

Mission Congress 2005

Preparatory Reflection Booklet

The Foundations for Mission in the 21st Century

The goals of *Mission Congress 2005* include: addressing the new areas of mission raised in *Redemptoris Missio*: that is, mega-cities, youth, migrants and refugees, mass media, and areas such as justice and peace and care for the environment; giving a human face and faith dimension to globalization through dialogue with people who directly experience its benefits and shortcomings; and creating a greater understanding of what it means to be a Church without borders.

We offer this preparatory booklet as an invitation to reflection in the days and weeks prior to our gathering in Tucson. At the end of each section you will find one or two questions for reflection but we encourage you to bring your own experience and questions to these reflections.

Two documents of the Church are considered foundational for mission in the new millennium and the Church in America and they form the foundation of our reflection, dialogue, and process of Mission Congress 2005 — Redemptoris Missio and Ecclesia in America. Our reflection begins with excerpts from these documents..

Redemptoris Missio: Encyclical Letter “On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate”

The Context for Contemporary Mission

Written in the year 1990, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) is the foundational document for mission in the 21st century. The following excerpts are offered to assist your reflection on your own experience of mission as you prepare for participation in Mission Congress 2005.

In RM 30, John Paul II writes:

“Our own time, with humanity on the move and in continual search, demands a resurgence of the Church's missionary activity. The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing ever wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit.”

Throughout Chapter IV, he raises the challenges and envisions the horizons and parameters of contemporary mission.

RM 32: “Today we face a religious situation which is extremely varied and changing. Peoples are on the move; social and religious realities, which were once clear and well defined are today increasingly complex. We need only think of certain phenomena such as urbanization, mass migration, the flood of refugees, the de-Christianization of countries with ancient Christian traditions, the increasing influence of the Gospel and its

values in overwhelmingly non-Christian countries, and the proliferation of messianic cults and religious sects....”

RM37(c): Cultural sectors: the modern equivalents of the Areopagus.

After preaching in a number of places, St. Paul arrived in Athens, where he went to the Areopagus and proclaimed the Gospel in language appropriate to and understandable in those surroundings (cf. Acts 17:22-31). At that time the Areopagus represented the cultural center of the learned people of Athens, and today it can be taken as a symbol of the new sectors in which the Gospel must be proclaimed. The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a ‘global village.’ The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media. To some degree perhaps this Areopagus has been neglected. Generally, preference has been given to other means of preaching the Gospel and of Christian education, while the mass media are left to the initiative of individuals or small groups and enter into pastoral planning only in a secondary way.

Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the "new culture" originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology. Pope Paul VI said that "the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time,"(62) and the field of communications fully confirms this judgment.

There are many other forms of the "Areopagus" in the modern world toward which the Church's missionary activity ought to be directed; for example, commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities; the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world. These too are areas which need to be illuminated with the light of the Gospel. We must also mention the immense "Areopagus" of culture, scientific research, and international relations which promote dialogue and open up new possibilities. We would do well to be attentive to these modern areas of activity and to be involved in them. People sense that they are, as it were, traveling together across life's sea, and that they are called to ever greater unity and solidarity. Solutions to pressing problems must be studied, discussed and worked out with the involvement of all. That is why international organizations and meetings are proving increasingly important in many

sectors of human life, from culture to politics, from the economy to research. Christians who live and work in this international sphere must always remember their duty to bear witness to the Gospel.

38. Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization. This phenomenon the so-called "religious revival"- is not without ambiguity, but it also represents an opportunity. The Church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer humankind, a heritage in Christ, who called himself "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6): it is the Christian path to meeting God, to prayer, to asceticism, and to the search for life's meaning. Here too there is an "Areopagus" to be evangelized.

For the complete text of Redemptoris Missio see:
www.adoremus.org/RedempMissio.html

Questions for reflection:

How are you personally challenged by John Paul II's call for ever-wider horizons and possibilities for mission?

From what spiritual resources do you draw the courage needed to respond to this call?

How do we as Christians bring the elements of mission (proclamation, liturgy, catechesis, social justice, dialogue) to any of the new sectors (Areopagus) of mission engagement?

Ecclesia in America

Building Solidarity in a Globalized World

In 1999, Pope John Paul II spoke to the Church in America following the Special Assembly in America of the Synod of Bishops, and collected in the document, *Ecclesia in America* (EA).

Chapter II, "Encountering Jesus Christ in America Today" begins with these words of Scripture:

"From those who have received much, much will be required." (Lk 12:48)

In this context, John Paul II reflects on 'the phenomenon of globalization' and the special implications for the Church in America.

