

## Mission Spirituality in Global Perspective

Madge Karecki, SSJ-TOSF

*Today there is a growing interest in spirituality at both the popular and academic levels. Some missiologists have been suspicious of spirituality because of how it has been defined. This article looks at definitions of spirituality and how they interface with missiology in a way that is mutually enriching for both disciplines. Four regions of the world are examined to see what they might contribute to our understanding of mission spirituality. Emphasis is placed on the need for contemplative prayer to shape and sustain mission praxis.*

### **Introduction**

In the famous play, *A Sleep of Prisoners*, written in the aftermath of the bombing of London during World War II, Christopher Fry (1953:62) penned these well-known words about the need to meet the challenges before us with new freedom and awareness of fragility and the need for life to be rooted in God.

Thank God our time is now when wrong  
Comes up to face us everywhere,  
Never to leave us until we take  
The longest stride of soul men (sic) ever took.  
Affairs are now soul size.  
The enterprise  
Is exploration into God.

We, like those soldiers in Fry's play need to realize that the context of mission has changed and is changing and this calls upon us to make a new and creative response to the ever-present invitation to participate in God's mission in the world.

Indeed, “affairs are now soul size” and the “enterprise is exploration into God.” The development of theological research in the field of spirituality and a growing body of academic literature that has resulted from it has led to a deeper appreciation for the academic discipline of spirituality. This necessitates further analysis and reflection on how missiology interfaces with spirituality and how spirituality affects mission praxis.

### **Why This Topic?**

Why the topic of mission spirituality? One reason for considering this topic is simply to deepen our understanding of spirituality. There is also a need to confront some common misconceptions about the meaning of spirituality in terms of mission. Still another reason for putting emphasis on this area of study is to bring the academic disciplines of missiology and spirituality into conversation with each other because both are interdisciplinary and could be enriching for both. Finally, my own reason for pursuing research about spirituality and its relationship to mission is that I see an intrinsic connection between the two theological fields of study. My hope is that I can demonstrate that the union one experiences through an encounter with God, is the basis for a spirituality and does indeed, enrich one’s mission theology and mission praxis. The key is to maintain intimacy with the Lord.

My first mentor in all things missiological was David Bosch. He is known and respected not only for his academic work as a missiologist, but also the witness of his life during the long, hard years under the National Party’s apartheid regime in South Africa. Bosch raised questions about the relationship of spirituality and mission in his book, *A*

*Spirituality of the Road* (1979) he confessed that even the word “spirituality” made him a bit uneasy because he felt that it was primarily related to one’s devotional life to the exclusion of concern for the world; he saw it as a form of Docetism. He wrote: “Spirituality or devotional life seems to mean withdrawal from the world, charging my battery, and then going out into the world” (Bosch 1979:11). He continued: “Praying is of course, commendable and even necessary. But when praying about something becomes a kind of magic formula, a panacea, according to the slogan ‘prayer changes things,’ then true spirituality has been exchanged for superstition” (:17). He voiced concerns that had been echoed in many a missiological conference.

Clearly uncomfortable with this kind of thinking about spirituality, Bosch nevertheless seemed to be hopeful that a new definition of spirituality would be possible, one that would include a concern for the world. He maintained that:

Fundamental to any definition of spirituality is that it can never be something that can be isolated from the rest of our existence... involvement in this world should lead to a deepening of our relationship with and dependence on God, and the deepening of this relationship should lead to increasing involvement in the world (Bosch 1979:13).

Thirty-plus years after Bosch articulated his hope that a fuller definition of spirituality would reflect both the inner and outer dimensions of Christian life we find ample evidence that his hope has been fulfilled. Theologians have given expression to an

understanding of spirituality that manifests a genuinely prophetic response to the world which is rooted in an experience of God that leads to self-transcendence.

### **Defining Spirituality**

Celia Kourie, maintains that “spirituality refers to the *raison d’etre* of our existence, the meaning and values to which we ascribe, whether these be religious or not. Spirituality, in this wider sense refers to the ultimate values and commitments upon which we base our lives” (Kourie 2000:12).

Sandra Schneiders (1986:266) describes spirituality as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives." She honed her definition of spirituality further by adding a Christian perspective: "If the ultimate concern is God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced through the gift of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Church, one is dealing with Christian spirituality" (Schneiders 2000:23). Spirituality develops an interior life and taps the deepest sources of desire, revealing our mystical longing for unity with Christ and all of creation (Col 1:15; Eph 1:10).

Bernard McGinn (1987:253) describes Christian spirituality as “the lived experience of Christian belief” and “the effort to appropriate Christ’s saving work in our lives.” Furthermore, he asserts that the: “spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality” (McGinn et al 1985:xiii). It is this experience of Christ’s

saving love that is shared in missional relationships with deep respect for how the Spirit is drawing people to Christ even in ways that are unknown to us.

