at the hands of others, but rarely of the wrongs we have done to others. This estrangement often turns inwards, so that we are strangers to ourselves, not understanding our motives and passions, let alone the true ends for which we exist.¹⁷

One of Ramachandra’s greatest challenges to international religious congregations is the need for members of congregations to be immersed in the socio-religious context of the peoples among whom they live and to be in dialogue with a concrete people’s grasp of transcendence and search for liberation. There is, I fear, a tendency still to think that the best way to train members of a religious institute is to send them abroad for studies. The danger in that, Ramachandra constantly reminds us, is that persons so formed can import foreign analyses and methods and propagate them as the means to solve local problems. Methods of first and ongoing formation must be found, however, to insure that work is grounded in the cultural soil of a given people while also being carried on with awareness that all cultures change and that globalization is

bringing about dislocations everywhere.

Moonjang Lee

My fourth Asian theologian, Moonjang Lee, is Korean. He has degrees from institutions in Korea, the United States, and Britain. He has taught in Germany, Scotland, Korea, Singapore, and the US. I first met Moonjang at a seminar on studies of world Christianity arranged by Andrew Walls at Princeton Theological Seminary. The central insight of his paper that day — “On the Asianization of Theology and Theological Education” — will be the focus of this section. I believe it ties together what each of the previous three theologians has said and focuses it on our topic, educating missionaries in our age.

Lee’s paper has gone through several revisions and will soon be published in *The Journal of African Christian Thought*. I have his permission to share his ideas with you, but I will not quote him directly. Lee sets the context of his thinking as one in which Christianity is a “Post-Western” religion and one in which there is no identifiable Christian center. In every major continental area, Christians struggle to articulate what it means to be part of the world Christian movement. They also struggle to articulate what it means to be a follower of Jesus in their local contexts, be those continentally, nationally, sub-nationally, ethnically, or culturally defined.

For Lee Asians seek to make Christianity an Asianized faith rooted in Asian life ways and culture. For him, however, one of the problems is that the very means of reflection and theologizing employed to accomplish this are themselves Western. Indeed, despite giving notional assent to creating Asian (and for that matter, African, Latin or North American, Oceanic, or European) theologies, the methods employed borrow far more from atomizing, analytic, deconstructing Western ways of reflection on historical, sociological, and textual data than from specifically *Christian* ways of reflecting on faith. Asian students, he notes, come to seminaries to seek wisdom but find that the themes being discussed are alien to the questions they have. A great gap yawns between the desire to *know* Christian truth and the way academic institutions function — often as if there were not an overarching Truth embodied in the Christ who is meant to become the novice’s living way and very lifeblood.

As Lee presented his ideas that afternoon, it began to dawn on me that in Western Catholic tradition, we once practiced what he was terming an Asian “religious” way of studying. It was done in monasteries where psalms were chanted, daily chapters unfolded the scriptures in the light of the feast of the season, and formal study was also *lectio divina*. For Lee, the goal of theological studies is something Bernard of Clairvaux would have recognized and applauded, a threefold way of:

1. embodying truth
2. attaining spiritual awakening, and
3. self-transformation

What the Asian student formed in Northeast Asia under the influence of Taoist, Confucianists, and Buddhist thought seeks — consciously or unconsciously — is akin: (a) to learning the Tao (Way) of Jesus revealed within the heart; (b) being enlightened as to the true nature of the self, the human community, and nature and their true end; and finally (c) be introduced to a path of self-transformation that will enable one to live ever more authentically as a Christian human being.

The importance of these insights from Lee can hardly be overstressed. *Are our theological education and formation centers initiating students into the total Way of Jesus. Or – especially in the case of programs for students bound for ordination – are study and formation programs a bundle of compromises patched together to satisfy the guilds their professors belong to (i.e., scripture, ethics, history, dogmatics and systematics)? Are training programs for sisters, brothers, and priests equipping them for a life of prayer and continual reflection both on their Christian faith and the reality of their people? Or are these programs, despite so many attempts at overseas training programs and the like, a form of testing ground that candidates must pass in order to be admitted to membership?*

3.

