

The Emerging Future in Mission

Summary of the 2021 SEDOS Mission Symposium Talks



What do we mean when we use the term *mission*, what is mission? Seen from the input over the five days of the SEDOS Mission Symposium on the theme of “New Trends in Mission,” a great diversity in what mission is today emerged. The Redaction Committee has been listening to the talks given at the Symposium, along with its many participants online, and has been looking to see what major themes surfaced across the different talks that have been presented. And while there are significant themes we can spell out, we do not want to take away the unique richness of each contribution.

Four Foundations

A major question for the Redaction Committee has been: “What are the pillars we notice that support our understandings of mission as expressed during this symposium?” The 1969 SEDOS Symposium focused on the significance of the roles of Development in missionary activities and of Dialogue, and the 1989 SEDOS Symposium came up with four “principal activities” of the Church’s mission: proclamation, dialogue, inculturation, and the liberation of the poor. Are these still valid for today?

Although all these activities remain present in mission today, based on the talks of this 2021 SEDOS Mission Symposium, we first considered what the *foundations of mission* are. These foundations might be called the “non-negotiables” in Mission. They are valid for all time.

1. **Scripture,**
2. **Experience,**
3. **Holy Spirit,**
4. **Cry of the World,**

These Four Foundations inter-connect. This means that when we reflect for instance on the working of the Holy Spirit in Mission, its working will also be present in the Cry of the World/Poor (see for instance the talk on *Secularism*), in Scripture (see for instance talk on *Biblical Trends in Mission*), and in Experience (see for instance talk on *Initial Proclamation*). This interconnectedness makes it difficult to be one-sided in talking about mission.

Missio Dei

Alongside the meetings of the Redaction Committee, different discussion groups gathered daily to do some sharing about the talks, with questions set beforehand. Towards the end, the conclusion of the Redaction Committee was given to them for evaluation. There were many specifications of the proposed emerging future aspects, which are taken up in the next paragraph, but one very important remark was that “Mission starts in the Mind of God”, as Sr. Rekha Chennattu, RA, so vividly explained from her study of the Bible. The Four Foundations therefore are to be taken as a unity under the umbrella of *missio dei*, the mission of God. One can imagine the Four Foundations to be the four legs of a table, and the table as a whole the mind and heart of God. As missionaries we are seated at this table, eating from one or more sides of the table, enjoying the same food (= mission).

Four Emerging Themes in Mission

During the days of the Symposium, the Redaction Committee started to see more clearly which aspects of today's mission the different Speakers had in common; those from a theological background (Parts One and Two) as well as those from a more practical background (Part Three). We did not want to come up with just one term for each theme, but to place it with another so as to give some dynamism to each of the themes. There are thus four main themes, each with two aspects that are very much related.

1. *Synodality and Communion*

Possibly one of the most significant themes that arose from the talks was the theme of *Synodality* which came to the fore right at the beginning when Sr. Mary Barron, OLA, reflected on SEDOS and its history in which nine missionary Congregations made a significant contribution to the text *Ad Gentes*. Perhaps, after Sr. Mary's talk on Thursday, it is appropriate to add "Herstories" to the history of SEDOS; for we have heard often enough in these five days about the significant role of women in Mission. The theme of Synodality came through in the talk by Cardinal Tagle and his three points for SEDOS to follow up. In the light of Synodality, what he had to say was important and new. Another aspect of Synodality which perhaps was named well by Sr. Mary Barron, OLA, is the shift from *ad gentes* to *inter gentes*, as we move from a mission "to," to a mission "with and among." We heard echoes of it again in the talk Fr. Paul Béré, SJ, gave on images of Pope Francis' mission, and in the reflections of Sr. Marie-Hélène Robert, OLA, on Ecumenism and the search for Unity. Fr. Jose Palakeel, MST, then asked, "What is Mission and how is mission developing?". We were reminded

that our ecclesiology shapes mission, in particular he spoke of three perspectives: *Regno*, *Communio*, and *Missiological*, with the last one as a new understanding in ecclesiology. The talks spoke strongly of our call to Communion. Sr. Marie-Hélène Robert, OLA, for example said mission is done by groups not individuals and reminded us of the importance of the complementarity of others. Sr. Agnes Lanfermann, MMS, mentioned that networking and cooperation is not to be done on our own. The importance of dialogue, as an aspect of synodality and communion, was reaffirmed in the reflection Sr. Maria De Giorgi, MMX, gave on interreligious dialogue, and also by Fr. John Mallare, CICM, in our dialogue with Islam and the mission of mercy. Synodality was also a central requisite for Mr. Oliver Aquilina, SDC, who referred to the need for a change of mindset, from cooperation to co-responsibility, when it comes to our attitude to the laity. The theme of synodality can also be heard in the enfolding paradigm shift that sees us moving from the "I" to the "We." The talks placed strong emphasis on the collective thrust of mission. It is not: "I am the missionary," rather we now hear, "We" are Mission, which Sr. Helen Kamkol, CMS, shared with us.



