

Collaboration Between Congregations in the Field of Mission and Formation



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SEDOS

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Editorial



Dear Members and Readers,

Reflecting on the need for inter-congregational co-operation, the SEDOS team came together to discuss and explore more possibilities of working together. Thus, the topic, “Collaboration Between Congregations in the Field of Mission and Formation”, was chosen to begin with. Besides mission and formation there are a number of fields, where the congregations can work together in order to be more effective and relevant in the present context, where a number of congregations are struggling to survive.

Talking about the success of co-operation, Kärin Butler Primuth and Michael Kaspar, the Catalysts for the Ministry Collaboration Issue Network, at the Global Workplace Forum 2019 held in Manila, the Philippines, said: “These mission networks, in all their various forms - as partnerships, alliances, or coalitions, bring churches, ministries, mission agencies, field workers, tent makers, business entrepreneurs, and fund raisers together around common areas of interest to share information and resources, learn from each other, and co-operate in joint projects to accomplish what no one could do alone.”

Reflecting upon the theme, whose basis can be found in Scripture. Co-operation among members within the Body of Christ is vitally important as it reflects the very nature and dynamism of the Triune God.

Furthermore, Kärin Butler Primuth and Michael Kaspar say, “Not only is collaboration important because it reflects God’s design for his Body, but also because co-operation has demonstrated increased Kingdom impact. Over the last 40 years, God has been uniting the global Church as never

before in history, resulting in the explosive growth of mission networks that are making the Gospel advance where the challenges are too great, the situations too complex, and the resources required are too much for any single organization or strategy to face alone.” During the Seminar we heard the sharing of some groups co-operating and making an impact on Global mission. Today we can find hundreds of networks rallying around shared goals in dozens of different mission fields - from people in groups to geographically or specifically focused issues. In the current SEDOS Bulletin, you will see that the missionary congregations are concerned about networking. All are looking forward to working jointly on some specific areas such as mission and formation. They delve into these two areas to explore the possibilities of co-operation.

These practical examples of co-operation among Congregations in Mission and Formation is particularly appropriate at this time when the whole Church is embarking, at the invitation of Pope Francis, on a synodal journey. The consecrated are invited to take this synodal process seriously and become an irreplaceable part of the great community on the move, that is the Church. The present SEDOS Bulletin is actually the outcome of the SEDOS Spring Seminar that was held at the UISG on 30 March 2023 on the theme, “Collaboration Between Congregations in the Field of Mission and Formation.” The Bulletin begins with the Introductory talk given by Mary Barron, Superior General of OLA, in which she put the theme in the right perspective and gave the right orientation to the topic.

The first article entitled, “*Missio Dei Is Missio Trinitas*: Sharing the Whole Life of God, Father, Son and Spirit” was not part of the Seminar but it gives the theological and Biblical foundation of co-operation. In this article Darren Cronshaw gives us a

theological foundation of co-operation based on the Trinity.

The Second article by Nadia Coppa, ASC, based on the paper she presented at the SEDOS Spring Seminar on the theme, “Collaboration between Congregations in the Field of Formation and Mission”, put before us the opportunities and challenges related to co-operation among Congregations.

In the Third article, also based on the paper presented on the theme, “Laici: collaboratori nella missione e coinvolgimento nella Chiesa locale”, Adelson Araújo dos Santos, SJ, invites us to cooperate with the laity and make the Church more vibrant.

The fourth article, jointly presented at the panel discussion during the same Spring Seminar, by Francis Rozario, SMA, and Juliana Karomba, MSOLA, on the theme, “Inter-Congregational Partnership” based on their experience of an inter-congregational venture in “Inter Congregational Ongoing Formation (ICOF).”

The fifth article, also part of the panel discussion during the SEDOS Spring Seminar, presented by Jim Greene, M. Afr., on “Collaboration between Congregations for Mission”, where he explains the various challenges faced and dealt with in working with sixteen congregations on the project for Solidarity in South Sudan. In his concluding remarks, Jim says, that they offer a model which shows “different cultures living in harmony and working together for a common good that serves all.”

In the last article, Alberto Lamana, MCCJ, his presentation during the panel discussion, spoke about his experience with the group, *Tutti Fratelli*, a group of Religious Brothers residing in Rome. They represent various Institutes and gather regularly to exchange and promote common initiatives relevant to their respective Congregations. For Alberto, “The group is an expression of synodality

that is an essential dimension of today’s Church.”

Lastly, we are publishing a long-awaited review on the book, “New Trends in Mission” by James H. Kroege, MM, under the title, “Mission: Our Continuing Journey.” I am sure that all these articles will enlighten us and motivate us to work together not only in the field of mission and formation but also in other areas such as spirituality, ecology, peace, justice and community life.

Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD
Director of SEDOS



Mary Barron, OLA

Collaboration between Congregations in the field of Mission and Formation

Introductory Talk



It is my privilege to say a few introductory words to open our deliberations and sharing on this very interesting topic chosen for our SEDOS Spring Seminar this year:

Reflecting on this topic in preparation for today, a number of areas strike me as being particularly important and in this brief introduction I will just briefly mention three.

The Call to Collaboration

There is the understanding of the call to collaborative ministry... from where does this call emanate?

Understanding of Collaboration

There is also the understanding of collaboration itself which may seem straightforward but in fact needs to be unpacked as there are myriad possible understandings that need to be explored.

Conditions for Fruitful Collaboration

And the third area I would like to highlight is the necessary conditions or the favourable setting for collaboration in ministry to be fruitful...

Before I briefly touch these three areas, I would like to say a word about the understanding of mission – because this also is crucial for fruitful collaboration.

José Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, CMF, whose writings on this topic are inspiring and informative, highlights the importance of a clear understanding of mission. He cautions that we must be careful not to confuse mission with our apostolic activities... because if mission is defined through the prism of apostolic activities, then perhaps the setting for collaboration becomes a little bit more ‘territorial’, if I can use that word.

However, if our Missiology is rooted in the Trinitarian understanding of Mission, i.e. we

Collaboration between Congregations in the field of Mission and Formation

We are delighted that so many people have joined the seminar, here in presence at UISG where we have over 60 people and online where we have at least 30. We are grateful to UISG for the use of the facilities and to all our translators who will facilitate the sharing in the different languages.

Our theme focusses on *the Field of Mission and Formation* - during the afternoon session we will hear testimonies from these different dimensions.

Two collaborative experiences in the area of formation will be presented - covering both initial and ongoing formation.

The other two experiences are mission focussed – one African-based collaborative experience, the Solidarity with South Sudan project and one Latin American - the Pan Amazonian Network.

To set the background for these testimonies, in our morning session our two speakers will introduce us to the theme speaking from their own particular experiences and areas of interest.

I think we can all agree that it is set up to be a very interesting day.

understand Mission as *Missio Dei*... then as Paredes describes it:

Mission is a movement coming from Heaven to the earth, to humanity, in which we are called to participate. And it is only this understanding of mission that can lay the foundations or to use the more organic term that Paredes uses, it is only this understanding of mission that can **create the eco-system** in which collaborative ministry can thrive.

This is an important distinction for collaborative initiatives. For more fruitful and authentic collaboration, it is important that that collaboration evolves from the Trinitarian, relational, understanding of mission as *Missio Dei* and not from the narrower perspective of an already defined apostolic activity.

The Call to Collaboration

‘Collaborative ministry is not an optional extra but the manner in which the ministry of the gospel is a gospel ministry’. This is a challenging statement from Paredes signifying that the call to collaboration is inherent in the Christian call to ministry. Authentic ministry is collaborative... Since the Christian identity is fundamentally relational, “collaborative ministry” has to be rooted in the relationality of the Trinity.

Stephen Pickard, writing from an Anglican Australian perspective, emphasizes that collaboration is not a passing fashion, but is rather “*a practical demonstration of Gospel shaped relationality and an expression of the true sociality that characterizes the created order.*” Collaboration is not limited to laity and ordained working together. There are deep theological foundations for collaboration – it is an expression in mission of the example of the relational Trinitarian God. It flows from an ecclesiology that is respectful of the call and giftedness of all the members of the Body of Christ.

Collaborative ministry for mission concerns therefore the *‘dynamics of relationships’*

among all agents (clergy, religious, lay faithful), each contributing from their own particular call and giftedness. This working together in mutually respectful and supportive ways for mission creates a synergy that is more than the sum of the parts.

Pickard in a very challenging way, suggests that individualist and isolationist approaches are contrary to the practice of Jesus, and to Paul’s understanding of what it means to be members of the one body and to belong to each other. (Romans 12:5)

The call to collaborative ministry then is a call to just and authentic relationships between the different collaborating agents, focused on participation in the *Missio Dei*, creating a synergy in mission from their unity in diversity.

Understanding of Collaboration

Collaboration for mission or in formation requires a common understanding of what it means to collaborate. At its simplest, to collaborate means **to work with** others. A very simplistic definition perhaps but the little preposition in this sentence is vitally important – working **‘with’** is not the same as working **‘for’**. Already the use of **‘with’** creates a sense of the mutuality of the relationship between collaborating parties... Paredes helpfully offers three approaches to ministry which help to hone our understanding of collaboration.

- (i) He speaks of the dominant paradigm within the Church which is still the traditional model where the ordained minister is the sole minister and people receive that ministry. However, it is not the same to “work with” as to “work for” someone in a hierarchical relationship.
- (ii) In the second example he speaks of ‘Help and delegation’. In this approach there is still the sense of a hierarchical order of others helping the one in charge of the ministry.
- (iii) Collaborative ministry: In this approach there is a sense of mutuality and

partnership; there is respect for differences; a common approach to conceiving the approach to ministry with open communication and feedback.

Perhaps for many of us we have to move from the 'help and delegation' approach to ministry to the '*with*' ministry, to a more authentic collaborative approach.

Conditions for Fruitful Collaboration

Finally, something about the conditions necessary to facilitate a collaborative approach to ministry. '*The joy of ministry resides in collaborative practices, where all play a part and regard the ministry as a truly shared task rather than the monopoly of one particular group*'. (Paredes)

So how can you ensure that it is genuine collaborative ministry? How do we ensure it is not the monopoly of one group?

Given our history of being quite individualistic and isolationist, we cannot presume to automatically be able to tap into the necessary skills for collaborative ministry. We must devote time and energy to cultivating these skills.

Collaboration in mission through very different charisms and ministries is not easy. It requires a lot of spiritual maturity. It requires work on developing a sense of common purpose; It requires authentic teamwork; It requires an understanding of the power dynamics inherent in collaborative approaches. In relation to the power dynamics, Paredes suggests - *a collaborative approach to ministry requires both sharing of power and a generous bestowal of power*. This is both counter intuitive and counter cultural in our competitive world of today.

Perhaps a key dimension for collaborative approaches to work is to cultivate intercultural competence among the partners. Intercultural skills of openness, respect for diversity, acceptance of others, awareness of prejudice and bias are all helpful competencies when engaging in collaborative initiatives. Each partner has their own strong sense of identity and traditional ways of proceeding which will be challenges as the collaborative initiative takes root and evolves.

These are just a few thoughts to whet your appetite for the sharing we will enjoy for the remainder of the day. All that remains for me to do is to wish you an enjoyable and inspirational Spring Seminar.



Photo from the SEDOS Spring Seminar at UISG

Missio Dei Is Missio Trinitas

Theological and Biblical Foundations for Inter-Congregational Collaboration in Mission and Formation

1 Introduction

One of the most important theological (re-)discoveries of the twentieth century ecumenical and missional movements is *missio Dei* (“the mission of God”); grounding the mission of the church in the character of God as a missionary God. The concept is limited, however, when writers use it to shape contemporary theology of mission but focus on one aspect of God: the Father as the sending God, or Jesus as the model of incarnational mission, or the Spirit as empowerment for mission. Moreover, the concept is limited if not considered as a foundation for *missio ecclesia* (“the mission of the church”) and the spiritual formation of believers. This article therefore explores, the implications of *missio Dei* as *missio Trinitas* for Christian communities in mission, if we can grasp what it means to share the *whole* life of God – Father, Son and Spirit – with the whole world through the whole church. In the form of a question, it asks, what difference does *missio Trinitas* make to Christian communities and their collaboration for mission and formation?

The article thus explores the richness of a theology of the *missio Dei* from an explicitly trinitarian perspective and its implications for congregations and their collaboration. Analysis of *missio Dei* and recent trinitarian theology in the missional church literature leads to consideration of implications for divine agency, spirituality of mission, holistic mission and the mission of the whole people of God. Ultimately, with critical adoption of Mike Breen’s argument that the missional movement is preoccupied with individuals being sent on mission because it focuses on

God as an individual involved in mission, it will be argued that the concept of *missio Trinitas* (“the mission of the Trinity”) is more fruitful for communities serving on mission.

2 *Missio Dei* as *Missio Trinitas*

South African missiologist David Bosch, in his seminal work *Transforming Mission*, explains how the church derives from *missio Dei*:

Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God ... in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity ... The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father, sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit ... expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world ... a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission ... There is a church because there is a mission, not vice versa.

Bosch 1991:390

Note the distinctly trinitarian basis for *missio Dei* that Bosch underlines. He recognized that history had displaced the early church’s Trinitarian emphasis on mission with a focus on soteriology (saving people from damnation), or culture (introducing people from the East to the privileges of the Christian West), or ecclesial concerns (viewing mission as the expansion of the church, or of a particular denomination) (1991:389).