Alister McGrath (2003:13-14), commenting on the interest in spirituality among Evangelicals, wrote:

Spirituality is all about the way in which we encounter and experience God, and the transformation of our consciousness and our lives as a result of the encounter and experience. It is most emphatically not the exclusive preserve of some spiritual elite...Spirituality aims to ensure that we both *know about God* and *know God*. Spirituality is about the personal appropriation of what theology signposts and promises.

McGrath echoes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council's document, *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. Chapter five of the document teaches that:

...Christ sent the Holy Spirit to all to move them interiorly to love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, with their whole understanding, and with their whole strength (cf. Mk. 12:30), and to love one another as Christ loved them (cf. Jn. 13:34; 15:12). The followers of Christ, called by God not in virtue of their works but by his design and grace, and justified in the Lord Jesus, have been made sons (and daughters) of God in the baptism of faith and partakers of the divine nature, and so are truly sanctified (LG 40).

It is clear that union with the Lord is an invitation open to all, not just an elite group of people it is indeed, a universal call to holiness.

Evangelical scholar, Kenneth Boa (2001:19-20), writing about relational evangelism and the spiritual journey, sees the Bible as the foundation of Christian Spirituality.

Biblical spirituality is a Christ-centered orientation to every component of life through the mediating power of the indwelling Holy Spirit...Since it is based on a present relationship it is a journey with Christ rather than a journey to Christ. As long as we are on this earth we never arrive; the journey is not complete until the day of our resurrection, when the Lord brings us into complete conformity with himself.

Like Boa, Michael Downey (1991:271-272), looks specifically at Christian spirituality and links the role of the Holy Spirit in leading us into the mystery of Christ:

The whole of the Christian's life is oriented to self-transcending knowledge, freedom, and love in light of the ultimate values and highest ideals perceived and pursued in the mystery of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in the church, the community of disciples. That is to say, spirituality is concerned with everything that constitutes Christian experience, specifically the perception and pursuit of the highest ideal or goal of Christian life, e.g., an ever more intense union with God disclosed in Christ through life in the Spirit.

William Johnston (1973:20) contends that:

The blind stirring of love eventually develops into a bright flame, guiding ...every choice...moreover it is precisely this love that gives wisdom...Progress in charity,

then, means progress in wisdom. This kind of wisdom is...apparent in human relations where love can discover beauty and potentiality that reason alone cannot find. It is this love, the love that one learns in contemplation that not only transforms individuals, but transforms the cosmos.

Reflection upon these definitions of spirituality reveals some common threads expressed in various ways: self-transcendence, transformation, ultimate values, intimacy with God, sharing in Christ's saving death and resurrection, and the work of the Holy Spirit. All of these find resonance with mission theology and praxis. These elements remind us of the need to reflect on the motivation for mission that opens us to being called and sent to share in God's mission in the world.

### **Toward a Mission Spirituality**

Missiologists know intrinsically that context is an essential component in the development of wholesome and sound mission praxis. When individuals and groups seek to engage in mission their analysis must include external as well as internal trends and issues. One of the issues that has not been given wide consideration by missiologists is the discipline of spirituality and its relationship to mission praxis and missiology; although it is gaining interest.

Why might spirituality as an interdisciplinary theological field of study be a significant interlocutor with which missiologists can engage? Since spirituality is a significant component of mission praxis. It could enrich missiology by its power to infuse depth and meaning into various approaches to mission in diverse contexts and

cultures. Missiology could enhance spirituality through its emphasis on lived” experience in a variety of cultures and contexts. Further, spirituality could increase our understanding of the workings of the grace of conversion that reveals itself in the intimacy of contemplation and in the situations into which God leads us. In prayer we are confronted with the mystery of the Spirit leading us into the awesome experience of God’s gratuitous love leading us to freedom from obstacles within us that can diminish our capacity to be conduits of God’s compassionate presence among people we encounter.

An invitation to intimacy with the sending community of the Trinity is open to all of us; the inner journey bids us to cross boundaries that take us beyond ourselves. True spirituality does not lead to isolation but to communion. The capacity for such communion is built up within us through the action of the Spirit as “our inner self” (Eph 3:16) is purified so that the love that ignites passion and zeal for participation in God’s mission transforms us.

In his book, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice*, Daniel Groody (2007:240) has observed that:

Though globalization and technology have given us access to information and more control over the external world than we could ever have imagined these phenomena have not served us well in terms of getting a deeper understanding of the inner world of the human person and the ultimate questions that give meaning to human existence.

Perhaps this is the reason that books and blogs and other resources that deal with spirituality are so much in demand. There is even a volume in the *Dummies Series* entitled, yes, *Spirituality for Dummies* and it is printed as a Second Edition!

Within the last decade we have witnessed a burgeoning interest in spirituality both as an academic discipline and as a topic of popular interest. Kourie (2009:148) has pointed out that spirituality is in “high demand” and notes the widening circle of interest in spirituality at the popular and academic levels. Kees Waaijman (2007:1) likened the exponential growth in interest in spirituality to an “explosion.” A Google search for “the meaning of spirituality,” confirms his observation with over three million entries listed.