FORMATION FOR MISSION AD ET INTER GENTES IN OUR DAY

Mission As “Art” and the Need for *Poiēsis*

The first practical observation I want to make is that work in mission is an art calling for *poiēsis* (Greek for the *art* of fashioning something beautiful from everyday realities, whence “poetry”) much more than it is the unfolding of principles. The same is true for creating the kind of communities that carry on the actual work of mission, and equally so for the initial formation of men and women for mission. Most of all, the judgment that underlies everything that follows is this: every missionary community’s ongoing life must be a continual circle of observing, judging, and acting in concrete contexts in the attempt to fashion something beautiful out of the social realities in which the missionary community lives. In that context, no community’s initial formation can equip a man or woman at the age of twenty-five or thirty to do what he or she will be doing at the age of fifty or sixty-five. The art of formation, I want to suggest, is primarily *poiēsis* — introducing the novice to the art of fashioning environments that aid missionaries in inserting themselves creatively, intelligently and vitally into the context in which they live work. And if the work communities to which missionaries are assigned do not continue the practice of seeing and seeing anew, reflecting continually, and fashioning fresh approaches, then they are failing in the task of ongoing formation. That formation can never be accomplished with an occasional seminar or annual retreat.

Because doctrines and theology are framed in discursive language, many are prone to think that Christian life is a matter of embodying the principles that doctrines enshrine. After Vatican II, in fact, we took our cues on renewal from ever shifting *ideas* about the Christian project. Given the Western preoccupation with true knowledge as proven ideas and theory (*theories*), on the one hand, and application of principles in practice (*praxis*), this is probably inevitable. Moreover, most religious communities and societies of apostolic life were founded in a period when organizations were judged by the efficiency with which they put ideas into practice. Some think themselves successful to the extent that they are frequently mentioned in the press and are clearly and favorably “branded” in the public eye.

If we shift to realizing that theology and practical Christian living (including missionary life) are much more an act of *poiēsis* than an application of principles or having a good public relations or “branding” profile, everything changes. Christian life, I want to suggest, brings into existence a Christic dynamic out of the material of our lives in the way the artist, the poet, or the

craftsperson brings a work of art into reality. The fundamental Christian ethic is to make good things happen that would not happen if the disciple of Christ were not there. What we are about in initial formation for mission, then, is finding a way in which to help the person who presents himself or herself for membership experience the kind of study, discipline, and creativity that brings into existence a Christian person who creatively reflects the missional charism of the community and who chooses to commit one's entire being to that task. Ongoing formation refines that dynamic and equips the missionary to meet new demands and situations.

The Global Missionary Context

Moving further, the art of forming missionaries for intercultural ministries, I want to suggest, is not the art of forming men and women for routine pastoral ministries, but helping men and women who are led by the Holy Spirit to join a concrete group of disciples and become competent in intercultural settings. One might fairly object, "That's good theory, but what about concrete practice." In recent months, as I have spent a good deal of time working on the English translation of a biography of Pierre Claverie, O.P., the martyred bishop of Oran, by Jean-Jacques Pérennès, also a Dominican, it became evident to me that Claverie is the quintessential missionary of the twentieth century and may serve as a model for what missionary formation in our era needs to become.¹⁸ A brief reference to Claverie's life may make my theory more practical.

In the abundant use that Father Pérennès makes of Claverie's letters to his family and personal papers, one sees a man who was deeply affected by his novitiate and theological training at le Saulchoir. Born a *pied-noir*, he had lived his early life in the colonial bubble of French Algeria as if Arab-Muslim Algeria did not exist. The Dominican novitiate was a transformative event for Claverie. His intercultural breakthrough came when he did his compulsory military service in Algeria after having become a Dominican. Later assigned by his superiors to work in Algeria, he plunged into studies of Arabic and the Quran. As the years went by, he went deeper and deeper into the paradox of the revelation of God in the Crucified One, and realized that the role of his tiny Catholic flock in Oran was not to witness to the glories of Catholicism but to incarnate and bear witness to Jesus as a tiny minority in a Muslim sea.