Fortunately, the twentieth century saw a rediscovery of mission as an activity of God. Bosch (1991:368–393) recognizes some Barthian influence in this move, picked up at the 1952 Willingen International Missionary

Council. But in the latter half of the twentieth-century, *missio Dei* was grasped by almost all church branches – in Catholic mission theology of the Second Vatican Council, Eastern Orthodox, many evangelicals and the missional church movement. For example, Catholic mission theology of the Second Vatican Council in *Ad Gentes* (1965) announced: “The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary, since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit”. Lesslie Newbigin, and the Gospel and our Culture movement and missional church movement he inspired, bemoaned an ecclesio-centric (“church-centric”) view of missions and advocated a theocentric reconceptualization of mission – grounded not as an activity of the church but in God’s initiative of sending (Guder 1998:4). Wheaton College missiologist Ed Stetzer maintains there is a consensus across different streams of the church: “*missio Dei* has become the milestone concept of the twentieth-century’s theology of mission” (2016:96).

Missio Dei is not just an abstract or philosophical doctrine, but one with practical and focusing implications for revitalising the mission of the people of God. But it invites Christian communities to go deeper, this article suggests, into another doctrine that can sometimes be treated as abstract and philosophical – the Trinity. Thus we discuss the implications not just of *missio Dei* but of *missio Trinitas*. Colin Gunton comments that everything “looks different when theologised with and through the doctrine of the Trinity” (2003:22). What difference does the Trinity make for mission and formation, and congregations cooperating with one another and with the God of mission and formation?

Some words need adjectives or possessives to emphasize their nature, especially if that nature has been forgotten or neglected. For example, “missional” when used in the term “missional church” should be considered redundant. Church is by nature missional. If everyone understood the term church correctly then we would not need the

“missional church”, as if there is any other kind of church. But “missional”, rather than being superfluous, helps remind us of an important aspect (or essence) of church. Similarly, “Dei” in “*missio Dei*” is in some ways redundant. Mission is part of the character of God. There is no other Christian mission other than what finds its source in God. If everyone understood the source of mission correctly, we would not need to emphasise “*missio Dei*” as if there could be any other Christian mission. But “Dei” reminds us that mission belongs to and derives from and is essentially God turning attention to the world and remaking it.

We could also say that it is not necessary to expand *missio Dei* and talk about *missio Trinitas*. There is no ultimate semantic difference between *missio Dei* and *missio Trinitas*. *Missio Dei* is mission Trinitas. The God of *missio Dei* is trinitarian. When we talk about *missio Dei* we are always referring to the mission of the God of the Bible who is Father, Son and Spirit. Hastings asserts that our understanding of Trinity emerges from the mission of God, and that “we say that the *missio Dei* is only true because of the *missio Trinitas*” (2012:251). However, *missio Dei* can unfortunately be understood focusing on one aspect of God: God as Father the sending God, or Jesus as model of incarnational mission, or the Spirit as empowerment for mission. Using the term “*missio Trinitas*” invites us to emphasize God’s trinitarian nature and what this means for mission.

Missio Dei cannot be understood other than as a *Missio Trinitas*. Neither is *missio Dei* prior in logical development to the Trinitarian unveiling. The Creator God, the Covenant God of Israel, has been unveiled in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the eschatological presence of the Spirit. The Creator Covenant God *is* Father, Son and Spirit. That is our primary ontological reality. This ontological primacy of the Trinitarian unveiling must shape epistemology and everything that Christian communities do, say and think. N T Wright (2013) argues that the apostle Paul redefined the primary Jewish theological elements of creational

monotheism, election and eschatology in the light of the first century inbreaking of the Kingdom of God in and through Jesus and the Spirit's eschatological outpouring. Paul was not rejecting Jewish understandings of Yahweh's work, but he "rethought, reworked and reimagined them around Jesus the Messiah on the one hand and the Spirit on the other" (Wright 2013: 612). Those truths of creational monotheism and election are chronologically prior to the Trinitarian unveiling. Yet the unveiling of the Trinity illuminates the logic of election and creational monotheism (centrally in Pneumatological Christological categories). *Missio Dei* and its functional implications cannot be understood prior to or without understanding Trinitarian relational ontology. To what extent then, and where and how, are Christian communities shaped by *missio Trinitas*, and what difference does it make? In what ways does the God of mission invite congregations to cooperate both with God and with each other in mission, and in formation for mission? This article identifies a range of missional church literature that references *missio Dei* and especially *missio Trinitas*, including writing which is seminal in the missional movement by Alan Roxburgh, Craig Van Gelder, Mike Breen, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. The remainder of the article considers how this selection of missional church literature is shaped by *missio Dei* and more specifically *missio Trinitas*, and the implications *missio Trinitas* points towards.

3 Missional Church Discussion

My introduction to missional church was through Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch's *The Shaping of Things to Come*. They urged recalibrating church around mission, and going back a step further to rethink mission around Jesus. Thus, they started with Christology, let that inform missiology and in turn shape ecclesiology (Frost and Hirsch 2003:16, 209). Frost explains they were intent to urge church leaders not be fixated with "getting church right" and to recalibrate with reference to Jesus in the gospels, as

suggested by the title of their later book *ReJesus* (2009). Hirsch underlined this in *The Forgotten Ways* (2006:143):

Not only our purpose is defined by the person and work of Jesus, but our methodology as well. These set the agenda of our missiology. Our missiology (our sense of purpose in the world) must then go on to inform the nature and functions, as well as the forms, of the church.... It is absolutely vital that we get the order right. It is Christ who determines our purpose and mission in the world, and then it is our mission that must drive our search for modes of being-in-the-world.

They were eager, Frost wrote, to go back to the first principles of Jesus' ministry and teaching, and let that (re-)shape a way of being in the world as church (Frost, Foreword in Hill 2017:x).

However, basing ecclesiology and missiology purely on Christology can neglect the contribution of Trinitarian theology. This is where the church is at risk of a "deficient trinitarianism" (Flett 2009:6). Without a Trinitarian foundation, missiology and ecclesiology will risk being underdeveloped. Hence the key question for this project: what are the implications of *missio Dei* being *missio Trinitas*, and what difference does this make for mission and church?

I start with Frost and Hirsch because they helped inform and transform my missional thinking, and they are seminal missional writers influential in my Australian church context. Yet their influence is not limited to Australia, and for the last two decades there has been an expanding interest in missional church frameworks by various writers. Van Gelder and Zscheile (2011) helpfully map missional church discussions as a tree of different branches that have grown globally since the seminal work of *Missional Church* (Guder 1998). This article focuses on how different branches particularly treat *missio Dei* and *missio Trinitas*.

There are two streams of how Trinitarian theology influences missiology and ecclesiology (Bevans and Schroeder

2004:286–304; Van Gelder 2007a:28– 30) Firstly, there is an understanding of the *sending* work of God: the Father sending the Son, the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, and the Trinitarian godhead sending the church (Bosch 1991:390). The other Trinitarian stream deals with the interrelatedness of three persons within the Godhead and how this social reality is reflected in church (Zizioulas 1985). God in three persons models community life and invites people into the life and community of God, or more poetically perichoresis; the movement (or dance) of God (La Cugna 1991:272; Volf 1998). My intention is to consider the strengths of both streams, and in particular foreground the social Trinity which is not as developed in the missional literature. Some missional writers have begun to engage Trinitarian theology. But often Trinitarianism is mentioned as important without delving into its implications. For example, Hirsch's discussion of the Trinity in *The Forgotten Ways* is limited to the triune Creator-God and the theological consistency of learning from organic systems, which God created (2006:180–181). Surprisingly, Hirsch does not draw on Trinitarian reflection for his discussion of community and *communitas*, or mission more broadly, both for which the Trinity could be a fruitful resource of inspiration.

Frost suggests that the first essential feature of any missional community, whether it looks like traditional church or any form of fresh expression of church, is Trinitarian theology as a framework and glue of the community (2006:145–156). He warns against hierarchicalism and downplaying the triunity of God, but is yet to develop these implications further (Frost 2006:146– 147; Frost 2007:45–50, 93). Frost and Hirsch both welcome the Christ-centred “sending” aspect of Trinitarian theology, but preferred to approach the Trinity through Christology and focus on the monotheism of the Shema and Jesus is Lord (Frost and Hirsch 2009:137–138).

Social Trinitarian theology, or perichoresis, was popularised in some emerging churches

by Baxter Kruger (2002) and more broadly by Pete Ward's *Liquid Church* (2002). Gary Simpson (2007:75–83) outlined how *missio Dei* has permeated the missional church but the more recent social Trinitarianism was slower to reach, much less permeate, emerging or missional churches. Missional churches helpfully focus on the mission of the church based on a fresh understanding of Jesus, but can risk an underdeveloped ecclesiology if they practically ignore the Trinity (Cronshaw 2009:58–62).

Graham Hill argues that Trinitarian theology is essential for churches to be truly missional: “Each member of the Trinity plays a role in the triune God's missional action and nature (2017:263).” It is not the case, however, that God merely “goes on mission”. The Creator Covenant God in Trinitarian Communion is mission; and each divine Person expresses the Triune God's mission in the perichoretic economy. Hill is concerned, however, that Trinitarian discussion is not widespread in missional literature. He adapts Karl Rahner's critique of theology in general: “Should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious [missional] literature could well remain virtually unchanged” (Rahner 2001:10–11; in Hill 2017:264).

4 Missio Trinitas Implications

This brings us back to the central and overriding question of this article: what difference does *missio Trinitas* make to Christian communities and how congregations cooperate with God and one another? There are five significant truths that the mission and missional church literature suggest as implications of *missio Dei* and more specifically *missio Trinitas*. *Missio Trinitas* places the primary responsibility for mission with a Trinitarian God, invites the church to join God in the dance of (co-)mission, moves mission beyond church programs to a spirituality of mission, turns church attention *to a whole gospel* for the whole world, and calls all Christians into

mission as communities rather than individuals.

4.1 Missio Trinitas Places the Primary Responsibility for Mission with a Trinitarian God

An initial difference missio Dei makes is freeing God's people from bearing ultimate responsibility for mission. Mission is not a matter of human agency but firstly divine agency. The initiative is not with Christian communities and their members. They are commissioned to participate in what is first and last both divine self-unveiling and divine cosmic new creation. It is missio Trinitas into which the people of God are invited. Mission is not ecclesiocentric but theocentric. Mission is not an activity of the church but the essence of the nature of God. It is an economic implication of God's trinitarian being. This is more than saying mission is an attribute of God, as if mission is one part of God's nature alongside other aspects. Instead, mission is inherent in the "economic Trinity" and therefore far more than an attribute of the Creator. Mission is the narrative of the Trinitarian unveiling. In Trinitarian unveiling the "economic Trinity" is the very means by which the Creator God unveils the "immanent Trinity". Hence mission – that is the "economic Trinity" – is the means by which the "immanent Trinity" is unveiled. Furthermore, that unveiling of the immanent Trinity in the economic Trinity is in essence the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. The Creator Covenant God's trinitarian unveiling is in essence "mission", and the Trinity invites people into relationship and community with God and with one another (Moltmann 1993). Forgetting that narrative of the Trinitarian story of God in mission leaves the church thinking they are responsible for mission.

Van Gelder and Zscheile (2011:4–8) suggest that a number of renewal movements of recent decades (e.g., church growth, church effectiveness, church health) focused on the purpose and mission of the church, and then explored what churches and leaders can do

differently. This can lead to focusing on human agency. The missional church conversation, in contrast, starts with the church's identity and nature. However, even missional church literature can assume the church's identity as missional and move too quickly to focus on how the church organizes itself or what the church does on God's behalf. The focus shifts too quickly from Spirit agency in the church to human agency and responsibility. Missio Dei reminds the church that the primary responsibility for mission stays with God: "The primary agency for mission moves to divine initiative through the ministry of the Spirit as the larger framework within which our human response takes place" (Van Gelder and Zscheile 2011:8).

Lest human agency eclipse missio Dei, it is important to remember in our theology and practice of mission that God bears the ultimate responsibility. The role of human agency (missions) finds meaning and inspiration in the Trinitarian divine agency of God (the higher order mission of God). That Trinitarian divine agency is essential foundation for Christian communities. Realizing conceptually that the divine agency for mission is thoroughly Trinitarian helps the people of God be aware of their adopted fellowship in the primary Triune Communion of Father, Son and Spirit. Comprehending their graced fellowship in the divine life consequently reorients their participation in the mission of the Triune God. The role of human agency finds its meaning within the divine being of God and is familial. It is then obvious, and liberating, that the church does not bear primary responsibility for mission.

Since missio Dei is mission Trinitas, this divine agency for mission is Trinitarian. Mission is firstly the essence of the nature of God as Trinity, not primarily an activity of the church. In other words, it is not ecclesiocentric but Trinitarian-centric. As missio Trinitas, mission is "God-originated, Christ-centred and Spirit-empowered" (Engel and Dyrness 2000:37). There is inspiration and focus for the people of God in each of those truths. It is liberating for mission not to

be strategic plan-originated, church-centered and leadership-empowered. Mission appropriately starts with God (the Father), is centered in God (Jesus the Son) and empowered by God (through God's Spirit). Just as mission is not primarily an activity of the church, it is not just an activity or function of one or two Persons of God. Inspiration, focus and help for mission comes from a Trinitarian God. Complete and ultimate agency for mission is with the Trinity (not with humans and/or even the church). Moltmann's assertion of where mission lies is explicitly Trinitarian: "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church" (1977:64; cited by Bosch 1991:390). Thus we are not merely moving from human to divine agency in general, but specifically to Trinitarian agency.