In general, many people are searching for meaning in their lives. As John O’Donohue (1994:265) has observed, “interiority is continually threatened with eviction” because “life has become so externalized that the self has grown evermore hollow.” In today’s fast paced life, many do not take the time for the kind of deeper reflection that helps to foster integrity and wholeness of life; not escapism.

On a daily basis we may take time to ponder the authors of academic sources who become our interlocutors in the quest for insights that enrich our research and teaching, but that is still not what Solomon prayed for with the words: “Give me wisdom the attendant at your throne” (Wis 9:4). This neglect of the inner journey can have consequences not only for us personally, but also for the advancement of missiological discourse and our mission praxis.

As an academic discipline, spirituality provides us with opportunities to increase our cognitive knowledge, but also leads us to manifold paths through which to experience of the God who lives within us and leads us beyond ourselves. St. Paul in Romans 8:26-27 reminds us that it is the Spirit that prays within us. The need to explore this area of Christian life is necessary so that mission is motivated by the “mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5). This obviously happens through study, but intellectual expertise does not necessarily lead to spiritual maturity or zeal for mission in us as persons; for this to happen there has to be the will to be united with the One “in whom we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Missiologists have not developed a large body of literature on mission spirituality, we need, in the words of Stephen Bevans (2006:10) in an essay about missionary evangelization, “a deep spirituality” that “will demand a lot of discipline”. Writing in *Reformed Spirituality* Howard L. Rice (1991:46), reflected a similar viewpoint when he pointed out that “Awareness of God is not automatic, nor can it be brought about by any particular technique. We can however, open ourselves to the already present God by deliberately cultivating certain disciplines of mind and will.” Rice made an important point and one that is essential for understanding the kind of prayer that is vital for cultivating missionary zeal and nurturing ongoing conversion.

Such a missionary spirituality will call us to a participation in the *missio Dei*, through an ever deepening awareness of God’s presence and an ever-growing concern for others so that we manifest selfless dedication to the mission of making Christ known and

loved by all people of the world. It is to walk faithfully in the “footsteps of Jesus” as participants in God’s mission. This kind of spirituality is not merely informative; it is performative (Sheldrake 1999:164) and is concerned with transformative action not simply individualistic moral rectitude and private prayer (Schneiders 2008:13).

Philip Sheldrake (2003:27), drawing on his extensive research, contends that spirituality is meant to give shape to our lives so that we learn “to be truly hospitable to what is different and unfamiliar, and establishing and experiencing a common life. [It] excludes social or political quietism, it excludes existing passively in the midst of the world.” Sheldrake’s insights are exactly what Bosch saw in the apostle Paul whose life was shaped by his experience of Christ and manifested itself in a dynamic and life-giving spirituality that shaped his approach to mission. Paul indeed, had a *spirituality of the road* (:20). Our task is to grow in our appreciation of spirituality so that we bring it into relationship with missiology in ways that are mutually enriching to both disciplines.

### **Spirituality as Encounter**

There are diverse spiritualities within the Christian tradition that have developed along denominational lines, according to religious traditions, ministries, and areas of emphasis. One thing is constant: the origin of every authentic spirituality lies in an experience of God; that experience creates within a person or community a vision that calls forth a passionate commitment to living the Gospel as a creative response to the empowering presence of the Spirit in their lives. O’Donohue (1994:267) explains that such an encounter with the living God is transformative “good news that touches the

deepest origin, memory, identity and destiny of the human individual.” He continues: “the life of each person is a sacrament, wherein the eternal seeks to become visible and active; each individual is chosen for a creative destiny in this world.”

In an experience of God we are drawn by the Holy Spirit to an embrace by Christ’s alluring presence and in the process we are invited to come closer to the Lord. At the same time there is often the temptation to pull away because we realize our own sinfulness and for some, it seems like a waste of time to meditate when there is so much to do. As a result we miss the grace of seeing ourselves in the light of Christ and an opportunity to be authentically counter-cultural in the most profound way.

On the other hand, if we continue to respond to the Spirit’s invitations, we begin to see how the Spirit is working in imperceptible ways in our lives through people and events that call us to change, to conversion. Michael Casey offers this insightful comment:

The experience of the Holy Spirit praying within us is inseparable from a sense of our own weakness and incapacity. By the action of the Holy Spirit what is worst in us can give rise to what is best. This is an alchemy we do not comprehend and can never anticipate, no matter how often it happens. God transforms human limitation into something beautiful, taking what is of least value and ennobling it from within (1996:7).

Those who have experienced the transforming grace of Christ begin to see the world as Christ sees it with the light of Christ’s love illumining their minds and hearts. Spiritual

writers throughout the centuries have observed that those who have been changed by friendship with Christ are people filled with zeal who are ready to participate in God's mission in the world.