As the situation in Algeria worsens, you see Claverie becoming ever more deeply a friar preacher helping a flock that numbered more and more martyrs understand this dimension of Christian life and their mission in that context. A man with many Muslim friends, he saw the rise of “Islamism” as a deformation of Quranic teaching that he understood more deeply than the zealots. In his writing, speaking, and pastoral leadership, he was a man inserted totally into the Algerian reality, all the while realizing profoundly that he was an Algerian only, as the French subtitle catches it in words difficult to translate into English, *par alliance* – in a form of covenant relationship with Algerian culture and people. In the end, having led his flock and much of Algeria in absorbing the shock of two religious sisters who were killed in September 1995, the abduction of the seven Trappist monks of Tibhirine in late March 1996, and the discovery of their severed heads on 31 May 1996, he and his young Muslim driver were killed on 1 August 1996. Three days earlier he had written:

The death of these monks who were our brothers and friends for so long wounded us once more, but strengthened our ties with the thousands of Algerians who are sick of violence and eager for peace. Their silent message has resounded in the hearts of millions throughout the world. We are remaining here out of fidelity to the cry of love and reconciliation that the prior of the community left in the spiritual testament in which he clearly foresaw his own death. I [Claverie] am taking precautions, and I have the protection of the security forces, but it is God who remains the master of the hour of death, and only he can give meaning to our life and to our death. Everything else is just a smokescreen.¹⁹

One sees in the life and death of Claverie the formation of a missionary in its two essential dimensions. *First*, having gotten to know Dominicans in his early life, when his own conversion took place, he felt an attraction to their way of life. He was not recruited by advertisements offering him a fulfilling life. In an era before the Council, as a boy, he encountered the vitality of French Dominican life in Algiers and later both in the novitiate and at le Saulchoir, the latter without doubt one of the world’s premier theological centers. He and the order took each other’s measure and each liked what it saw. When he was offered the chance to work in Algeria, he took on that assignment as a way of living out the charism of the order. He realized he needed to master contemporary Arabic, the Quran, and modern Algerian writing and literature if he was to live a life fully inserted in the reality of the Maghreb. The Dominicans gave him the opportunity to do so. He took up that opportunity in a way that led to him not just getting by but so that native Arabic-speakers were deeply impressed.

At a second level, Claverie was formed by insertion into the life of the church in Algeria, but also by his deep empathy for the life of Islamic Algeria in all its vicissitudes. He had a gift for friendship and he made friends. I don't know that he knew the word "interculturality," but he modeled its reality and by entering deeply into community he became an intercultural missionary. He once joked that he had heard it said that the only way to leave the Dominicans after solemn vows was to get married or to become a bishop. He became a bishop, but his letters show that he felt himself ever more deeply a preaching friar for whom life in community with regular prayer was important. *My point?* His formation for mission was never finished. He engaged in serious study, prolonged study, study that lasted throughout a lifetime. But it was not mere academic study. It was reflection on his intercultural missionary reality. The community he lived in even after becoming a bishop made that possible. It was the warp and woof of everyday life. Claverie may have been lucky to have been a bishop in a church of only a thousand or so Catholics and to be part of a larger community made up not just of Dominicans but of men and women of other congregations and laity with whom he kept reflecting and growing, he was able to concentrate on essentials and not be buried in the administrative minutiae that absorbs so many religious.

Missionary congregations that become so overwhelmed by practical pastoral-missionary work are not places where prayer, continued study takes place. If I may use the Latin word, *otium* (time to devote oneself to things other than work) is in too short supply in such congregations. Conversation, study, reading — including conversations about "secular" matters and reading in the literature, culture, and politics of the region in the vernacular of the region — be it in Arabic, Urdu, Mandarin or Twi — are an essential dimension for growth in missionary life. It is hard to imagine how a missionary moving in and out of a country in a two or three-year cycle of short-term mission can master such languages. Can he or she be anything but an ecclesiastical type of United Nations or foreign office civil servant whose primary reference remains the goals of the sending organization and not a local people?