Lesslie Newbigin, perhaps more than any other single writer, has helped highlight the challenge of mission to the Western world. Newbigin admitted he originally was too focused on the church's mission. He had a paradigm change from seeing the primary "agent" of mission as the church, to a fully Trinitarian understanding. He bemoaned what he came to see was a "church-centric" view of missions that was too exclusively founded on the work of Christ (rather than also the Father and Spirit's role). Yong suggests that just as Barth revitalized the doctrine of the Trinity for theology in the twentieth-century, Newbigin retrieved Trinitarian theology for mission theology (2015b:148). Yet Yong argues that Newbigin still proposed more of a Christological than pneumatological trinitarianism, in the context of twentieth century theology that was shy of the Holy Spirit (Yong 2015b:150–151). It is important to grasp the divine agency of mission, but in Trinitarian holism and not be *overly* focused on the authority of the Father, or the work or example of the Son, or the filling of the Spirit. Newbigin was ahead of his time in suggesting how a Trinitarian mission holds together God's complete work: "proclamation" of the Kingdom (in the

Father's authority), "presence" of the Kingdom (through the Son) and "prevenience" of the Kingdom (through the Spirit who "goes before" the church) (Newbigin 1963:31–34). The implications of Newbigin's proposals regarding the Trinitarian responsibility and inspiration for mission are still being worked out.

4.2 Missio Trinitas Invites the Church to Join God in the Dance of (Co-) Mission

The second difference that *missio Dei* makes is that although mission belongs to God, God invites the people of God to cooperate in mission. Mission is firstly God's responsibility, but the church still has a responsibility; to be available to cooperate in God's mission. The commission that God gives the church is actually a co-mission, something that the church does together with God, cooperatively. Moreover, congregations are invited to cooperate together with God in this co-mission, and to be formed by a Trinitarian God for this purpose. Mission, then, can be conceptualized as all of what God is doing in the world to remake it according to God's purposes, with which God invites the people of God to cooperate.

Van Gelder appeals for the church to freshly recognize divine agency in mission, yet calls the church to orientate itself around God's activity. The Triune God, he says, is the primary acting subject rather than the church. However, the church participates in God's mission – as sign that God's redemption is present, foretaste of what redemption will be like and instrument to carry the message into local contexts all around the world (Van Gelder 2007a:19; echoing Newbigin 1978). *Missio Dei* gives the church the privilege of cooperating with God in these missional ways.

It is reassuring for the people of God that ultimate responsibility for mission lies with God as Trinity, but also that it is the privilege of the church to be included in joining the Trinity in mission; sharing the whole life of God with the world. A Trinitarian mission,

moreover, is broad in its scope. The Trinitarian dance of God is seeking to remake the world, and invites the church to join in the dance. Pete Ward uses perichoresis to explain how the Trinity's relationships draw God's people into "the divine trinitarian dance of God" (2002:49–55). But the dance of God is not just a relational connection but a missional cooperation. God as Trinity cooperates together in the dance of mission. The Trinity invites the church to join this dance. Together with God and in step with God, God and the church together invite the world to come back into sync with God's purposes. Mission, said Newbigin, is logically best viewed "as the proclaiming of the kingdom of the Father, as sharing the life of the Son, and as bearing the witness of the Spirit" (1978:31, 20–72). The co-mission that God's people are privileged to join with involves the work or dance of all of God – Father, Son and Spirit.

Craig van Gelder emphasizes divine and Trinitarian agency, arguing that: "A trinitarian understanding is now the common starting point for thinking about God's people in the world, about the church, and about how the church participates in God's mission in the world" (2000:11). He explains how the mission of the church depends on God as creator of the church, who sends the church to participate in mission (through the power of the Spirit and based on the work of Christ):

God as a creating God also creates the church through the Spirit, who calls, gathers, and sends the church into the world to participate in God's mission. This participation is based on the redemption that God accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a redemption that was announced by Jesus as the "kingdom of God" ... the "redemptive reign of God in Christ".

(Van Gelder 2007a:18; drawing on Van Gelder 2000:74–76)

Trinitarian convictions anchor the mission of the church since it is created and sent by God,

redeemed by Christ and empowered by the Spirit. The foundation or agency of mission is Trinitarian.

4.3 Missio Trinitas Moves Mission beyond Church Programs to a Spirituality of Mission

Missio Dei is not an organizational "model" to plug into a church or Christian community to make it work better. At a conceptual level, missio Dei reminds the Church that it is missionary in its very essence and nature, originating as it does in the mission of God. At this level, the challenge for the church and congregations and their engagement in mission is more about imagination and theology, rather than programs and models. It is a paradigm change that churches need to adopt that will influence all they do, rather than a program they need to implement. Thus, Neill suggested: "The age of missions is at an end; the age of mission has begun" (1966:572; cited in Bosch 1991:391). Frost and Hirsch similarly assert that the essence of "missional church" is not a particular style or format or program of church, but adopting a posture of mission for the whole church, always remembering that the mission is God's (2003: 39–40). The role of human agency (missions' programs and activities) finds its meaning within the divine agency of God (the higher order mission of God). Missional revitalization is not about adding more activities, but adopting a posture of mission. Van Gelder (2007b) suggests the key for focusing on divine agency is to invite congregations to discern together what God's Spirit is up to and seek to join in with that, rather than starting with ideas about strategies and innovations. Moreover, we can add, the invitation is to cooperate as congregations in discerning and acting together with God for the mission and formation for which we are called to cooperate with God.

At a relational level, the challenge for churches and their engagement in mission is more about spirituality and familial relationship with God as Trinity. It is an invitation of formation. Missio Trinitas is more than a posture of mission as another

tool for organizational renewal. It is a relationship that influences all they do, or a divinely given familial responsibility rather than institutional requirement or organizational restructuring. The church is missionary in its essence and nature, originating as it does in the very ontological Communion of the holy love of God as one God and three persons in perichoretic indwelling as Father, Son and Spirit. The church is called to and exists in that co-inhering indwelling. Thus the challenge for a church is not merely to adopt a mission posture but to live into its relationally missionary identity. The Trinitarian Creator God enlivens, leads, sustains and with holy love encircles the church and invites her to join the Trinitarian God in the dance of New Creation which is mission.

The primary identity of God's people in Christ is relational rather than legal or institutional. A spirituality of mission reflects an ontological co-inhering of the church in Christ in and through the co-inhering life in the Spirit empowering flourishing mission, rather than a functional institutional underpinning of church mission. The Trinity is a relationship to experience through participatory indwelling, not just a doctrinal concept. The last Adam incorporates the church into the life of the Trinity. By abiding in Christ the church is birthed into mission, guided in mission, sustaining by the Spirit and having its very life inhabited by the Spirit – in mission. Identifying as sons and daughters of a Heavenly Father birthed into life in Christ by the Spirit helps the church escape an institutional mindset of church. Instead, the primary focus for the church's engagement in mission is the gift of hospitality both given and received. The familial life of hospitality of Christian communities invites those who might be strangers to dine and even to love together with them. That is the gift of New Testament ecclesiology and outworking of a missional spirituality.

Missio Trinitas arguably frames not just a posture for mission but a fully grounded spirituality for mission. Mission in

Trinitarian perspective is not just about church programs but about how God is recreating the world and empowering the church through the indwelling Spirit to cooperate with that. American missiologist Gregory Leffel (2017) explains that John 17 launches the idea of perichoresis, and a perichoretic or Trinitarian spirituality for (co-)mission:

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.... I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.... I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:18, 20–21, 23)

“Perichoresis” literally means “mutual indwelling” or “interpenetration”, and that idea is central to a Trinitarian understanding of mission. God as Trinity functions in “mutual indwelling”, and Jesus’ prayer is that his disciples will join that movement and mutual sharing. God shares life among the Godhead with one another, but then also shares life with followers of Jesus who together with God (or more appropriately God together with them) shares life with the world. The other place John alludes to mutual indwelling as a spirituality of mission is with Jesus as the Vine and disciples as the branches, explaining that as disciples dwell in God and God in them, they will bear fruit (Jn 15:1–8). But John 17 alludes more to the mystery of God's Trinitarian life that the church is invited into. It is, as Leffel (2017) suggests, an attitude, a frame of mind, a submission of faith, a practice of conscience and a guiding paradigm that the church dwells in God and God in them, with the end purpose that others will be invited to join as well, so that in the end “God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28b NIV; Leffel 2017).

John expresses the end purpose of this mutual indwelling or spirituality as: “so that the world may believe ... [and] know that [God] has loved them” (John 17:21, 23). Missio Trinitas thus recalibrates the church away from a programmed and managed approach to mission. It invites the people of God into an abiding relationship that nourishes mission. Mission arises foundationally from participation in the very life of God as Trinity. This indwelling of the Spirit in the church is life creating. N. T. Wright observes, “The spirit was not, for Paul and his contemporaries, a ‘doctrine’ or ‘dogma’ to be discussed, but the breath of life which put them in a position to discuss everything else – and more to the point, to worship, pray, love and work” (2013: 710). This perspective is a thorough-going spirituality of mission. To be “missional” is first and foremost a spirituality. The mission of the church begins with, is focused by and is fueled through participation with God.

Hastings suggests that the greatest secret to co-missioning is “to be experientially participating in the triune God”; as God’s people are intoxicated with God, they will more likely want to vibrantly share the life of God with the world (2012:116). Ultimately the activism of co-missioning is not separable from deep spirituality; missional acts are carried out in participation with what God is doing. The needs for mission in the world are not something Christians need fill with guilt-driven motivation and unbounded activism. These gaps are already filled by the work of Christ and the activity of the Spirit, and the church then fills these gaps “*as one with Christ by the Spirit* in participation with the mission of God” (Hastings 2012:259, original emphasis). Being missionally wide derives from deep worship of the triune sending God. The Trinity is firstly experienced in worship and then lived out with mission. It is immersion in the life of the Trinity that will lead inevitably to being missional (Hastings 2012:104–105).

Trinitarian fullness, moreover, is what best helps sustain the church for the challenges of mission. Missio Dei is limited when writers

use it to shape contemporary theology of mission but focus on one aspect of God; for example, God as Father the sending God, or Jesus as model of incarnational mission, or the Spirit as empowerment for mission. Different renewal movements may invite the church to be captured by the Father heart of God, or have their imagination fueled by the Jesus of the gospels, or be inspired and empowered by the filling of the Spirit. But a fully-orbed spirituality of mission needs all of God, in order to generously share the whole life of God Father, Son and Spirit with the world. Sharing the fullness of a Trinitarian God with the world begins for the church in worship of God, as Braaten argues:

This Trinitarian grounding of mission should make clear that God and not the church is the primary subject and source of mission. Advocacy is what the church is about, being God’s advocate in the world. The church must therefore begin its mission with doxology, otherwise everything peters out into social activism and aimless programs (1991:127).

Missio Trinitas moves mission beyond church programs to a spirituality of mission, but it also shapes a servant church that offers a whole gospel for the whole world.

4.4 Missio Trinitas Turns Church Attention to a Whole Gospel for the Whole World

If God is interested not just in the church but the whole world, then missio Dei invites the church to focus on God’s interest in the whole world. Bosch explained that the emerging ecumenical consensus around missio Dei has called all streams of the church to greater attentiveness to the world and its need for holistic mission (1991:368–510). The missions activities (plural) of the church in the world are derivative of the mission of God (the singular primary reference point). In other words, missio Dei is wider than missio ecclesia. This should not be overextended to suggest that mission excludes the church, as some have asserted, but it also means that mission is not limited to church ministries. It is the movement or

turning of God to the world and its need for redemption, “in ordinary human history, not exclusively in and through the church” (Bosch 1991:391). Thus, Bosch concluded his section on *missio Dei*: “It is inconceivable that we could again revert to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission” (1991:393).

The scope of *missio Dei* reflects a Kingdom or reign of God perspective in fostering God’s purposes for all creation. It reflects God’s commitment to the common good of all humanity and the world. Bosch underlines that “To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love” (1991:390). He continues: “In its mission, the church witnesses to the fullness of the promise of God’s reign and participates in the ongoing struggle between that reign and the powers of darkness and evil” (1991:391; drawing on Scherer 1987:84). The implications and breadth of mission, therefore, includes evangelism but also justice, liberation, dialogue and more. It is not just about church planting and saving souls (though that language problematically feeds into Gnosticism), but holistic or integral mission. (Bosch 1991:391, 368–510). Building on Bosch, the foundational volume of the missional church movement states, “Mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation” (Guder 1998:3–4). This sense of all-Creation embracing mission is informed by the kingdom of God: “God’s good news for all the world” (Guder 1998:10). The consequential invitation for the church as new community is to discern what the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is implementing in new creation since its startling invasion in the ministry, cross and resurrection of Christ (Hays 1996: xvii, 193–200).

The church’s role, within a *missio Dei*/ *missio Trinitas* perspective of cooperating with God in fostering the reign of God, is to discern where God is at work in the world and in history (Bosch 1991:391–392). Some

church consultants adopt this framework to foster missional revitalization or congregational transformation and encourage churches to practice attentiveness and discernment as key spiritual disciplines.

In a series of volumes focused on revitalizing churches, Canadian missional consultant Alan Roxburgh urges cultivating a congregational attentiveness to what God is doing in the neighborhood and world around the church. If *missio Dei* turns the attention of a church to the whole world, then it needs a keen openness to discern what God is doing beyond the church. Roxburgh’s *Missional Map-Making* prioritizes this basic posture beyond strategic planning as a starting point: “To cultivate a people in our local churches who are asking questions about what the Spirit is up to in their neighbourhoods requires a church environment where people feel safe enough and encouraged to learn to listen to God and one another as a basic habit of their lives” (2010:137). Part of the problem that he suggests in *Missional* (2011 – note without “church” in the title) is that the missional conversation has become preoccupied with church, rather than focusing on what God is up to in the world. He argues that the shortcoming of most appeals for church growth and renewal, and emerging or missional church reimagination, is that responses are misguided when they focus on church survival and leadership. Roxburgh (2015) helpfully seeks to foreground the agency of God and discerning what God’s Spirit is already doing in the world around us, while empowering the whole people of God to get involved in that agenda. As Bosch suggested, when Christian communities adopt mission from God’s perspective, and understand that God is concerned for the whole world, then clearly mission will affect all people in all of their spheres of activity (1991:391).