2. *Dignity and Human Fulfilment*

The second theme we heard emerging this week was the significance of *Respect for the Dignity of the Other*. A former mission approach might have considered mission to others as mission to those who hde no knowledge, or were in need, of what we bring. This theme came up strongly in the talk Sr. Monique Tabareh, RGS, gave and in the reflection of Fr. Tim Norton, SVD, on Spiritual Direction. We heard of the importance of honouring the God who is already present among others. Fr. Daniel Huang, SJ, quoted his Superior General Fr. Arturo Sosa, SJ, who said, one of the “signs of the times” today is the universal process of secularization. God speaks to us even from the heart of a humanitarianism that has no need of the transcendent. Thankfully, God goes before us on mission. As many Speakers reminded us the Spirit of God is capable of being in any place and with any people. Fr. Paul Béré, SJ, reflecting on the mission of Pope Francis and the Cry of the Existential Peripheries, helped us to see that we are talking not about geography but about the human peripheries we acknowledge.

Maria Antonetta Pereira, FMM, reminded us that Education is Mission: “Bring the schools to the people not the people to the schools.” Mission demands a certain mutuality and willingness to go to where people are. We saw a firm emphasis on the Human Aspects of mission – Interculturality, Peripheries, Women. Multiplicity of options is now a value. Again, Fr. Daniel Huang, SJ, spoke of human centeredness: putting the human at the centre of mission. This is not to replace God as the foundation of mission but rather to acknowledge the God who works within human experience. First, learn to know human feelings then go to how Jesus felt, and then to church as a community of believers. How to speak of God today: of

God’s offer of salvation to people who do not need God? What allows for human flourishing; for Conservative religion. Young people today are looking for Identity. Need for a new way of communicating — identity. Sr. Rekha Chennattu, RA, and Fr. Stephen Bevans, SVD, spoke of Prophetic Dialogue which is respectful of the other.

Fr. Pudota Rayappa John, SJ, too spoke of the dignity of the human person when referring to the mission among Indian Farmers, and of our need to go beyond the gates for the sake of the Kingdom of God. He talked of the agrarian language Jesus used as the language of the local people. Fr. Gerard Hall, SM, invited us to learn to respect the inherent Christian experience which is not dominated by a culture not its own. Sr. Robyn Reynolds, OLSH, began her talk by paying her respects to the Indigenous People of her country. She drew special attention to indigenous religiosity and leadership by Indigenous people, rather than by Church ministers. The moderator called her talk “mystical.” Bro. Nestor Anaya, FSC, spoke about young people, the work of supporting them as they develop, to be fully the people they are called to be, and of accompanying them in their dreams. As mentioned, Sr. Mary Barron reminded us of the importance of hearing the “Her-story” of women on Mission, so often omitted from the official records. She honoured the *feminine genius* as she mentioned the qualities of sensitivity, generosity, maternity, receptivity. Sr. Carmen Elisa Bando, SSpS, on The Roots of “People on the Move” called us into a place of respect found in deeper communion with God, with others, and with all creation. The dignity of people not wanting to be called “refugees” deserves our respect – they are first and foremost human beings. We all have our roots in movement. With God we are all itinerants

journeying on the road to the definitive union with God. We should respect people on the journey of their life with God.

3. *Christ-connectedness and Witness*

Fr. Stephen Bevans, SVD, situated mission in the context of “missionary discipleship”, in which our *connectedness to Christ* enables the transformation of the world. Spirituality was the theme which united the talks and expressed our being linked to God through Jesus Christ. Sr. Rekha Chennutta, RA, spoke about biblical trends in Mission for our time. Mission begins in the mind of God and we have to be of the same mind and heart. I’m reminded of Phil 2:5 “have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus”. We are givers and receivers on a journey together with Christ at the centre. Mission has to touch the spiritual yearning of humanity said Fr. Bevans. The Church’s mission is to be a covenant community. Sr. Rekha loved the reciprocal love that defines Johannine discipleship. We must first evangelise ourselves to be able to talk about God. The task of mission today is to evangelise ourselves, so that we become visible signs of God in the world. Fr. Jose Palakeel, MST, pointed out that as missionaries we should not look only to be in communion with other human beings but at the same time with God, and to be open about it to others.