EA 20:

“A feature of the contemporary world is the tendency towards globalization, a phenomenon which, although not exclusively American, is more obvious and has greater repercussion in America. It is a process made inevitable by increasing communication between the different parts of the world, leading in practice to overcoming distances, with evident effects in widely different fields.”

Noting that the “ethical implications can be positive or negative” the Pope identifies two areas of globalization – economic and cultural – which require “a lively commitment to the values of the Gospel.”

“There is an economic globalization which brings some positive consequences, such as efficiency and increased production and which with the development of economic links between the different countries can help to bring greater unity among peoples and make possible a better service to the human family. However, if globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful the consequences cannot but be negative. These are, for example, the absolutizing of the economy, unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between rich and poor, unfair competition which puts the poor nations in a situation of ever increasing inferiority.”

Later in the document, John Paul II calls us to analyze the globalized economy “in the light of the principles of social justice” and challenges the Church in America ‘to promote greater integration between nations, thus helping to create an authentic globalized culture of solidarity’ and “to cooperate with every legitimate means in reducing the negative effects of globalization, such as the domination of the powerful over the weak, especially in the economic sphere, and the loss of the values of local cultures in favor of a misconstrued homogenization” (EA 55).

The “path to solidarity” includes a call to the Church in America to

“be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction the right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another. Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration” (EA 65).

For the complete text of Ecclesia in America see:

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/pope/exhortations/12299.htm>

Questions for Reflection:

In what areas of your Christian life do you engage in solidarity?

In what areas of your Christian life do you yearn for greater solidarity – with God, the poor, the earth?

What do you think is the responsibility of the US Church in mission with the global community today?

Reconciliation as the Model for Mission in the New Millennium

As we read and reflect on the ‘horizons and possibilities’ as well as the challenges and responsibilities of mission in the 21st century, we cannot help but realize that if globalization is the context, reconciliation must be the model for mission today.

At the close of his reflection at the planning meeting for the World Missionary Conference for Evangelism to be held in Edinburgh in 2010, Stephen Bevans, SVD, reminded the participants that “we are called especially today to preach the ‘good news to the poor’ (Lk 4:18), and to witness to and embody the ministry of reconciliation that has been ‘entrusted to us’ (2Cor 5:18); we are called to be ‘all things to all people’ (1Cor 9:22) as we discover the ‘boundless riches of Christ’ (Eph 4:8) in the contexts and cultures of these among whom we minister. ... The ‘great issues’ today have always been great issues in the history of mission, but they are urgent today because of today’s context.”

For the complete text see:

www.familyma.com/Edinburgh%2005/Edinburgh%202015%20Bevans.htm

In his chapter “Globalization and Reconciliation: Challenges to Mission” in Mission in the Third Millennium, edited by Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), Schreiter offers reconciliation as the model for mission in our globalized yet broken world.

“It seems to me that the Christian understanding of reconciliation could well provide both the resources and the very paradigm for a theology and spirituality of mission encountering a world marked by globalization” (p. 142).

“The cry for reconciliation grows out of an acute sense of the brokenness experienced on such a broad scale in the world today. It arises as people try to rebuild their lives in the ruins of ideological projects, civil conflict, the consequences of human malice and greed. It breaches the darkness of memory recovered from a painful past and the loss which that memory evokes. It is a calling out for a new set of relationships so that the terrible deeds done in the past cannot happen again—*nunca m*\leq. It is a reaching out across the abyss of severed relationships to create a different kind of future for ourselves and especially for our children” (p. 140).

“Our religious institutes and the entire church are called in a special way in our time to be communities of reconciliation, those special spaces where God’s saving action might break into people’s lives”(p. 141).

Reconciliation has the power to turn our globalized age from the terror it inflicts economically and socially to an age of active hope and transformation. According to the

Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs, those who believe that this is “an age of transformation” must “choose to risk reaching out to those we do not know to create cultures of peace, justice and healing. We must choose to value, indeed celebrate our diverse national, religious and cultural identities, while claiming a unifying identity as citizens of this Earth and children of one sacred source of all life.”

(www.interfaithnews.net/wp/2005/05/31/age-of-transformation/)

As Schreiter puts it at the close of his chapter in Mission in the Third Millennium:

“Mission is not for the faint-hearted. It is for those whose hearts have been touched by God’s reconciling love, and who burn now that others might also experience it. In the often confusing, polycentric world that globalization has brought upon us, where the gaps between rich and poor yawn like unbridgeable abysses, it is important that we have that unshakable hope which St. Paul expressed in the eighth chapter of the Letter to the Romans:

‘What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? ... No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom. 8:35, 37-39)” (p. 143).

Questions for Reflection:

Where in your life and work do you experience the brokenness of today’s world?

How do you experience the urgency for reconciliation aware of the brokenness of today’s world?

How do you encourage communities of reconciliation in your own ministry?