Mission shaped by a Trinitarian framework clearly focuses the church on a holistic or integral understanding of mission addressed to the whole world. Mission focused on one person of the Trinity, for example the work

of sacrificial atonement of the Son, can narrow an understanding of mission. Jesus came to save sinners, but also to bring salvation and redemption to the world in a cosmic sense. But thinking also of God the Father or Creator's role in bringing the world back into God's purposes, and the Holy Spirit's role in sustaining and remaking the world, helps turn the church's attention to a whole gospel for the whole world. *Missio Trinitas* includes evangelism but also compassionate service, advocacy for justice and care for creation. Graham Hill reflects: "God welcomes us into his Trinitarian embrace. And he invites us to join in his redeeming and restoring activity in individual lives, social systems, the world in general, human history, and the eschatological age to come" (2017:297). The whole being of God is active in remaking the world according to God's purposes in all these senses. The Lausanne movement has picked up on the inspiration of *missio Dei* and *missio Trinitas* in their vision of "The whole church, taking the whole gospel, to the whole world" (Lausanne II, 1989).

Hastings (2012:98) explains that when people are brought into communion with the triune God, they are assured of eternal life in Christ but also fully recover the dignity of personhood – which, as with the community of the Trinity, is characterized by love of God and neighbor and creation. In Trinitarian mission, therefore, there is no tension between evangelism and social action:

Trinitarian missionaries will be concerned with both proclamation of the saving message of Christ and the development of persons to their fullest human potential by means of education and health care, and with the transformation of communities so that converts might discover the dignity of work, healthy community and creation care.

Hastings 2012:99

A Trinitarian mission is broad in its scope. The Trinitarian dance of God is seeking to remake the world, and invites the church to join in the dance. This includes evangelism because the relational nature of God as

Trinity invites people into right relation with God's self. It also includes mercy ministry and advocacy for justice because God as creator, redeemer and sustainer is committed to helping people experience new creation, redemption and sustaining in the whole of their lives, not just dualistically for their "souls". It also includes

mission as hospitality, since God as Trinity is hospitable to people and invites the church to follow that example in welcoming people of all backgrounds to belong and experience community. *Missio Trinitas* also underlines the importance of creation care. Amos Yong (2015a) maintains that pneumatology has been neglected, or marginalized, but has been "rediscovered" by the Pentecostal movement, including more recently with pneumatological theologies of creation. Creation care needs pneumatological, Christological and patristical facets. All three persons of the Trinity were involved in creation, and all are involved in redemption and indeed in the renewal of creation (Yong 2015a:169–175). Leffel (2017) aims to change the minds of church leaders (or convert them) on the imperative of moving from a Christo-centric to Theo-centric (and Trinitarian) mission, not to downplay Christ but to avoid a narrow gospel:

Make no mistake: Christ is the head of the church, and he will always be at the center of what we do. Having said this, we tend to reduce our gospel witness to the invitation to be born again. Our focus is on the blood of Christ, the call to repentance, re-birth in Christ, and the nurture of our relationship with him. This tends to make Christian faith individualistic. What we lose is the relational emphasis of a full-blooded Trinitarian witness, as well as God's greater concern for the fullness of all human life, for reconciliation between peoples, for justice, the health of the planet, and a vision for what the world will become when God brings it to consummation. i.e., the whole gospel ... back to missional spirituality.

Missio Trinitas reminds the church that God is the ultimate sharer of life and habitual gift-giver in creating, redeeming and sustaining the world – for all the needs of shalom for people and creation.

4.5 *Missio Trinitas Calls all Christians into Mission as Communities rather than Individuals*

Missio Dei reminds us of the agency of God in mission, with which the church cooperates in adopting a posture of mission and focusing on a *whole gospel* for the whole world. Moreover, missio Dei calls the whole people of God into mission. Just as the Father sent the Son, everyone who follows Jesus is “sent” by him into their world and neighborhood. Jesus’ words “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (Jn 20:21) can apply not just to the first disciples, but to all disciples.

Bosch explored how mission is ministry by the whole people of God, or the “apostolate of the laity” sent into the everyday life of their world (1991:467–474). This is a significant shift away from ministry as being monopolized by ordained men. Those called as leaders are to accompany and empower the whole people of God for mission: “Laypersons are no longer just the scouts who, returning from the ‘outside world’ with eyewitness accounts and perhaps some bunches of grapes, report to the ‘operational basis’; they are the operational basis from which the missio Dei proceeds” (Bosch 1991:472). The invitation to cooperate with mission and all of what God is doing in the world to remake it according to his purposes is not for a select few professionals, but for the whole people of God. This is part of the reversal in thinking about church and mission: from sending a few missionaries to all being sent missionaries (Frost and Hirsch 2003:39–40).

When missio Dei is conceptualized as missio Trinitas, which it already is, it also calls the whole people of God into mission as communities and not just individuals, and as communities and congregations cooperating together. Missional leader Mike Breen,

founder of 3DM (an organic movement fostering discipleship and mission), welcomes the contribution of missio Dei to the missional conversation. Yet he suggests that churches are falling short of missional effectiveness when they focus on individual missionaries being sent to influence their neighborhoods, workplaces and schools. He argues part of the problem is Western individualism, and the other part of the problem is the theology of a singular God, underlined by talking about missio Dei. God is one but Breen seeks to remind missional church leaders that they see God’s unity expressed in the diversity of three persons. Even when Jesus was baptized and began his ministry, the Spirit descended on him and a voice from heaven said “This is my Son” – the Father speaking identity to him and the Spirit empowering him for mission. It was a “family on mission”, a model that Breen urges churches to adopt. The commission for Jesus’ mission was to “family business”. Similarly, when churches today are inspired by missio Trinitas, then instead of focusing on individual missionaries they can send “families on mission” to represent God (Breen 2014a).

“Families on mission” are not just parents and their children, but those in church communities sharing in life and mission together. This is the kind of community that Breen says exists in the Trinity and ideally is reflected in churches or families on mission. Unfortunately, churches in the Western world are enmeshed in Western culture. This too often includes all-pervasive individualistic perspectives which also influence mission. Because Western culture is so thoroughly individualistic, then even a term such as missio Dei, which should implicitly be understood in Trinitarian terms, can be understood individually. This leads to emphasis on individualistic mission. Breen (2014b) observes:

While the Missio Dei doesn’t cause individualistic mission all by itself, it does get co-opted by Western individualism. For this reason we are suggesting that beginning

to talk about the *Missio Trinitatis* and being “Families on Mission” could be a helpful way of evolving and nuancing the conversation in a way that better equips people to truly hear the theology in a way that leads to a methodology consistent with it.

In this, Breen would agree with Volf, that Free Church ecclesiology – with its innate volunteerism, individualism and focus on Christology – tends to drift away from Trinitarian perspectives (Volf 1998: 196–197; Hill 2017:278). Volf asserts ecclesial communion ought to reflect Trinitarian communion, and just as divine beings in God are inseparable, Christians should not live in isolation and independence (Volf 1998:191–220; Hill 2017:136–137). *Missio Trinitas* reminds the church of the community within God that the church models itself on, and invites reflecting that with practicing mission as communities or “families on mission” rather than individual “lone ranger” missionaries (Breen 2014b).

Just as the call to mission is for communities and not just individuals, so too the call is for communities and congregations to cooperate together in discerning and acting with mission *Trinitas* rather than merely acting as a congregation individually.

Table 1. Implications of *missio Trinitas*

Missio Trinitas:

- places the primary responsibility for mission with a Trinitarian God
- invites the church to join God in the dance of (co-)mission
- moves mission beyond church programs to a spirituality of mission
- turns church attention *to a whole gospel* for the whole world
- calls all Christians into mission as communities rather than individuals
- calls congregations to cooperate both with God and with one another in mission and formation.

5 Conclusion

Missio Dei, and grounding the mission of the church in the character of God as a missionary God, is one of the most important theological (re-) discoveries of the twentieth-century ecumenical and missional movements. The concept is limited, however, if focused on one aspect of God as sending God, or model of incarnational mission or empowerment for mission. When considering mission, it is important to consider the Trinitarian nature of God and therefore of mission. *Missio Dei* is thoroughly Trinitarian, by definition. Focusing on mission *Trinitas* (rather than thinking of *missio Dei* apart from the Trinity) helps expand the church’s understanding of and confidence in mission. *Missio Trinitas* places the primary responsibility for mission with a Trinitarian God, invites the church to join God in the dance of (co-)mission, moves mission beyond church programs to a spirituality of mission, turns church attention to a whole gospel for the whole world, and more faithfully leads to a method of communities rather than individuals serving on mission. Focusing on *missio Trinitas* helps expand the understanding of and confidence in mission for Christian communities and for congregations cooperating together in mission.

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Cammini di comunione per la vita consacrata in missione collaborazione tra congregazioni nella missione e nella formazione



Un tema, quello che mi viene proposto, di grande interesse che evidenzia la dinamicità della vita consacrata chiamata a tessere relazioni generative che

rende la sua testimonianza efficace e il suo annuncio profetico. È un tema che richiama innanzitutto un concetto importante: la trasformazione, un concetto di dinamicità, un concetto di una formazione che ci pone in continua ricerca, in una continua uscita da noi stessi, verso “il noi”, verso la comunione che rende credibile la nostra missione.

Stiamo attraversando tempi difficili in cui stiamo vivendo una crisi dopo l'altra: la pandemia, le calamità naturali (cicloni, terremoti...), le ondate di calore estremo e la siccità, in altre parti del globo, dovute ai cambiamenti climatici, la guerra e la crisi energetica. Le sfide economiche e sociali sempre più pressanti stanno spingendo uomini e donne a lasciare la loro terra per consegnarsi all'ignoto e affrontare queste crisi, soprattutto a lungo termine, richiede un solido impegno, a tutti i livelli.

La pandemia è stata uno dei fattori scatenanti l'incertezza economica e ad evidenziare la vulnerabilità dell'essere umano. Abbiamo bisogno gli uni degli altri e la fragilità può diventare una risorsa soltanto se Assunta e accolta insieme.

È un tempo di caos, ma anche di Kairos: tanta confusione, ma anche tempo di nuove idee, di prospettive, di percorsi di speranza. Sono tempi in cui siamo interpellati, in modo particolare noi consacrati, a curare una dinamica generativa capace di condurre le comunità religiose verso stili di vita rinnovato dal Vangelo.

Lo scenario è caratterizzato da un “cambiamento profondo e continuo di cui a fatica riusciamo a definire le caratteristiche¹”. Assistiamo ogni giorno a sviluppi sempre nuovi di una rivoluzione socio-culturale, economica, tecnologica ed ecclesiale, mentre si osserva l'incrementarsi della pluralità etnico-culturale e il crescere a dismisura dell'offerta di possibili visioni della vita.

In questo contesto di ricerca, di approfondimento la spinta a cammini sinodali generative perché ci invitano al superamento “dell'io” e alla costruzione profetica e sapienziale del “noi”.

La sinodalità è il cammino che Dio attende dalla Chiesa nel Terzo Millennio, come ha affermato Papa Francesco nel discorso del 17 ottobre 2015, in occasione del 50° anniversario dell'istituzione del Sinodo dei vescovi.

“La sinodalità non è un cammino segnato in partenza e richiede di aprirsi all'inatteso di Dio che, attraverso l'ascolto degli altri, giunge a toccarci, a scuoterci, a moderarci interiormente. Cammino di discernimento in comune di una assemblea radicata nell'eucaristia che prende coscienza di sé e si mette in strada insieme, la sinodalità è fondamentalmente chiamata alla conversione per elaborare e produrre una comunione missionaria al servizio del mondo. Essa è un processo che si svolge nel tempo. Ha bisogno di un inquadramento e di una struttura ma, in modo più fondamentale, è lo stile peculiare che qualifica la vita e la missione della Chiesa, esprimendone la natura come camminare insieme e il riunirsi

¹ CIVCSVA, *Annunciate. Ai consacrati e alle consacrate testimoni del Vangelo tra le genti*. Libreria vaticana 2016, 15.

in assemblea del Popolo di Dio convocato dal Signore Gesù nella forza dello Spirito Santo per annunciare il Vangelo”.²

La vita religiosa è per sua natura sinodale e pertanto deve tendere ad incarnare questo stile comunione sia all'interno delle fraternità sia all'esterno, nel dialogo e nella condivisione con gli altri. Non si tratta di rinunciare alla nostra identità carismatica, ma di condividerla con altri, senza chiusure e senza settarismi.

Papa Francesco si pone come un faro in questo cammino indicandoci la chiamata ad *“essere Chiesa, essere comunità che cammina insieme. Non basta un sinodo, bisogna essere sinodo”*. Già qui è una parola chiave, forte. Non basta un sinodo, non basta mettersi insieme, non basta stare qui insieme, bisogna essere insieme. Se, come consacrati, desideriamo porci in maniera generativa nella missio Dei, dobbiamo avvertire l'invito ad essere missione, ad essere annuncio di comunione con la vita condivisa, in un dialogo fecondo. Questo processo richiede un cambiamento di mentalità, una trasformazione.

*“La Chiesa ha bisogno di un'intensa condivisione interna, - dice ancora Papa Francesco - un dialogo vivo tra i membri dello stesso corpo”*³. Siamo membri di uno stesso corpo. È tempo di un linguaggio nuovo. *È il tempo di tessere relazioni nuove* capaci di condurre all'incontro con il Risorto e questo è frutto dell'impegno di uomini e donne, innanzitutto credenti e radicati in una fede matura, autentica che incoraggia a spendersi per il Vangelo con responsabilità etica mettendo al centro la persona, da sempre oggetto dell'amore divino.