As we grow in intimacy with Christ we do whatever is necessary to make this relationship the primary one of our lives. Slowly, we find that we are able to make choices that better reflect God's love for the world. Contemplation is not an escape from reality. In the contemplative experience of union with Christ one is called out of one's self in progressive stages of growth in love. In the Lord's embrace we become empowered by the Spirit with love, a love that we are taught by the One who is love. A spirituality shaped and sustained by union with the Trinity does not lead us away from people or disengagement from reality, but instead opens us to union with others, especially poor people, those suffering any form of oppression. Spirituality leads us to be more loving and generous toward all people, but especially those who are in most need of the liberating love and mercy of Christ because we ourselves have experienced liberation in Christ Jesus.

In the post-resurrection appearances Christ revealed himself to the women and to the apostles as one transformed, but still bearing the wounds of his crucifixion. The one who has experienced intimacy with Christ is not estranged or somehow exempted from the pain of human suffering; on the contrary, genuine mystical union plunges one into the very depths of the world and opens one's heart to the mystery of the other, all others. (Karecki 2010:3).

The American bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (CP 294) testifies that:

The practice of contemplative prayer is especially valuable for advancing harmony and peace in the world. For this prayer rises, by divine grace, where there is total disarmament of the heart and unfolds in an experience of love which is the moving force of peace. Contemplation fosters a vision of the human family as united and interdependent in the mystery of God's love for all people. This silent, interior prayer bridges temporarily the "already" and the "not yet," this world and God's kingdom of peace.

The kind of prayer that the bishops are not simply advocating vocal prayer, not even the liturgy; nor are they talking about bible study or other devotions. What they are promoting is contemplative prayer because only a deep prayer of the will is transformative as well as sustaining for the long-haul required by a commitment to mission. Only this kind of prayer enables us to act out of the conviction that as the Father has sent Jesus so Jesus sends us (Jn 20:21).

Mission praxis arises out of this experience of the perichoretic relationship that we share with the persons of the Trinity. This intimate sense of sharing in the mission of the persons of the Trinity nurtures the development of mission praxis because it is rooted in the life of this sending community. Furthermore in the context of the self-donation of the persons of the Trinity we are led out of a concern for self-absorption and self-preservation to self-transcendence and self-giving in a spirit of mutuality and mission.

This experience of God leads us to live with integrity and justice; two keys to becoming our authentic selves.

### **To Be on Mission with Christ**

It was out of this Trinitarian theology of mission that the Willingen Conference of 1952 articulated the concept of *missio Dei* and paved the way for new ways of understanding mission (Bosch 1991:370). The movement toward a God-centered focus of mission led to seeing Christ as an “agent” of the Father. James P McIlhone makes this point persuasively in an article on Jesus as God’s agent in the Gospel of John (2005:297). McIlhone points out that “the most significant mission in the Fourth Gospel is the mission of Jesus, the Son of the God, the Word made flesh” (:300). He then quotes Helen Friend who notes that the Son acts as an agent of the Father :

The son as agent emphasizes both the importance of the agency and replicates in visible form the principal. Instead of the agent having merely a legal or task likeness to the sender, he additionally has inherited the likeness—a likeness of nature or being (in McIlhone 2005:301).

McIlhone continues and points out that in Jewish thinking the son of the family household is the best qualified to be the agent of the of the head of the family. Then quoting Friend he says: “Thus the Son of God is the perfect agent” (:301).

Since it is Christ who sends the apostles and us, we are then agents of Christ. What then characterized the mission of Jesus and how can we fulfill our role as agents of Christ in mission? I have singled out just three characteristics.

## **Kenosis**

Contemplation leads to the most radical self-giving possible because union with the Lord as a gift of the Spirit ultimately leads to kenosis (Downey 2006:126), a sharing in the paschal mystery of Jesus. With Christ we learn to walk in his footsteps along the way that leads to self-emptying, a way that we take in obedience to the will of the Father. It is the self-emptying of Jesus that becomes the source of hope for all those who are weighed down by pain and grief, injustice and oppression, suffering and sin because in radical self-oblation new hope is born from the gift of self.

All people who respond to the call to mission know the meaning of self-emptying from personal experience. Allowing ourselves to be broken and poured out for others as Jesus is the way of kenosis. It enables us to accept the gifts of people who are different from ourselves. The self-giving witness of our lives must hold out the promise of fuller, more abundant life in Christ for others. The witness of our lives is more than any words we use to convey mystery of Christ (:131).

## **Prophetic**

Walter Bruggemann in *The Prophetic Imagination* (2001) names three dimensions of the prophetic imagination that are relevant to the discussion of characteristics of Jesus' mission: embracing inscrutable darkness in concrete circumstances, alertness to how God sees and acts in ways that give voice to the concerns of the poor and oppressed and the relationship between prophecy and doxology (Bruggemann 2001:14-18).

As we know, biblical prophets were messengers sent by God not to predict the future, but rather to speak a word of warning to those in power. They warn of ensuing consequences if those in power continue on their present course of action, and if the righteous ways of God are not followed. Unlike a fortune-teller, they are truth-tellers (Freeman 2009:2). The prophets also spoke words of comfort and correction to the poor and oppressed. These characteristics also typified Jesus' mission. This is evident in the Lukan account of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth.