As free associations of faithful, missionary communities should not get trapped in maintenance. Let me say quickly that the border between pastoral maintenance and missionary apostolates is

not easy to define. Moreover, I am not talking about uprooting, for example, a seventy-seven year old priest or sister who went to Zambia in 1950 and sending them to an inner city mission in Taipei. They have the right to remain as a pastor or nurse as long as their people want them and no one should make them think they are less a member of the congregation for it. I am talking about how one forms new Zambian, Italian, Chilean or American members, male and female, and to what kind of missions one sends them in places as diverse as Michigan, Uzbekistan, or Stuttgart.

In different ways, the central pastoral crisis today in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, Australasia, and Africa is identical. How does the church carry on pastoral care of people who have already become Catholics? And by that I mean a pastoral care that successfully nurtures faith, helps it mature, and creates local congregations with missional outlooks in the neighborhoods they are situated. And in that context, how do missionary congregations serve local churches without getting bogged down in maintenance and while living in ways that stretch these churches beyond their comfort zones?

Above all, how can missionary religious challenge local churches and the church's central administration to face up to the dire crisis we face in pastoral care virtually everywhere? The ageing of the clergy in Europe and North America and the virtual disappearance of vocations to orders of priests, sisters, and brothers are well known. In Oceania, and Africa, candidates for traditional priestly and religious life vocations abound, but they are insufficient to provide the kind of formation necessary to the laity, and in many places the church witnesses wholesale departures of Catholics who flock to African Initiated Churches, and various forms of Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism. In Latin America the inability to take care of the millions who want to be Catholic at a deeper level leads to wholesale departures to Protestant churches. After a talk I gave at a Protestant mission training center several years ago, a doctoral candidate there, a man with twelve years experience in Evangelical churches in Central America and Mexico, made an observation and asked a question:

I started three different churches in my years there. On beginning each mission, I resolved to work only among those who were not active Catholics. I did not want to be a sheep-stealer. Despite that effort, within a few months, Catholics who had

been leaders and catechists had joined us Evangelicals, and some of the most fervent Catholics came over to us. No one was taking care of them. Given four hundred years when you Catholics had the field to yourselves and all your theological and spiritual resources, why is your church today so feeble in responding the people's needs?

Two Principles and Some Practical Questions

While Catholicism is the quintessential top-down, global, bureaucratic organization, and while its centralization has grown stronger since the nineteenth century, as means of communication have improved, monastic and religious communities have served as leavening, parachurch agents since the third century. *My first principle is that to serve as effective intercultural missionary agents and leaven today, such communities need to be willing to live in faithful but real tension with the "mainstream" church.* I am not counseling rebellion. I am counseling a willingness — for the sake of embodying the gospel — to live the charisms of their founders even if they do not fit easily on the diagram of a diocesan pastoral plan. And only men and women who are themselves deeply committed to the value of consecrated celibacy have the credibility to suggest altering the traditional models. Only women who are totally dedicated to the gospel and show no self-interest can lead an honest discussion of the role of women in the ordained ministry and other offices in the church.

The truest missionary is formed not primarily by instruction in classrooms by learned professors or even in spiritual direction or at the hands of formation directors. Rather a man or woman is attracted to a community of disciples and, as heart speaks to heart, she meets the Lord in the breaking of bread liturgically, in prayer, in fellowship with experienced disciples, and in solitude. To the extent the members of that community live and breathe in the Spirit of Christ, their life's work and actions lead the new member deeper into the encounter with Jesus. *The second principle, accordingly, is that "recruitment" and formation are two sides of one coin and formation is a lifetime task about which we need to be serious.*

This is nothing new. The best missionaries have always become that way in something like the process we see concretized in the lives of Bishop Pierre Claverie and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. But it is also true that as 19th century missionary communities expanded, classes of aspirants got larger, methods of formation were developed that would allow communities to incorporate large

numbers of men and women in regular classes. Novitiates became much like schools where conformity reigned and observance could pass for internalization of values, something to be endured by a person who wanted “to go the missions.” If the community was preparing men to be priest-religious-missionaries or a priest-members of societies of apostolic life, they had to satisfy general ecclesiastical rules on philosophical and theological training. If the community was female, when they got to the “missions,” their insights were depreciated. The tendency was to want women to run schools, clinics, hospitals, and orphanages, but not to participate in the leadership of a mission or diocese. In all cases, the language that gave primacy to spiritual development was, of course, honored. But in reality, the pressures were immense on “sending” provinces to get as many priests, brothers, and sisters “to the missions” as possible.