Ogni giorno occorre fare sinodo, impegnandosi a camminare con gli altri, senza lasciare indietro nessuno. «La Chiesa ha bisogno di un'intensa condivisione interna: dialogo vivo tra le membra del corpo. Ogni giorno occorre fare Sinodo, sforzandosi di

camminare insieme, non-solo con chi la pensa allo stesso modo – questo sarebbe facile -, ma con tutti i credenti in Gesù⁴.» Impegnarsi di camminare insieme, non solo con chi riusciamo a condividere visioni e progetti, ma, con l'intero popolo di Dio, intraprendere percorsi e itinerari di speranza e di vita condivisa per la missione.

“Essere una chiesa sinodale significa - continua il Pontefice - tornare a «camminare insieme» realmente per portare in ogni parte del mondo, in ogni comunità e in ogni situazione la luce del Vangelo, l'abbraccio della Chiesa e il sostegno della misericordia di Dio”.⁵ È un invito all'ascolto profondo e alla partecipazione di ciò che siamo, imparando, giorno dopo giorno, a diventare fratelli e sorelle, nell'integrazione delle nostre diversità e nell'accoglienza delle nostre unicità, portando ogni giorno il Vangelo, l'abbraccio della Chiesa, il sostegno della misericordia di Dio.

“Uno stile sinodale non ha come obiettivo principale la stesura di un documento, - ci ricorda Papa Francesco - che pure è prezioso e utile. Più del documento è importante che si diffonda un modo di essere e di lavorare insieme, nell'ascolto e nel discernimento, per giungere a scelte pastorali rispondenti alla realtà.”⁶

Il documento più importante che dobbiamo scrivere con la nostra vita è stare insieme, è creare un noi comunione che assume la missio Dei ed è pronta a condividerne i frutti nella libertà dello Spirito. Attraverso l'ascolto, il discernimento e la partecipazione sapienziale di intuizioni e prospettive, poter giungere insieme a scelte coraggiose e audaci per la missione, è un segno per la Chiesa e il mondo di oggi.

Questa è la nostra missione: esprimere, nel vincolo della fraternità, la comunione Trinitaria: Dio che cammina in mezzo al Suo popolo e sostiene, in Gesù l'umanità in cammino verso il Regno.

² Commissione teologica Internazionale, La sinodalità nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa, p 70 marzo 2018

³ Papa Francesco, Discorso alla Chiesa Greco-Cattolica Ucraina, 5 luglio 2019

⁴ idem

⁵ Papa Francesco, Sinodo sul famiglia, 24 ottobre 2015

⁶ Papa Francesco, Angelus, domenica - 28 ottobre 2018

La nostra missione è condividere come popolo di Dio l'invito a rilanciare e narrare l'umano segnato da Gesù, attraverso modalità nuove di stare in relazione, approcci autentici, concreti e ricchi di umanità.

Uno stile sinodale che ha come obiettivo, non la stesura di un documento o l'elaborazione di procedure, la programmazione di progetti, ma l'esperienza di una comunione di generativa.

Ci viene chiesto, oggi, più che in altri momenti storici, la profezia della prossimità e dell'accoglienza come spazio generativo per essere, nella Chiesa e nel mondo, lievito di novità, seme di cambiamento.

Scrivo Nathalie Becquart – sottosegretaria del Segretariato Generale del Sinodo dei Vescovi - che la sinodalità non è una strada segnata in partenza. Richiede di aprirsi all'inatteso di Dio che, attraverso l'ascolto degli altri, giunge a toccarci, a scuoterci, a modificarci interiormente. A noi fa paura questo, aprirci a ciò che non conosciamo. Aprirci alla novità attraverso l'ascolto degli altri, a lasciarci toccare, scuotere e sfidare dagli altri, da ciò che è diverso e non conosciuto.

“La sinodalità è un *modus vivendi et operandi* che si realizza attraverso l'ascolto comunitario della Parola e la celebrazione dell'eucaristia, la fraternità della comunione e la corresponsabilità e partecipazione di tutto il popolo di Dio, ai vari livelli e nella distinzione dei diversi ministeri e ruoli, alla sua vita e alla sua missione⁷.”

La sinodalità è un modo di vita che favorisce e sviluppa la partecipazione e la collaborazione di tutti. Per entrare nello stile e nella pratica della sinodalità, abbiamo bisogno di coltivare e di dispiegare attitudini spirituali: l'ascolto, il dialogo, l'empatia, la libertà interiore e la libertà di parola, l'umiltà, la ricerca della verità e soprattutto la fiducia nello Spirito Santo che soffia in ognuno e nel gruppo che cammina insieme.

Emerge con forza la necessità di porsi l'uno accanto all'altro nel progettare e lavorare per

l'edificazione del Regno. Abbiamo bisogno di uno stile di compartecipazione privo di ogni forma di “clericalismo”.

L'esperienza della sinodalità è prima di tutto un'esperienza dello Spirito, è un cammino aperto, non tracciato in anticipo, che si tesse grazie all'incontro, al dialogo e alla condivisione che viene ad allargare e modificare la visione di ognuno. Entrare nella sinodalità significa accettare di mettersi in cammino, di vivere da pellegrini in una Chiesa pellegrina in ascolto del reale, del grido dei poveri e dei bisogni del mondo.

«La sinodalità è “una danza insieme” nella quale tutti, pastori e fedeli, grazie a un dialogo vivo e a una condivisione nella fiducia, si muovono in relazione gli uni con gli altri nell'ascolto reciproco e nell'ascolto comune della musica dello Spirito.»⁸ “*È l'arte di una Chiesa che si lascia rinnovare per diventare sempre di più una Chiesa Relazionale, inclusiva, dialogante e generativa, vale a dire una Chiesa in via di formazione che rinasce senza sosta con e grazie a coloro che la fanno vivere.*”⁹

C'è una chiamata profonda da riscoprire che è quella di vivere nel respiro della Trinità. Tutti siamo dentro questo respiro. Camminare insieme è vivere dentro questo spazio generativo, nel grembo della Trinità, attraverso la fraternità e la comunione. È necessario porsi in ascolto dello Spirito riconoscendo che la sinodalità è un *modus vivendi et operandi* che si realizza attraverso la fraternità, la corresponsabilità e la partecipazione di tutti ai vari livelli nella distinzione dei diversi ministeri e ruoli alla vita e alla missione della Chiesa. Si tratta di uno stile, di una pratica, di una maniera di essere Chiesa nella storia, «a immagine della comunione trinitaria», secondo papa Francesco: “La pratica della sinodalità, tradizionale, ma sempre da rinnovare è l'attuazione, nella storia del popolo di Dio in cammino, della Chiesa come mistero di comunione, a immagine della comunione trinitaria. La sinodalità è uno stile, è un

⁷ Commissione teologica internazionale, *La sinodalità nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa*, marzo 2018

⁸ Nathalie Becquart, *La sinodalità, un cammino di conversione comunitaria*, 5 maggio 2021

⁹ Idem

camminare insieme, è quanto il Signore si attende dalla Chiesa del Terzo millennio».

La corresponsabilità è l'appello profetico ad assumere la custodia dell'altro, a sentirci responsabili in quanto ogni fratello/sorella mi appartiene. Le ferite, le vulnerabilità dell'altro diventano la mia carne: l'altro mi appartiene. Si tratta di uno stile di vita, di una pratica di essere Chiesa a immagine di questa comunione Trinitaria, perché la pratica della sinodalità ci rinnova, ci cambia dentro, perché è uno stile è uno camminare insieme ed è questa la Chiesa del terzo millennio, è questa è la Chiesa, la comunità umana che il mondo si attende da questo terzo millennio. Diciamo sempre che la vita consacrata rappresenta sempre questo segno di fraternità proprio perché è questo spazio abitato dalla Trinità e in questo modo, la vita consacrata, in particolare la vita religiosa deve mostrarsi come icona di questa sinodalità di questo camminare reciproco, insieme.

Nel corso della storia della Chiesa, la vita consacrata, in particolare gli istituti religiosi, è stata espressione della vita sinodale. La sinodalità esige che si cammini nel respiro della Trinità. Ora, la vita fraterna in comunità, in virtù della quale le persone consacrate tentano di vivere in Cristo con «un cuore solo e un'anima sola» (At 4, 32), è proposta come un'eloquente "confessione trinitaria" (*Vita Consacrata*, 21).

Uno dei risultati più belli di questa riflessione sinodale è quello che sta aiutando a tutti noi ad assumere con rinnovata consapevolezza che la vita religiosa, la vita consacrata ha questa natura profondamente comunionale. Ed è questa la nostra missione. La comunione è proprio questo, condividere, con - partecipare, assumere la stessa visione. Assume con-partecipare. La comunione è mangiare lo stesso pane. Dobbiamo avvertire la chiamata a crescere nella comunione, nella comunione di intenti, nella ricerca del bene per gli altri. Questo si realizza attraverso un modo nuovo di stare in relazione. Credo che la prima missione che siamo chiamati tutti noi a costruire oggi è un modo nuovo di stare in relazione tra noi,

coltivando l'incontro, favorendo la mistica del vivere insieme. Una mistica che poi si fa l'ascolto degli altri, un ascolto profondo, l'assoluzione pena del farsi carico degli altri, soprattutto di coloro che fanno più fatica.

Curando le nostre relazioni, tessendo alleanze nuove e rafforzando la prossimità riusciremo ad individuare strategie missionarie innovative e riescono a dare risposte adeguate alle tante istanze del nostro tempo.

Ci sono molti ambiti dove noi possiamo vivere la sinodalità e, sicuramente le fraternità/sororità sono luoghi privilegiati in cui impariamo la mistica dell'incontro.

Se vogliamo essere uomini e donne in missione, dobbiamo interrogarci come la viviamo nelle nostre fraternità perché fratelli e sorelle si diventa. La trasformazione che il mondo si attende da noi è la creazione di spazi ricchi di comunione e di condivisione tra le persone, ma anche percorsi semplici ed efficaci in cui osare e sperimentare le dimensioni del vivere tra fratelli e sorelle, dove il protagonismo e l'individualismo cedano il passo alla dimensione del "noi".

A partire da una visione sinodale della vita fraterna in comunità, si deve ribadire con forza la necessità di una conversione dall'"io" (individualismo) al "noi", in cui ogni membro si senta responsabile della crescita dell'altro. Una vita fraterna in comunità che vuole presentarsi in stile sinodale deve essere aperta alla partecipazione di tutti, all'ascolto di tutti, a contare su tutti quando si tratta di discernimento.

Noi assorbiamo quello che viviamo fuori. C'è un grande individualismo e anche nelle nostre fraternità. A volte c'è anche il rischio che i nostri ministeri sono una risposta al nostro individualismo.

Le nostre comunità di vita devono diventare luoghi generativi: comunità o meglio koinonie, luoghi in cui attraverso l'impegno quotidiano si diventa artigiani di comunione e si passa da comunità di vita a comunione di vita. È la comunità chiamata dallo Spirito Santo ad assumere questo bellissimo e impegnativo percorso, a diventare "grembo"

generativo di vita, luogo della fecondità dell'amore attraverso non soltanto un progetto, ma soprattutto come stile di vita. È frutto di tanto impegno da parte di ciascuno.

L'esperienza intercongregazionale è un dono per la Chiesa del Terzo Millennio. La vita consacrata e chiamata ad andare in pellegrinaggio con altre persone consacrate. Noi camminiamo insieme, siamo pellegrini insieme in atteggiamento di dialogo carismatico. Siamo in dialogo carismatico dove i nostri carismi si arricchiscono vicendevolmente. C'è una ricchezza dai nostri incontri perché ogni carisma è un dono per la Chiesa e, nella Chiesa diventiamo l'uno dono per l'altro. Siamo incoraggiati ad unire le forze per portare avanti progetti comuni, a cercare risposte alle tante sfide di questo momento storico che stiamo vivendo. È il momento di uscire, di mettersi insieme, di mettersi in cordata e rendere i nostri percorsi ricchi di un Vangelo narrato, sperimentato, vissuto. Guardando la realtà nella quale siamo immersi proviamo a individuare e sperimentare nuovi percorsi, realizzare momenti inclusivi, vibranti, aperti all'esistenza e al Vangelo, in cui trovare interesse e cuore.

L'orizzonte del futuro è proprio questo: camminare insieme accogliendo le nostre differenze e valorizzando il meglio che ognuno di noi ha per costruire a partire dalla fraternità intercongregazionale: la comunione per la missione. È questa è la forza che orienta il nostro stare insieme e deve aiutarci a superare le sfide delle nostre diversità. Noi ci fermiamo tanto sulle nostre differenze e a volte ne facciamo degli ostacoli, invece di guardare le nostre diversità. La diversità è una ricchezza, la differenza è un ostacolo per progetti comuni.

Crescere nella comunione tra i diversi carismi: è questa è la profezia che il mondo attende. È arrivato il momento della comunione solidale, come frutto positivo di una purificazione dello Spirito che dilata i cuori e ci rende più aperti alla comunione come bisogno e dono reciproco.

La complessità dell'oggi, le problematiche mondiali richiedono completezze,

interpellano tutti, invitano a prendere coscienza che non è più possibile camminare ciascuno per proprio conto. L'individualismo porta lontano, allora mettersi insieme è anche una strategia non è soltanto un bisogno, è una strategia.