The spirituality that Jesus embodied is expressed in the Gospel of Luke 4:18-19 in terms of the prophetic mission given him by the Father. The verses of the passage are from the prophet Isaiah and might be called his mission statement. We are familiar with the text: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." These verses express Jesus' self-understanding of his mission. Jesus confirmed this in the comment made about the text being fulfilled in their hearing (Lk 4:21). He made it clear to the whole assembly gathered in the synagogue that day that he was the embodiment of the prophetic text from Isaiah. In no uncertain terms he declared himself the One sent by the Father. He was anointed by the Spirit to fulfill the mission given to him by the Father. It was the *raison d'être* for his coming among humankind.

This text from Luke tells us something about how mission happens within the context of the relationships that exist among the persons of the Trinity: God bestows the

Spirit on the Son and the Son is sent to carry out the mission of the Father. Jesus is the fulfillment of that mission and we, as the baptized, share in that prophetic mission. This mission holds together both a profound experience of intimacy with Christ and a deep sense of justice so that any obstacles to a realization of the mission of God in the world can be confronted in love and truth (Karecki 2001:5).

### **Being Transcultural**

Richard Slimbach (2005:209), writing about transcultural learning, quoted anthropologist, Clyde Kluckhohn in regard to cultural diversity: “All people are like all others, like some others, and like no other.” Slimbach offered an interpretation of Kluckhohn’s view:

What this means for transcultural development is that our universal human nature is our primary identity...Human beings are of equal value and deserving of fair recognition, mutual respect, humane treatment, and equal opportunities for self-realization. Transcultural development begins with the realization that, amidst the diversity of cultural expression, we share common human potential and experience. From here, we discover the ways that others make sense of their world (Slimbach 2005:209).

Crossing borders is a part of every experience of mission; in crossing the borders of cultures we need to tread lightly so that we can enter into the lives of others with respect and the desire to learn. If we enter into every human relationship with a sense of our common human identity then we lay the foundation for respectful and potentially

missional encounters in which the Spirit can lead us to embrace the other and all others as sisters or brothers.

My years among the Zulu people of South Africa were, for me, a journey in which I learned that crossing borders is best done with the help of others. In my case it was one of the sisters with whom I lived; her name was Mary Ngcobo. She guided my entry into the Zulu cultural world with pride in her culture and sensitivity to my sometimes hesitant steps in this border-crossing experience. Together we learned to dance and sing and reflect on the wisdom she shared. Culture is indeed a missiological locus where spirituality is nourished and conversion can take place.

I will never be a Zulu woman, but I now know at least to some degree, how to navigate my way through so many other borders while remaining at home in my own identity. Mary taught me how to be a transcultural person and to see in the Gospel the way Jesus was able meet people in their own cultural, religious, political and economic contexts. His border crossings began at the Incarnation as he entered into humanity in a way that is a pattern for our own border crossings into the cultures of the people we encounter on our missionary journeys.

We all journey in mission as the Lord leads us. A spirituality that is rooted in the life of the Trinity, shaped by an encounter with the Risen Christ, challenged by the grace of conversion, nourished by the intimacy born of contemplative prayer, filled with gratitude for the gifts of creation and the diversity present in humanity, rooted in the kenotic example of Jesus, and enhanced by the call to share in God's mission in the

world, can open us to the profound and precious gifts of all people whom we encounter in the global village of which we are a part. Such a spirituality makes us able to give a ready answer to those who ask the reason for the hope we have in our hearts (1 Pt 3:15).

## **Part Two**

I begin this section of our discussion of mission spirituality where I left off in Part One, with culture. Culture, whether ethnic, religious, secular or another of the myriad alternative ways of looking at culture that have developed in contemporary societies is the context in which God's manifold gifts are manifested. In the global village in which we live the various sectors of our world have enriched and continue to enrich what we call Mission Spirituality.

### **Mission Spirituality: The Richness of the Global Community**

One of the effects of inculturation of the Christian faith in various cultures is the composition of original, indigenous music and art forms. This became evident to me when I traveled to different African countries. The carvings by Zimbabwean artists, the weavings of Zulu women, the dancing of Malawian youth set afire through the captivating stories of the Gospels demonstrated to me the depth of the religious experience of these people and the spirituality that sustained their lives. "Spirituality", writes David Walker (2000:138),

is always meant to be lived – cannot remain theoretical. However, without theological insight or value, it can become a practice that is not rooted firmly in the mystery of God. When it is expressed in life it becomes a witness to that

unique aspect of the mystery which it represents and enriches the community's appreciation of the mystery.

Everywhere in the world people whose lives have been transformed by the action of the Spirit in their lives have contributed to the well-spring of mission spirituality. They have enriched the faith community by their witness.

I have not traveled the entire globe to learn about the contributions made by the different peoples, but in the Archdiocese of Chicago where I am currently on mission, Sunday liturgy is celebrated in forty different languages, forty-two percent of the Catholic population is Hispanic and the latest ethnic group in Chicago are the people from Myanmar. In this multicultural and multilingual milieu I am still learning to be ever-attentive to the gifts of others to mission spirituality.