Bro. Alfred Maravilla, SDB, spoke of Rediscovering the Initial Proclamation. There is the Initial Proclamation to new catechumens and Ongoing Renewed Proclamation to the faithful. Kerygma is the preaching or proclamation of the Christian Gospel, but Initial Proclamation is how to come to know the Person of Jesus Christ. The Kerygma is witnessed by a credible life-style, with an authentic practice of charity. A credible witness of life is an attractive

invitation. We heard several times the use of the term Encounter, which spoke to us of the Initial Proclamation.

Witness has many expressions: we heard of the expressions of the Media from Sr. Monique Tabareh, RGS. Dialogue gives witness; as does good inculturation in the outreach to the poor. Fr. Lazar T. Stanislaus, SVD, spoke of the Parish’s missionary potential. Inculturation in the parish enables the new culture of the Gospel to witness to our centredness in Christ. Fr. Aloysius Pieris, SJ, in his reflection on the search for the real identity of “religious”, called them “Jesus communities animated by love,” whose presence and witness reflects the Trinity. From a faith aspect we are full of the Holy Spirit and we recognise the centrality of discernment in our mission witness.

Basic themes were: the sacredness of the human person, the sacredness of the human family, and the shared passion to create human community. Inter-relatedness: to go where the people are, to join in their struggle, to learn their language, to respect their dignity. To respect their aspirations in mission dialogue is very important. In gathering all people/s into the heart of God we are challenged to build up the communion of God’s People. A new consciousness which begins with evangelising oneself was treated by Fr. Anthony Akinwale, OP, as he reflected on the African Church that has grown up in 55 years with *Ad Gentes* and *Lumen Gentium*. He showed us the growth of the Church in Africa which now gives reciprocal witness by sending missionaries out to the world.

We regret that the talk on “the mission among the poor” of Sister Marvi Delrivo, SFP, and Sister Licia Mazzia, SFP, was cancelled at the last minute because it could have enlightened us on how to empathize with and recognize the face of Jesus in the

poor, suffering, rejected, excluded, marginalized brother and sister.

4. *Holistic Approach and Unity*

Fr. Stephen Bevans said Mission has to be approached in a holistic way. The Theology of Mission addresses the whole of Creation. Through transforming missionary discipleship, personal transformation leads to transformation in others. As we await the completion of Creation, ecology, and the whole of creation, all life, is the focus of mission. We are in a new consciousness, in which we must see ourselves as only part of the whole of creation. We are not separate from but interconnect with the whole.

The holistic approach also focusses on the centrality of healing and salvation as Sr. Agnes Lanfermann, MMS, shared in recognizing Healing as Mission. Healing is part of what has emerged at this time, but only lately in the Church. How Christ's healing power may act through us. Healing the Earth is an integral part of the healing of people. To walk together to promote the culture of life, means healing must be holistic not fragmented. We also heard of interdenominational healing. Furthermore, we are requested to become Vulnerable and face our vulnerability as in the wounded Christ, thus healing the whole person, remembering "we" are Mission. Sr. Anne Beatrice Faye, CIC, shared a riveting story of forgiveness that illustrated the healing power that frees and reconciles. This is the new face of reconciliation. Mission speaks to the victims of crimes against humanity who have a right to truth and justice. Forgiveness and reconciliation are acts of hope. God is the author of all reconciliation and healing of the offender. For Sr. Anne Beatrice evangelisation takes the name of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Fr. Jose Palakeel, MST, spoke of communion with God at the heart of Mission. Our walking together in unity is linked to wanting to connect with one another. We heard the African word "Ubuntu" in a number of talks. Sisters Maria Teresa Ratti, CMS, Helen Kamkol, CMS and Ida Colombo, CMS, echoed this in, "We" are Mission. We do not work alone. Fr. Bede Ukwuije, CSSp, encouraged Working Together to Promote the Culture of Life. African Tribal Religions and Christianity have similar values which can build on one another. A further sign of this unity and holistic approach was developed by Fr. James Kroeger, MM, in his exploration of Peace Promotion, which forms an integral part of the work of mission and evangelization. We also listened to Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF, who proposed a new framework that can hold the reality of Creation. It demands we enter the holistic consciousness, with the whole of which we are a part, but not separate. In what ways is mission evolutionary? While we are "wholes", we are becoming something more within greater "wholes". Our unity with God in Creation is the very unity *the emerging future* depends on.

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