«Le sfide della missione sono tali da non poter essere efficacemente affrontate senza la collaborazione, sia nel discernimento che nell'azione, di tutti i membri della Chiesa; una collaborazione che inizia dal rapporto comunionale fra le persone consacrate e i loro istituti.» (Vita consacrata n.46)

In Ripartire da Cristo leggiamo che «La comunione che i consacrati e le consacrate sono chiamati a vivere va ben oltre la propria famiglia religiosa o il proprio istituto. Aprendosi alla comunione con gli altri istituti e le altre forme di consacrazione, possono dilatare la comunione, scoprire le comuni radici evangeliche e insieme cogliere con maggior chiarezza la bellezza della propria identità nella varietà carismatica, come tralci dell'unica vite. Dovrebbero gareggiare nella stima vicendevole per raggiungere il carisma migliore, la carità» (n.30).

Queste parole ci richiamano a vivere una profonda esperienza di comunione e di collaborazione.

Consapevoli che soltanto una stima reciproca, l'accoglienza dei diversi carismi ci può aiutare a camminare insieme e a dare quella testimonianza credibile che il mondo vuole vedere da noi. Ci sono già l'esperienza positive in atto. Ci sono già strutture valide a molti livelli e voi ne siete testimoni. Dobbiamo sostenerle queste esperienze, dobbiamo ancora riconoscere però che c'è tanto cammino ancora da fare.

Formiamo una forte catena gli uni con gli altri, continuiamo a coinvolgerci in una missione comune dalla ricchezza delle diversità dei carismi, perché la nostra piccolezza diventa così amplificata e possiamo essere presenti dove da soli non potremmo arrivare, ma soprattutto ne riusciamo arricchiti, perché ne usciamo insieme.

Laici - Collaboratori nella missione e Coinvolgimento nella Chiesa locale

PARTE I: Collaboratori alla missione.

1a domanda: quale missione?

Risposta: Missio Dei

2a domanda: a quale livello di collaborazione?

Risposta: A pieno livello dalla vocazione battesimale

PARTE II: Impegno nella Chiesa locale

3a domanda: Come incoraggiare questa partecipazione nelle Chiese locali?

Risposta: Investire nella formazione dei laici; Rivedere la formazione del clero; Fare esperienze concrete di rete – camminare insieme, in sinodalità.

1. Collaboratori in quale missione?

Forse quando pensiamo al tema dei laici come collaboratori nella missione, quasi naturalmente viene in mente che essi collaborano alla “nostra” missione, alle “nostre” opere. Quindi siamo felici di vedere che, di fatto, molti di loro occupano oggi posizioni e funzioni importanti nelle nostre scuole, università, ospedali, centri sociali, case di ritiro, parrocchie, ecc. E, sebbene questo possa essere considerato un avanzamento nei rapporti tra i diversi “stati di vita” all'interno della Chiesa (laico, religioso, ministro ordinato), in realtà riflette ancora una mentalità piramidale, che pone i non ordinati e i non consacrati alla base della piramide che prende le decisioni e determina la direzione della missione, che rimane primariamente “nostra”, lasciando a noi di dirigerli ea loro di collaborare.

Penso che il passaggio da questo paradigma a quello di una Chiesa più circolare (e non piramidale) inizi quando ci rendiamo conto che, in nessun modo, la missione che svolgiamo può

essere etichettata come “nostra”, poiché è il Signore che ci sceglie e ci invia a collaborare alla sua missione, cioè è la *Missio Dei*! Come sappiamo, questo antico termine latino significa “Missione di Dio” o “Invio di Dio”, in allusione alla grande missione di Dio di restituire a Sé l'umanità attraverso l'incarnazione e l'invio di Suo Figlio Gesù e la Sua chiamata a noi, per partecipare alla sua missione.

Infatti, questo linguaggio ci ha aiutato, nell'ambito della vita religiosa, a superare le distanze ea creare una maggiore consapevolezza di corpo e di rete apostolica, che comprende tutti coloro che sono coinvolti nella stessa missione. Così, nell'ultima Congregazione Generale dei Gesuiti, ad esempio, il documento finale invita “i Superiori e Direttori dell'opera, così come tutti i Gesuiti e collaboratori nella

missione, a promuovere profonde abitudini di preghiera e di discernimento come preludio e accompagnamento alla pianificazione continua, ma anche per rafforzare i reciproci rapporti e la collaborazione nell'attuazione dei piani. Significa coltivare uno spirito di apertura e di fiducia tra di noi e con tutti coloro che servono la *Missio Dei*” (CG d.2,26). Si vede che non si parla più di collaboratori per la “nostra missione”, poiché oggi comprendiamo più chiaramente che si tratta di “collaborazione con gli altri”, in una “partecipazione alla missione che comprende quanti professano la fede cristiana come noi, gli appartenenti a religioni diverse, le donne e gli uomini di buona volontà che, come noi, desiderano collaborare all'opera riconciliatrice di Cristo. Nelle parole del Padre Generale Arturo Sosa, i gesuiti sono chiamati 'alla missione di Cristo, che non appartiene esclusivamente a noi, ma che condividiamo con



molti uomini e donne consacrati al servizio degli altri” (CG36 d.1, 36).

Naturalmente, tutto ciò richiede tempo e desiderio di conversione perché diventi realtà, perché, come riconoscono i gesuiti, “nonostante i notevoli progressi nella collaborazione all'interno della Compagnia, gli ostacoli continuano a esistere. Le sfide risiedono nella nostra mancanza di immaginazione e coraggio; oppure possono provenire da inibizioni derivanti dai nostri contesti sociali o anche da pratiche abituali localizzate di clericalismo” (CG36 d.2,7).



2. A quale livello di collaborazione?

Oltre ai consacrati e/o ministri ordinati, anche i laici e le laiche partecipano pienamente come collaboratori alla missione di Cristo, attraverso il sacramento del Battesimo, che rende tutti noi discepoli e missionari, come ha ricordato Papa Benedetto XVI ad Aparecida, nel suo discorso inaugurale di quella V Conferenza dell'Episcopato Latinoamericano, quando disse che uno degli obiettivi di quell'incontro era “ricordare anche ai fedeli di questo Continente che, in forza del loro Battesimo, sono chiamati essere discepoli e missionari di Gesù Cristo”¹.

Ma, ancor prima di quel momento e con portata universale, il Concilio Vaticano II ha confermato la visione della Chiesa come Popolo di Dio, come vediamo nella *Lumen gentium*, che nei suoi primi tre capitoli tratta del mistero della Chiesa, della Chiesa come Popolo di Dio e della costituzione gerarchica della Chiesa e in particolare dell'episcopato, che si inserisce e si comprende nell'intero Popolo di Dio, evidenziando così il rapporto di complementarità tra il sacerdozio battesimale, comune a tutti, e il sacerdozio ministeriale, dei ministri ordinati. Ciò conferma che, sebbene solo pochi esercitino il servizio dell'autorità,

tutti nella Chiesa esercitano pienamente il servizio della collaborazione alla missione di Cristo. Infatti, l'intero IV capitolo di questa costituzione conciliare è dedicato a descrivere il ruolo dei laici nella struttura ecclesiastica e la loro missione nella Chiesa, mettendo in luce la

nostra comune identità di cristiani, data dal Battesimo.

Ora, questa piena partecipazione dei laici, e specialmente delle donne, alla missione di Cristo e della sua Chiesa, è ripresa oggi da papa Francesco, il quale si discosta dalla stessa visione del Vaticano II per insistere sul fatto che tale

partecipazione nasce da un'esigenza di la nostra fede, come ha fatto nel suo discorso inaugurale per l'inizio del nuovo cammino sinodale, il 9 ottobre 2021:

Infatti – come dice l'apostolo Paolo – «da un solo Spirito siamo stati tutti battezzati in un solo corpo» (1 Cor 12,13). Il punto di partenza, nel corpo ecclesiale, è questo e non altro: il Battesimo. Da Lui, nostra fonte di vita, deriva l'uguale dignità dei figli di Dio, pur nella diversità dei ministeri e dei carismi. Per questo tutti siamo chiamati a partecipare alla vita della Chiesa e alla sua missione. Se manca una reale partecipazione dell'intero Popolo di Dio, i discorsi sulla comunione rischiano di diventare nient'altro che pie intenzioni. A questo proposito qualche passo in avanti è stato fatto, ma si avverte ancora una certa difficoltà e dobbiamo registrare il disagio e la tribolazione di tanti operatori pastorali, delle organizzazioni partecipanti delle diocesi e delle parrocchie, delle donne che spesso sono ancora lasciato fuori. Tutti a partecipare: è un impegno ecclesiale irrevocabile! Per tutti i battezzati questa è la carta d'identità: il Battesimo².

Fortunatamente, nonostante le resistenze di alcuni settori interni della Chiesa gerarchica e di alcuni gruppi neoconservatori e anti-Vaticano II, l'impegno di Francesco per combattere il

¹ BENEDETTO XVI, Discorso Inaugurale della V Conferenza, Aparecida 2007, n. 3.

² FRANCESCO, Discorso Inaugurale del percorso sinodale, Città del Vaticano, 09 ottobre 2021.

clericalismo e dare più spazio alla partecipazione dei laici, con enfasi sulla partecipazione femminile, ha trovato un riscontro positivo e propositivo in varie parti del mondo, come la regione Pan amazzonica, dove attualmente si sta lavorando per mettere in pratica le proposte approvate al Sinodo Speciale sull'Amazzonia, che nel suo Documento finale afferma:

Il rinnovamento del Concilio Vaticano II colloca i laici all'interno del Popolo di Dio, in una Chiesa tutta ministeriale, che ha nel sacramento del Battesimo il fondamento dell'identità e della missione di ogni cristiano. I laici sono i fedeli che, mediante il Battesimo, sono stati incorporati a Cristo, costituiti nel Popolo di Dio e, a modo loro, resi partecipi del munus sacerdotale, profetico e regale di Cristo, esercitando così il loro ruolo nella missione di tutto il popolo cristiano nella Chiesa e nel mondo (cfr LG 31). Da questo triplice rapporto, con Cristo, con la Chiesa e con il mondo, nascono la vocazione e la missione dei laici. La Chiesa in Amazzonia, in vista di una società equa e solidale nella cura della "casa comune", vuole fare dei laici attori privilegiati. La sua azione è stata ed è vitale, sia nel coordinamento delle comunità ecclesiali, nell'esercizio dei ministeri, sia nel suo impegno profetico per un mondo inclusivo di tutti, che ha nei suoi martiri una testimonianza che interpella³.

3. Come favorire questa partecipazione nelle Chiese locali?

Dopo aver riflettuto sulla missione che svolgiamo come *Missio Dei* e che, al suo interno, la collaborazione dei laici e delle laiche deve essere piena e legittima, a partire dalla comune identità data dal Battesimo, possiamo concludere questa breve esposizione chiedendoci quale possiamo e dobbiamo fare di più per incoraggiare e rafforzare la partecipazione dei laici, non solo nell'esecuzione dei nostri progetti apostolici, ma anche nei processi di elaborazione degli stessi e negli ambiti decisionali.

Certamente, tutti conosciamo iniziative che vanno in quella direzione, a diversi livelli: dal più universale al più localizzato nelle nostre

realità geografiche, ecclesiali e congregazionali. La condivisione di alcune esperienze riservate a questo pomeriggio sarà un momento ricco per applicare il discorso teorico che abbiamo fatto finora.

Tuttavia, vorrei evidenziare alcune linee di azione pastorale che mi sembrano importanti per fomentare questa maggiore partecipazione dei nostri fratelli laici alla missione di Cristo, nella quale siamo tutti collaboratori. Per questo ricorro ancora una volta alla realtà che conosco più da vicino, cioè quella della Chiesa Pan amazzonica, per essere la mia regione di origine e per avervi lavorato per molti anni, essendo fino ad oggi collaboratore della missione che fanno laggiù. Accanto a questo, credo possa essere utile condividere anche la mia esperienza di collaborazione in questo momento con l'équipe di spiritualità del prossimo Sinodo sulla sinodalità, che certamente getta molta luce sul tema che stiamo affrontando.

Un primo aspetto da evidenziare è l'importanza di investire nella formazione dei nostri animatori laici, affinché possano esercitare pienamente la loro fondamentale vocazione di collaboratori nella missione di Cristo con noi, sacerdoti e religiosi, che abbiamo già assicurato un lungo percorso formativo. Lo stesso Papa Francesco, infatti, nell'esortazione apostolica "Querida Amazonia" sottolinea che è importante che i laici si assumano responsabilità importanti per la crescita delle comunità amazzoniche, molte delle quali mancano della presenza regolare della figura sacerdotale e anche della vita consacrata. Ma, sottolinea il Papa, perché i nostri laici possano agire nell'esercizio della leadership in queste comunità, è necessario un adeguato accompagnamento, cioè che sia offerta loro una solida formazione⁴. In questo senso Francesco riprende quanto già proposto dal Documento finale del sinodo amazzonico, quando raccomanda la creazione di programmi di formazione in teologia che siano inculturati e comprendano la formazione congiunta per i ministeri laicali e la formazione dei sacerdoti⁵. Non si tratta semplicemente di copiare e offrire ai laici gli stessi modelli di formazione nello stile clericale o di vita consacrata, ma in modo

³ Documento Finale del Sinodo Amazzonico, n. 93.

⁴ Cf. FRANCESCO, Esortazione Post Sinodale "Querida Amazonia", n. 92.

⁵ Documento Finale del Sinodo Amazzonico, n. 114.

creativo cercare di assicurare ai nostri responsabili laici, come dice il Papa, «la maturazione nella santità attraverso vari servizi laicali, che presuppongono un processo di maturazione – biblica, dottrinale, spirituale e pratica – e diversi percorsi di formazione permanente», permettendo così alle comunità amazzoniche di avere una “presenza stabile di leader laici, maturi e dotati di autorità, che conoscono le lingue, le culture, l'esperienza spirituale e il modo di vivere in comunità in ogni luogo, lasciando spazio alla molteplicità dei doni che lo Spirito Santo semina in tutti”⁶.