In considering the contributions of different areas of the world to mission spirituality I am not attempting a thorough analysis; only a brief synopsis of some dominant aspects from the thoughts of authors from each region. I have not dealt with the contributions of sub-cultures in these areas of the world.

### **Gifts from Asia and the Pacific Islands**

Asian and Pacific Island peoples bring “the experience and sensibilities of the great religions and spiritual traditions of the world—Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism—together with Christianity (USCCB 2001:15) to the development of mission spirituality. They live with a profound sense of the sacred and an appreciation of what can be learned

from the spiritual riches of Christianity. They bring these gifts to the dialogue with other religions. In this process of dialogue the hope is that “it will bring about a truly inculturated theology, liturgy, and spirituality...in order to live and announce the message of Christ” (USCCB 2001:25) that is the foundation of Christian spirituality.

In Oceania there have been important meetings of leaders of various Christian denominations, involvement in ecumenical dialogue, and all have been characterized by mutual respect and the desire for collaboration (Walker 2000:140).

Challenges abound because of the diversity of the vastness of the area. Oceania is made up of 7,500 islands of which about 500 are inhabited (VCO 2010:17). In Oceania, Australia and New Zealand religion and spirituality have become private and individualistic; while in other countries of the region where traditional cultural values prevail the challenge is to come “to a new realization of their identity” (Walker 2000:141).

Though in general, if I can even speak in general, the indigenous people of Oceania are open to dialogue and live in harmony with others, nevertheless “excessive individualism and isolation are enemies of authentic spirituality”(:146).

The kind of dialogue that is promoted in the Asian context is seen as leading to internal and external harmony and unity. In no measure is it complete, but harmony and dialogue are laced throughout the spirituality of the peoples of Asia and the Pacific Islands.

### **Gifts from Latin America**

The spirituality in Latin America has been shaped by both popular piety and liberation theology. The historical factors involved in Christian history have played a formational part in the development of Latin American Spirituality. The influence of Spain and Portugal has marked the development of Latin American Spirituality and culture.

The Argentinean theologian, José Miguez-Bonino (1974:41), argued compellingly that:

There is a tendency to think that evangelism can remain unaffected, can carry on business as usual, forgetting social action, but without being fundamentally changed. This it seems to me to be a deadly misunderstanding. The real problem is the alliance of missions and Western capitalistic expansion has distorted the Gospel beyond recognition and that evangelism, prayer, worship and personal devotions have been held captive to an individualistic, other-worldly, success-crazy, legalistic destruction of the Gospel.

Miguez-Bonino is concerned that in such a historical context every effort needs to be made to hold the proclamation of the Gospel and the concern for justice in relationship.

Segundo Galilea has written persuasively about the need for conversion as an essential element in Latin American spirituality saying: “There is no lasting way for justice and human solidarity without a change of heart. No one can truly contribute to another’s liberation if he (sic) himself is not undergoing liberation from selfishness and

all forms of idolatry” (Galilea 1985:193). He sees the main challenge to Latin American Christianity as “institutional injustice” which has resulted in the “inhumane poverty of so many people” (:187) and hence the need for integral liberation which “is the synthesis between social and inner liberation; between the way of deeds and the way of the heart” (:193).

A concern for justice and liberation are the primary characteristics of Latin American Spirituality. This region of the world has contributed to the development of mission spirituality’s quest to hold in relationship the bond that exists between spiritual growth and social responsibility.

### **Gifts from Africa**

Anyone who has spent time in Africa can testify to the warm and gracious hospitality of the people and the strong sense of family that characterizes African life. These are cultural and Christian values that are part of the foundation of African societies. Nigerian ecclesiologist and liturgist, Elochukwu Uzukwu, has called for a reappropriation of these cultural values as basic to the development of African persons in contrast to Western individualism. He wrote:

While the African social definition of person displays the human person as subsistent relationship—in other words, the person as fundamentally “being-with,” “living-with,” “belonging-to”—Western philosophy lays emphasis on the absolute originality and concreteness of the human person, a “being-for-itself”...In Western systems relationship is not constitutive of the being of

humans despite the fact that it is fundamental to human existence (Uzukwu1996:42-43).

This profound sense of living in relationship to and with others marks every aspect of African life. One of the things I learned to say in isiZulu was *Umntu, ngumuntu ngabantu* which means “A person, becomes a person with others.” It typifies the point made by Uzukwu that in Africa a person’s authentic character only develops in relationship to others. Uzukwu continues with a cautionary word:

The idea of church as family should, however, not be construed to mean that the African cultural experience will set the terms for the construction of this “new family of God.” On the contrary!...This metaphor must be stripped of all the characteristics of patriarchal dominance. The novelty of the gospel must predominate (Uzukwu 1996:66).

This notion of the new family of God is rooted in baptism. It is vitally important that we understand the profound dynamic at work through which baptism brings each of us into relationship with the family of the Trinity so that we grasp the fact that all of us share in the mission of this sending community (Bühlmann 1979:115). It is this emphasis on family, and that is a gift that readily can be integrated into mission spirituality.