That day is long past. If this is the case, the key question of forming missionaries for the future is, How does a community identify and equip the persons and work that best embody the charism of the community? Required are persons young and old who want to be vital parts of community and who can provide both the energy of youth and the leaven of experience and insight to be part of a second founding of the congregation.²⁰

In the Global North today, recruits for missionary communities are few. In parts of the Global South they are plentiful. Granted that bringing in young religious from the South can help bring life to an ageing community in Europe or the United States, does a community not have to be careful lest they merely feed them into old provinces in ways that merely keep them on life support?

* * *

I end without a conclusion. The problems we face as a church are not easy ones to solve. Prayer, reflection, discussion, study, reading, debate, and dialogue alone can align us with God’s Spirit as we attempt to discern God’s preferred future for ourselves as individuals and as members of our congregations.

¹In, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (7 December 1990), Pope John Paul II, recalling the words of Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (§ 27), says: "Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the Good News about their being loved and saved by God. Evangelization will always contain-as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism-a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ ... salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy" (§ 44).

²See James Okoye, *Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006); N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) and *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005).

³Patrick Keifert, *We are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006), p. 23

⁴Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Sky Is Falling: Leaders Lost in Transition* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2005).

⁵Michael Amaladoss, SJ, "Pluralism of Religions and the Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Asia," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 56 (2001) 1-14.

⁶William R. Burrows, "A Response to Michael Amaladoss," *CTSA Proceedings* (2001), 15-20.

⁷Jonathan Y Tan, "From 'Missio ad Gentes' to 'Missio inter Gentes': Shaping a New Paradigm for Ding Christian Mission in Asia," *Vidyajyoti* 68 (2004) 670-88; and 69 (2006) 27-41.

⁸Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford Regnum 1997).

⁹Jonathan Tan, "Jesus the Crucified and Risen Sage: Toward a Confucian Christology," in Vimal Tirimanna, ed., *Asian Faces of Christ* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2005) pp. 49-87.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 36 (note that I am citing a typescript of Tan's article; I did not have access to the published version, bibliographic data for which is given in the previous note.

¹¹Amos Yong, "The Spirit of Hospitality: Pentecostal Perspectives toward a Performative Theology of Interreligious Encounter," *Missiology* 35 (No. 1, 2007): 55-73. Much of what we discuss here is developed at great length in his *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005).

¹²Yong, "Hospitality," p. 59.

¹³Vinoth Ramachandra is author and co-author of several books. They include: *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); *Gods that Fail: Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1996); *Faiths in Conflict: Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World* (InterVarsity, 1999); and (with Howard Peskett) *The Message of Mission: The Glory of Christ in All Time and Space* (InterVarsity, 2003). Vinoth and I are in conversation about a collection of his essays on critical topics in mission theory and practice, which I hope will eventuate in an Orbis book in the near future.

¹⁴Vinoth Ramachandra, "Who Can Say What and To/For Whom? Postcolonial Theory and Christian Theology," in Timothy Yates, ed., *Mission and the Next Christendom* (Sheffield: Cliff Publishing, 2005) 119-46.

¹⁵See Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁶See Andrew F. Walls, "Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church," in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books) 241-54.

¹⁷Vinoth Ramachandra and Howard Peskett, *The Message of Mission: The Glory of Christ in Time and Space* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2003), p. 169.

¹⁸Jean-Jacques Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out: Pierre Claverie of Algeria*, trans. Phyllis Jestice and Matthew Sherry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), original French edition, *Pierre Claverie: un Algérien par alliance* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), Italian edition, *Vescovo tra i Musulmani: Pierre Claverie martire in Algeria* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2004).

¹⁹Pérennès, *Life Poured Out*, p. 227.

²⁰This insight is central to the work of Gerald Arbuckle, *Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Congregations* (Mahwah, NJ, 1988).

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