Sull'importanza della formazione dei collaboratori laici nella missione della Chiesa (*Missio Dei*), i vescovi latinoamericani riuniti ad Aparecida hanno riconosciuto “la testimonianza e la solidarietà di laici e laiche, sempre più interessati alla loro formazione teologica, come veri missionari della carità, e adoperarsi per trasformare efficacemente il mondo secondo Cristo”⁷. C'è da chiedersi però se, da allora fino ai nostri giorni, ci sia stato davvero un progresso nell'investimento di risorse per la formazione dei laici nelle nostre chiese locali e nelle nostre congregazioni religiose.

Nell'ambito della formazione non si può non menzionare, come di fondamentale importanza per costruire un maggior ruolo dei laici come collaboratori della missione di Cristo, l'attenzione che deve essere prestata alla formazione sacerdotale, affinché, fin dall'inizio, i giovani seminaristi e i futuri sacerdoti imparino a lavorare in collaborazione con le altre forze vive della Chiesa, come i laici e la vita consacrata. Ebbene, uno dei grandi ostacoli per noi per avere più iniziative per la partecipazione dei laici (e, in alcuni luoghi, anche dei consacrati) in prima linea nella pastorale parrocchiale o in altre è il clericalismo predominante, che, secondo Papa Francesco, è direttamente legato all'attaccamento al potere, essendo una vera e propria perversione che finisce per contagiare gli altri, perché «il clericalismo, che non è solo dei chierici, è un comportamento che riguarda tutti noi: il

clericalismo è una perversione della Chiesa»⁸. Occorre quindi favorire, fin dalla formazione iniziale, esperienze concrete ai futuri sacerdoti di lavorare in rete, perché imparino a camminare insieme, in sinodalità.

Con la parola sinodalità arriviamo, poi, all'ultimo aspetto che vorrei evidenziare per favorire la collaborazione e il coinvolgimento dei laici nella missione che oggi tutti siamo chiamati a svolgere, non solo dentro ma soprattutto fuori le mura della Chiesa, come vera “Chiesa in uscita”. Il tema della sinodalità, infatti, è già stato presente nei recenti sinodi convocati dal Papa. Se vogliamo comprendere lo spirito di sinodalità che muove i passi della Chiesa oggi, dobbiamo tenere presente tutto il cammino percorso sin dalla realizzazione del Concilio Vaticano II, l'istituzione del Sinodo dei Vescovi da parte di Papa Paolo VI, fino ad arrivare ai recenti sinodi guidati dall'attuale Papa, poiché sempre più da un sinodo all'altro si vede che Francesco non ha dubbi che «il cammino della sinodalità è il cammino che Dio attende dalla Chiesa di il Terzo Millennio», essendo una “dimensione costitutiva della Chiesa”, così che “ciò che il Signore ci chiede, in un certo senso, è già contenuto nella parola 'sinodo'”⁹.

Ad esempio, al Sinodo su “Le sfide pastorali della famiglia nel contesto dell'evangelizzazione”, nel 2014, Francesco si è reso conto che, metodologicamente, per dibattere un tema così importante e complesso, era necessario e urgente ascoltare, soprattutto alla voce dei laici, stabilendo così una lunga dinamica preparatoria, con due incontri presinodali ad ampia partecipazione, che andavano così maturando la riflessione e preparando il cammino culminato nell'assemblea. Parimenti, nel Sinodo su “I giovani, la fede e il discernimento vocazionale”, nel 2018, è possibile notare un ampliamento della modalità di ascolto, che ha determinato un maggiore spazio per una partecipazione individuale molto ampia a distanza, nella fase preparatoria dell'Assemblea, e anche in questa, vi è stata una rappresentanza più significativa di

⁶ FRANCESCO, Esortazione Post Sinodale “Querida Amazonia”, n. 93-94.

⁷ Documento Finale della V Conferenza Generale dell'Episcopato Latino-Americano e del Caribe, Aparecida, 13-31 maggio 2007, n. 99, f.

⁸ FRANCESCO, Encontro con i giovani di Roma, 11 agosto 2018.

⁹ FRANCESCO, Discorso sulla commemorazione del cinquantenario dell'istituzione del Sinodo dei Vescovi, Vaticano, 17 Ottobre 2015, 2.

uditori, invitati ed esperti, favorendo così che il tema dei giovani fosse affrontato in modo più vivace durante l'assemblea sinodale.

Ma, senza dubbio, è stato nel Sinodo sull'Amazzonia, con il tema “L'Amazzonia: nuovi cammini per la Chiesa e per un'ecologia integrale”, che abbiamo trovato il saggio metodologico più importante in termini di progresso nella sinodalità, dove il due esperienze sinodali precedenti (Famiglia e Giovani) hanno trovato un punto di convergenza e dove hanno cominciato ad affermarsi con maggior forza alcuni cambiamenti strutturali, basati su un'ampia presenza del Popolo di Dio lungo tutto il processo sinodale, caratterizzato metodologicamente da un ascolto concreto e inclusivo, soprattutto di leader nativi, donne, ospiti di altre organizzazioni internazionali o di altre confessioni cristiane, ecc.

La sinodalità non è oggetto della nostra riflessione in questo momento, ma la sua importanza per la Chiesa indica la necessità di ampliare il ventaglio delle esperienze apostoliche che aiutino i cristiani a sapersi sempre più lavorare insieme, nella diversità dei carismi e dei ministeri, attraverso la costruzione del regno di Dio, valorizzando i momenti di ascolto, di dialogo e di discernimento comune, in un processo in cui tutti si sentono inclusi come battezzati e, in definitiva, come persone amate da Dio.



Intercongregational Partnership – ICOF

Introduction

What is ICOF?

The acronym ICOF stands for “**Inter-Congregational Ongoing Formation**”. It is a program initiated by the Union of General Councils of the Missionary Congregations present and working in Africa. These include the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans), the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (MSOLA), the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles (OLA) and the Society of African Missions (SMA). Comboni Missionaries were part of the initial steps and then they dropped out. These five congregations now make the General Board.

In this article, we briefly share with you on:

- the history and vision of ICOF,
- the various ICOF programmes so far and
- a brief evaluation.

History and vision of ICOF

We trace the beginning of ICOF to the first formal meeting of the General Councils of five Congregations who work in Africa on 21 Nov



2014. We said in that meeting that our missionary institutes worked on Catechesis, initial formation for priests and religious, public education and healthcare in the last century. Most of these initiatives have been owned by the local

Church and the civil governments today. This reassures us that we responded to the most important needs of the society at that time.

Our experience of working in collaboration with the local church in the reality of our day led us to the following

question; what are the areas the local

Church and the governments will value most in the coming century so that we can start breaking the ground today?



We had a long and fruitful discussion on this question and we explored more concretely the needs in the area of ongoing formation.

We made a clear separation of three categories in Ongoing Formation:

1. Renewal programmes
2. Formation of Formators
3. Therapeutic help to those struggling with serious challenges

We decided to focus more on renewal programmes. Here are the following reasons behind the choice:

- The local Church organises the initial formation well in almost all countries and many bishops and superiors feel the need for ongoing formation of their members but do not find affordable and easily accessible options.
- Members of our own Institutes go to Europe and America for ongoing formation. This does not look sustainable because of the growing immigration challenges, growing number of members and the costs involved. The centres in the Western world depend on participants and resource people coming from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to run the programmes.

- If we organise ongoing formation in Africa, we will be able to pool our resource people together and we will have enough participants among our institutes and we will keep it open for the local Church. It will be cost effective, the content of the programme will be more contextualised, and it will be our joint missionary contribution in Africa.

Then in the following meeting on 21 February 2015, we decided to start two programmes: a ten-day resilience Programme in Central African Republic and a one-month renewal programme in Tanzania. We chose Central African Republic because of the tension and violence the pastoral agents in the country were facing at that time.

III.

We contacted our confreres in these two countries and explored the ways of organising the two programmes.

Then in the following meeting on 16 May 2015, we brought together the feedback received from the ground. We formed a Steering Committee in Rome with one representative from each Institute and an Executive Committee in Tanzania again with a representative of each of the institutes. The latter is the one which assures the day to day running of the programme in all its aspects from the beginning to the end.

Various ICOF programmes so far

We have three kinds of ICOF programs every year entitled as JOY-FILLED GOSPEL SERVICE: SABBATICAL PROGRAMME in English in Tanzania (6 months), JOYEUX SERVICE DE L'ÉVANGILE - RENEWAL PROGRAM in French in Ivory Coast (2 months) and RESILIENCE PROGRAM in French (2 weeks).

I. The first renewal program took place in 2016 and it was for two months. Following the evaluation and the recommendation of the participants, it became a six-month programme running from January to June. This has been the case for the years 2017 to 2020.

Since 2021, the six-month programme is split into two cycles of three months. Participants can choose either of the cycles or both. The first cycle is called **wholeness cycle** which

concentrates more on the human and personal dimension and the second cycle is called **Good Shepherd cycle** which gives particular attention to the pastoral dimension. Currently there is a program running for 2023. All these programmes in Tanzania are in English.

II. For French speaking participants, we run a two-month renewal programme in Ivory Coast. This program started in 2018 as a one-month renewal program, and then in 2019, 2021 and 2022 we ran it for two months. In 2020 the program was cancelled due to the COVID pandemic. During these two months, the program concentrates on the human/personal and pastoral dimensions of the participant.

The Resilience programme in Central African Republic had to wait till 2017. Pope Francis was visiting the country in 2015 and we decided to give him the precedence and we had a few more practical challenges too.

This third programme on resilience aims at empowering the participants with the capacity to endure and navigate the trials of life, the capacity to bounce back, to make a new start after going through stressful and/or traumatic situations. They also receive some skills and tools to enable them to help the people going through similar situations. We organised three sessions on resilience: Central African Republic (7th to 17th November 2017), Ivory Coast (1-16 September 2021), Burkina-Faso (2-16 September 2022). We are planning one for Nigeria in November 2023.

Evaluation - Positive feedback

Overall, the program seems to have had an impact on most of the participants. Both the participants and the staff members clearly notice the changes that take place in the participants.

Some participants have sent messages to express their gratitude for having attended the program.

Here are just a few examples:

- All the modules are so rich that they respond to my needs as a religious and to the way we are called to live the mission today.

- Words cannot express my feelings of gratitude! I am well prepared for my next appointment!
- A profound and enriching experience that allows me to face the future with hope
- The sabbatical program was a fruitful and refreshing one. The courses were all well-arranged and organized and were able to meet my needs at the right time. The courses were all very rich and resourceful.
- The many courses and workshops that were offered were very beneficial and aimed at helping the participants learn new skills and get a new awareness of current issues and many exercises to keep healthy in future assignments.

We got very positive feedback from the communities of the participants. They could see a visible transformation in the people who attended the programmes.

Many participants found deeper healing.

Quite a few people were able to find joy and meaning in ministry and were able to take up pastoral assignments happily.

Some in leadership positions attended the renewal programmes mainly as part of their transition. They found the programme extremely helpful.

Participants

Catholic pastoral agents with experience in ministry for seven to twelve years are welcome to apply once recommended by their bishops/superiors.

Each year we post on our web site the leaflet with information concerning the upcoming programs. These include qualifications for applicants, contacting address, fees and scholarships, programme contents, the opening/closing dates of the program and much more. You can visit us on www.icofprogram.org

Challenges

- **Personnel - trainers:** We are in the process of getting more of our members trained in the

area of ongoing formation to be able to serve in this ministry. We are managing it quite well for the time being. This is an ongoing challenge to renew and expand our teams.

- **Participants:** Renewal programmes are meant for everybody. Pastoral agents need more awareness. Men seem to be slower than women in seeking such programmes. Financial question is part of the cause for some diocesan clergy, though this is not the only reason for not taking part in this program, and other causes differ from one diocese to another.
- **Place:** In Tanzania, we do not have a place of our own. We rent the service of Canossa sisters for the past few years. We are still in the process of finding a permanent solution. In Ivory Coast we have a permanent centre.
- **Money:** The member congregations have a small common fund and we decided early on to try to run the programmes in a self-sufficient way for the sake of sustainability. We are able to balance the books every year. Though we do not intend to make any profit, the fee looks big for many local congregations. We tried to get external funding to subsidise and we have not succeeded yet. We hope to be able get some regular subsidy so that we will be able to serve all those who are in need.
- **Vision:** Some pastoral agents need not only renewal programmes but also serious therapy and rehabilitation. We did not want to combine renewal and therapy. We are still brainstorming to see how to support pastoral agents struggling with challenges that need more serious therapy.

Collaboration between Congregations for Mission

Reflection: Solidarity with South Sudan

I would like to thank the organisers for inviting a representative of Solidarity with South Sudan



to give a short presentation on this subject. We are a collaborative venture between congregations from conception, birth and continue to be so 15 years after starting our first

projects in South Sudan.

For those of you that are not familiar with the project, allow me to give a short explanation of how it started.

Origins

The congress of religious life, held in 2004, was a moment of great importance of Solidarity with South Sudan. At the end of that Congress, a book was produced called 'Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity'. Two icons were used to represent the primal energies that inspired the Congress: the image of the Samaritan Woman at the well with a spiritual thirst for God, a thirst that is never quenched. The second image was of the Good Samaritan, the perennial call to show the mercy and healing of God to our neighbour, wherever she or he is to be found. It represented a fundamental affirmation of the basic impulses of religious life and mission, along with the desire that these find new forms of expression at the start of a new millennium.