Hospitality in Africa is nearly always a family affair in the broad sense. The guest is welcomed by everyone. She/He is then looked after by some members of the family while others prepare food and drink for the visitor. Words of greeting lead in turn into conversations that can last for hours. At mealtime dishes are brought in so that the guest

can share a meal with the adults of the family. He/She is expected to eat well, failing not to do so would be considered an insult to those offering hospitality. Every effort is made to please the guest, who is expected to respond courteously to his/her hosts.

A deep sense of family is complemented by a strong and vibrant extension of that bond in African hospitality. Julius Gathgo cites a well-known quote by Archbishop Desmond Tutu which makes this same point:

Africans believe in something that is difficult to render in English. We call it *ubuntu, botho*. It means the essence of being human. You know when it is there and when it is absent. It speaks about humaneness, gentleness, and hospitality, putting yourself out on behalf of others, being vulnerable. It embraces compassion and toughness. It recognizes that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together (in Gathogo 2006:41).

A sense of family and hospitality enrich mission spirituality when we link them with life in the community of the Trinity and the biblical understanding of what it means to belong to the Body of Christ.

### **Gifts from Europe and North America**

Europe and North America are, for the most part, liberal democracies shaped by secularism where Christian churches are experiencing diminishment in membership and influence. Excessive individualism and consumerism are marks of Western culture. These reveal themselves in religious thought as the “Jesus and Me Syndrome” that is in opposition to Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 4:4 where he urges the Christian community

to remember that they one, because they are united in “one Lord, one faith, one body and one Spirit.”

Despite the fact that Europe and North America are dominated by secular culture and materialism, Jan Kerkhofs sees signs of hope in various pockets of European society. He names a growing interest in prayer and spirituality as a way people are seeking to find meaning in life. As evidence of this point he cites the fact that the works of John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, Evelyn Underhill, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and other Christian mystics are in great demand (Kerkhofs 2001:99). He reminds us of Karl Rahner’s prophecy that: “The Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic; if they are not, there will be no Christians left” (:101).

Sydney Ahlstrom (2005:468), writing in the *New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* about North American Spirituality uses four descriptors to summarize what characterizes it: acceptance of pluralism, a pragmatic approach, openness to innovation and a high regard for individual personal experience. These four aspects of North American Spirituality are reflective of North American societies in varying degrees.

Nevertheless, signs of hope also can be seen on this side of the Atlantic. Interest in spirituality is continuing to grow. Ecumenical gatherings of people join together at the Taizé community for prayer, the Contemplative Outreach Movement has introduced thousands of people to Centering Prayer; people coming to these groups are most often

seeking to deepen their spiritual lives. Pax Christi engages in peace-making efforts by bringing together people who work for reconciliation among nations and religions together. Environmental groups bring people together to help them to see that the earth is a finite reality that belongs to all people and these groups suggest ways to live more simply. Finally, the Catholic Worker Movement relentlessly brings before us the needs of the poor and the immigrant peoples in cities and in rural.

Europe and North America bring to mission spirituality both a sense of history and an openness to the future. Efforts made by women and men of faith on these continents remind us that faith must be nourished by prayer and that faith has consequences for how we live in the world with others.

One of the benefits of globalization is that we have a stronger sense of how we are affected by what goes on in other parts of the world. The ash cloud produced by Iceland's volcanic eruptions halted air travel throughout Europe and had consequences for the rest of the world. The economic meltdown in the United States has affected the world economy. Democracy movements in North Africa and the Middle East have challenged the reign of dictators and military rulers in ways that have altered the international political landscape. We are not only citizens of our own countries, but we are citizens of the world.

These events invite us to reflect again on how mission spirituality opens us to the movement of the Spirit beckoning us to new contexts of mission while awakening us to

the presence of the One who is willing to awaken in us an awareness of our deepest identity as missionary disciples.

Disciples must be formed in a spirituality of missionary action, which is based on docility to the impulse of the Spirit, to its life giving power which mobilizes and transfigures all dimensions of existence...Moved by the drive and zeal that come from the Spirit, the disciples and missionary learns to express it in work, dialogue, service and everyday mission (AD 284).

**Conclusion: Knowing we are Sent**

Our biblical faith tells us that we are both called and sent for mission. We are called to live in communion with the Trinity and with one another by reason of our baptism. We are sent on mission “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). We do not have our own mission; we are instead participants in the mission of God. The ways we engage in mission will vary according to our gifts, but all of us can be witnesses to God’s love at work in the world and we can give witness by the way we live. Pope John Paul II wrote eloquently and strongly about the importance of witness as the most basic form of mission: “The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission. Christ, whose mission we continue, is the “witness” *par excellence* and the model of all Christian witness” (RM 42).

The witness that is highlighted by John Paul II in this section of *Redemptoris Missio* is meant to reflect the concern that Jesus showed toward people in need whom he met in the Gospel. John Paul II expected that our witness would be patterned after Jesus’

own and should be marked by humility and forgiveness (RM 43). History has proven over and over that only a truly evangelical witness of those who have conformed their lives to Christ, followed in the footsteps of the kenotic Christ, and lived in union with the Risen Christ can speak to people in every sphere of life.

In the past mission was too often explained in terms of projects and plans. If we are to take seriously John Paul II's words about witness we have to look for a deeper motivation for mission. It is my contention that contemplative prayer opens us to the deeper motivation that is only given by the Spirit for the sake of the world.

Casey, whom I have quoted earlier, observed that people turn to prayer most easily in times of difficulty and yet, in the ordinary circumstances of life, we must make time each day to pray, and do what he calls "rewriting the script for the day" so that prayer becomes a priority, not an optional extra (1996:49). This is a challenge we all face as people living in an activist culture in which productivity is valued above emphasis on the transcendent dimension of life. Developing a capacity for contemplative prayer is only possible when we spend time being attentive to the Lord. When this happens our desire to share Christ with others grows, supports and directs our sense of mission.

What needs to inform a mission spirituality? Who and What can speak to our times and global context about fullness of life in Christ? We need, I think, a mission spirituality that is inspired and captivated by an image of the kenotic Christ as typified in Paul's Letter to the Philippians (2:6-8). Ronald Rolheiser explains:

To “self-empty” in the way of Jesus means being present without demanding that your presence be recognized and its importance acknowledged; it means giving without demanding that your generosity be reciprocated; it means being invitational rather than threatening, healthily solicitous rather than coercive; it means being vulnerable and helpless, unable to protect yourself against the pain of being taken for granted or rejected....it means letting God be God and others be themselves without either having to submit to your wishes or your timetable (Rolheiser 2006:55).

This text reminds us of the experience of Maryknoll Sister Janice McLaughlin while in solitary confinement in a Zimbabwean prison. She relates that in that situation she had only a few material possessions and she was only given the meanest amenities, but that in her need other prisoners showed her care and compassion. She said that she “felt part of something bigger than herself” and that she no longer felt alone because she was one with “oppressed people and God was there with them” (McLaughlin 1993:196). Her experience exemplifies the kind self-emptying witness that leads to communion with God and with others and our own conversion.

Mission spirituality speaks to us of the need to witness to the fact that the call to mission is a communal call. All of Jesus’ disciples were sent on mission, not some elite group. Since there can be no Christian life except in community we must actualize this reality by building relationships that give witness to the fact that we are indeed members

of one family called and sent to give witness to Christ in the world by our very lives. In order to do this we need to have within and among us “the mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5).

In the past missionaries were portrayed as “lone rangers” or “superman figures” who could work alone to make the kingdom of God a reality. This image is changing and in many places has changed. Since the “whole church is missionary by its very nature,” (AG 2) the whole church is called to mission.

In a document of the World Council of Churches, *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today* we receive the same mandate:

The mission of God (*missio Dei*) is the source of and basis for the mission of the church, the body of Christ. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, empowering and energizing its members. Thus mission becomes for Christians an urgent inner compulsion, even a powerful test and criterion for authentic life in Christ, rooted in the profound demands of Christ's love, to invite others to share in the fullness of life Jesus came to bring (John 10:10). Participating in God's mission, therefore, should be natural for all Christians and all churches, not only for particular individuals or specialized groups. The Holy Spirit transforms Christians into living, courageous and bold witnesses (cf. Acts 1:8) (MEUT 13).

That bold witness that we are called to give grows out of our inner experience of being sent by the Lord. “Mission is not limited to a program or project, but it is sharing the experience of the event of the encounter with Christ, witnessing to it and announcing it

from person to person, from community to community, and from the Church to the ends of the earth (AD 145).

I conclude with something that we all can do to spread Gospel wherever we are on mission. It is the phrase “gossiping the gospel” from Michael Green that Roger Schroeder and Steve Bevans are so fond of using to explain how the early Christians witnessed to their faith. What is meant by this delightfully mischievous phrase? Green tells us:

This must often have been not formal preaching, but the informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes and wine shops, on walks, and around market stalls. They were everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing. Consequently, they were taken seriously, and the movement spread (Green 1970:173).

We can only “gossip the gospel” if it is thoroughly integrated in our lives and is sustained by a spirituality that has hewn in us a desire for God that cannot be quenched and a missionary zeal that is filled with passion for the coming of the reign of God in its fullness.

### **Abbreviations**

AD	<i>Aparecida Document</i> (Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean).
AG	Vatican Council II, <i>Ad Gentes</i> (Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church).
LG	Vatican Council II, <i>Lumen Gentium</i> (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church).

MEUT	WCC, <i>Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today</i> (Preparatory Paper).
RM	Pope John Paul II, <i>Redemptoris Missio</i> (encyclical letter).
VCO	Secretariat of the Pacific Community, <i>Valuing Culture in Oceania</i> (Report for the Human Development Program of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community).
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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