The following year, some Bishops from Southern Sudan came to Rome with the cry 'help us'. They realised their need was greater than the capacity of any one congregation to respond to, and that is why they appealed for assistance to the JPIC group in Rome, which is intercongregational in its composition. This group in turn saw the need to present the Bishops' petition to both female and male

intercongregational associations, and undertook some preliminary investigations on their behalf.

Double Collaboration:

Solidarity was born out of this, an intercongregational initiative of both USG and UISG to launch a 'new paradigm for religious life' in Collaboration with the Bishops of South Sudan. Solidarity is therefore intercongregational in its origin and composition and collaborative in mission with the Episcopal Conference of Sudan and South Sudan in its implementation. **A double collaborative venture!**

It is important to state that from its conception and inspiration, Solidarity is an intercongregational initiative of female and male congregations, along with lay members. I think this is one of the great strengths of Solidarity. It is not a project that was started by one or two religious groups and was then opened up to others. Its very foundation, its mission and vision statements, its core values, even the modalities of its projects in South Sudan and the Fundraising necessary to sustain these, all these were discussed and agreed at intercongregational level from the outset. This is one of the strong positive underpinnings of Solidarity and helps explain why it has endured for so long as a project jointly owned by so many.

Equal Participation

It is true that at the very beginning 2 congregations were identified as founding members, the Comboni Sisters and the De La Salle brothers. However, in searching for the new wine skin, or paradigm, for the new wine of intercongregational apostolic mission, it was quickly realised that this was not an appropriate model. In fact, there were several congregations that lent significant support from the outset. Solidarity, or rather the congregations who gave birth to it, had to imagine and create an entirely unique structure for Solidarity.

Two concrete expressions of this in South Sudan are:

In none of our communities will you find a photo of a particular congregational founder or foundress in a public space. This can be a challenge for one or other member who thinks their founder is particularly indispensable. Members are encouraged to speak about their founders or their congregations in community fora. No one congregation can claim proprietorial ownership or rights over Solidarity at any level of its structures or activities.

Secondly, there is no one foundational spirituality for Solidarity. Each member is encouraged to express their own spirituality in community, in prayer and to be open to participate and learn from others.

One positive implication of this is that congregations who were unable to fully participate at the origin of Solidarity and who now wish to become more active, these congregations are able to find a respected place where they can contribute within the existing framework on an equal basis.

It is true that the majority of congregations who have joined Solidarity have their Headquarters in Rome, but there are a significant number of participating international congregations who are based outside of Rome. Perhaps the fact that Solidarity was founded by the USG/UISG, which has a global reach, is important in this regard. No one select group of congregations can claim privileged rights, although there is an open group of 45-65 congregations who attend the Annual Assemblies and various other Solidarity events in Rome. This is not an exclusive club.

Initial Energy

It is hard to imagine now the excitement that was generated around the Solidarity project at the start: An intercongregational project of both men and women focusing on a country ravaged by decades of civil conflict and which would soon before the newest independent African state. Add to this mix, the undefined expectation of starting a new paradigm of religious living, and you can understand why up to 400 congregations were associated with this undertaking at the very start.

Having such a wide base to call upon means that there is a great diversity that is put at the

service of one mission, an efficient pooling of resources, both in terms of personnel and expertise that any one congregation would struggle to find. This ‘effectiveness and efficiency’ aspect of pooling resources should not be overlooked, but neither should it be seen as the only or even primary motivation for working together. The richness in diversity is equally compelling argument.

Continuity of Commitment

One challenge that Solidarity has along with other intercongregational initiatives is that while the project belongs to everyone, no one congregation feels ultimately responsible for Solidarity’s wellbeing and success. Individual Superior Generals can be highly motivated, but sometime this motivation does not pass to members of their Councils, and with the arrival of a new congregational leadership group, sometimes the message or the enthusiasm does not pass from one group to the other. Or it can be that the new group wishes to focus on new priorities. None of this is a death sentence to Solidarity, it simply means that more work has to be done to continually reconnect with newer leadership groups.

Individual Choice and commitment:

I am associated with Solidarity in South Sudan for 4 years. During this time, we had Covid and lockdown. All through the civil war of 2013 to 2016, and afterwards, Solidarity never closed its doors. However, the corona virus ensured that we had to stop our activities with students, beneficiaries etc. In addition, we unable to meet as a group. Since the end of the Covid restrictions, we had met twice in annual assemblies. An outstanding impression of these meetings is how each member was positive about the mission and work of Solidarity. There was and is a remarkable energy and belief in the richness of the intercongregational approach to mission.

I attribute this to the depth of personal choice that each one was made in coming to Solidarity. This is not a mission that one stumbles on by accident, because there is nothing better to do or because one’s ‘Superior’ has told one to go. Arriving in Solidarity is the result of a free choice and a personal discerning on the

individual's behalf. There can be many reasons for failing in South Sudan, with the plethora of challenges due to different cultures, trauma, ongoing insecurity, wide spread poverty rampant corruption. One basic reason **for enduring, enjoying and contributing** positively is based on the quality of one's personal choice to join such a venture. This is an indispensable element for fulfilling collaboration in any intercongregational affair. This is always a role for discerning the suitability of individuals and the appropriateness of their skill sets and qualifications, but all this is premised on a fundamental option to live and work intercongregationally.

Knowing that you are living with like-minded people, who come from very different backgrounds, experiences, cultures, also feeds this personal commitment. Seeing how others, who are very different, remain positive in the



face of challenges and setbacks, how they resource themselves personally, and how they are willing to reach out and support others, is a great encouragement. Words to not do justice to that.

Diversity as witness

The composition of the group varies from year to year. The beginning was marked by a number of long serving members will all have left by the end of 2023. Currently we are, 21 members in South Sudan, from 13 nationalities and 16 congregations. Diversity is the middle name of Solidarity, diversity in Nationalities, congregations, professional and religious education, work experience, spiritualities and operative theologies. Male and Female working

side by side and forming religious communities together. The largest nationality grouping has three members and the largest congregational grouping has two members. We are very diverse, conscious of that and knowing that no one cultural way can dominate.

There is no initiation course into this 'stew'. We all need to learn 'on the job' and to remind each other if we are insensitive to difference. This takes a certain willingness to hold one's own ways in question, to be able to hear and accept the questions of others, and to be able to change! None of this is perfect. We all are on learning curves, both as individuals and as communities. While we are intentional in our desire to create and maintain

intercongregational communities of diversity, this is not our sole aim. An important counterbalance is the realisation that we are not in South Sudan to be a religious or social experiment, but to be of service to the church and

society – in a divided, contested and sometimes violent world. There are an estimated 64 ethnic groups in South Sudan, 60 different local languages. The country is scarred by conflict which is expressed in ethnic terms, us and them, Dinka and Nuer, Nilotic and Bantu, pastoralists and agriculturalists.

Our communities of diversity see themselves as offering a model for our students to see different cultures living in harmony and working together for a common good that serves all. Intercongregational communities are not fashionable experiments but ways of prophetic witness in countries which are fracturing and vilifying difference.

Tutti Fratelli

Tutti Fratelli is a group of Religious Brothers resident in Rome, representatives of various Institutes, who gather regularly to exchange and promote common initiatives relevant to their respective Congregations. The group is an expression of synodality that is an essential dimension of today's Church. Our Institutes are confronted with profound ecclesial and social changes that calls for ways of living our



Charism so that it can enter into dialogue with today's reality. On the other hand, the vocation to Brotherhood is suffering from an

ongoing misunderstanding that has its roots on the underlying clericalism very present in the Church. Traditionally, Brothers have been involved in ministries that today are being offered as a social service. But at the same time new arena of mission appears. Therefore, there is an ongoing effort to make a creative and prophetic reading of our Charism to be present near the marginalized and abandoned.

The Union of Superiors Generals (USG) is a good platform to bring together different religious experiences. It is in this context, back in 2010, some Brothers in Rome felt the need to come together to reflect and promote common initiatives. On-going formation has become an essential part of our internal programs as Institutes. Congregations that have thousands of members can easily organized formation programs for their Brothers unlike smaller ones that have difficulty to manage such important events. Therefore, the first initiative of the group was to organize a formation program in 2012 for Religious Brothers from eight Institutes dedicated to education. The theme of that one-month-course was the identity of the Religious Brother and took place at the General House of the La Salle Brothers. This first experience was well appreciated among the Institutes of Brothers who participated. Since then, the group continued meeting occasionally

to share initiatives, especially related to formation.

The year 2015, year of Consecrated Life, marked another important moment in the life and growth of the group. The first Meeting of Religious Brothers residing in Rome was organized by Tutti Fratelli. On the same year, the document of the CIVCSVA "*Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*" was published. The group of Brothers of the USG entrusted the group with the task of preparing various working materials to be offered to Religious Brothers. These two events help the group to strengthen its ties around a common task. The work produced by the group, traduced on several languages, was a useful tool for religious communities to deepen and reflect on this long-awaited document.

A further development in the consolidation of the group was in 2017 with the elaboration of the strategic three-year-plan. It helped to think and redefine the Mission and Vision of the Group as well as developing an action plan that helped to focus the objectives. All this was approved by the Group of Brothers of the General Superiors gathered on the occasion of the Assembly of the USG.

Out of this strategic plan the mission of the group was defined as: *By being a visible sign of the gift of brotherhood, we promote our vocation as religious Brothers and a common reflection on our identity and mission in the Church and in the world.* And the Vision was spelled out: *Through our reflection and activities all the Brothers are connected in a global network that promotes our common identity and mission.*

In this mission and vision emerge some aspects that deserve further reflection. Brotherhood seems to be an invisible reality in the Church, therefore we are invited to make the ministries carried out by Brothers to be known, often related to human promotion or social apostolate. Even if each one of us is a living expression of a Charism we do share a common gift as Brothers to serve the Church and society. This is to be

always developed and reflected upon to be meaningful and understandable.

The small number of Brothers in the Church often leads to isolation or underrepresentation in the local church. Connecting the Brothers from different geographical areas and ministerial contexts can help them grow in their identity and mission.

Currently the group is formed by ten Institutes approximately that participate regularly to the meetings and each congregation participates with one or two members. One of the richness of Tutti Fratelli is its inter-nationality, the group is made up of Brothers from four continents coming from small, medium and big Institutes. This carries in itself a great value in the sharing of experiences that come from a variety of cultures and ecclesiological realities.

Tutti Fratelli has three main recurrent activities:

1. **Monthly meetings** of the group. The main objective of these gatherings is to deepen themes that are interesting for all. Some topics that the group reflected upon are new community styles, new models for leadership and animation, new models of pastoral ministry and vocations. These meetings are organized in turns by the congregation that hosts the meetings.
2. **Annual gatherings** in Rome. Since 2015 the group organizes a gathering for all brothers in Rome. It has been taking place in the General House of La Salle. The attendance is between 60 and 100 brothers from different congregations. It is a great opportunity to know each other. A topic is presented, and abundant time is given for sharing in small groups. There is also a time for a common multilingual prayer.
3. **International formation programs.** There have been already two sessions of this one-month program. The program of 2012 and 2019 on relevant topics for the lives of the Brothers in general. The program that is being organized for the next month of September 2023 will be address to Brothers that accompany Brothers during their first mission experience. It will focus on the problem of Brothers leaving the congregation during their first years of religious life.

One of the objectives of the group is to foster collaboration among Brothers. A future plan is to promote the exchange with inter-congregational groups of Brothers in other countries and regions. So far, the link with similar groups has been limited.

Tutti Fratelli is answerable to the group of Brothers of the USG. It has a loose organizational structure. The continuity and consistency of the activities are guaranteed through the secretary. Each month, in turn, one of the Brothers organizes the meeting and sets up the agenda in dialogue with the secretary and the other members. This type of decentralized organisation responds well to the needs of the group and allows the realization of the planned activities. Even during the time of Covid, Tutti Fratelli managed to keep its activities through remote meetings. If there is an activity that has some cost attached, contribution of the participants is requested.

After a few years of life, the group has consolidated a valid dynamic to respond to its aim, mainly, to offer a space of reflection on the identity and vocation of the Brothers in the Church and society today. The relevance of the group could be summarized as follows:

- Opening horizons: coming together as different institutes helps to broaden viewpoints on different areas: ministries, organization and formation among others. Knowing how other Institutes do things helps us to question or relativize our own way. This is especially relevant in the field of formation and processes of reorganization.
- Reflecting on common issues: this is a time signed by important changes that deeply touch religious life and its mission and in particular the nature and relevance of the vocation of Religious Brothers in the Church and Society. There is a widespread vocational crisis of this type of life. Even if this is more accentuated in Europe, all continents give signs of a growing lack of understanding of Brotherhood.
- New fields of mission: coming together help the Brothers to discern about new fields of mission and opportunities to collaborate. There is a felt need of to rethink our religious life to respond to the changing mission

Mission: Our Continuing Journey

Upon receiving the attractive volume, *New Trends in Mission: The Emerging Future* (2022), several impressions immediately crossed my mind. I saw it as an “encyclopedia,” a “compendium,” a “sourcebook,” a “thesaurus” of current thought on the vast topic of missionary evangelization. In addition, I immediately recalled the 1991 volume *Trends in Mission: Toward the Third Millennium*, also jointly published by SEDOS and Orbis Books. Both the 1991 and 2022 volumes were jointly edited by the then Director of SEDOS (W. Jenkinson and P. Baekelmans) along with a sister companion (H. O’Sullivan and M-H. Robert).

These few foregoing facts already attest to the high quality and vast panorama of the material available in this current volume. Readers are alerted that this book review unfolds in two sections. First, a contemporary overview of mission theology is offered. Secondly, specific aspects about the book are presented, noting significant details about the authors and topics. All-in-all, readers will discover a vast smorgasbord of mission theology and praxis, containing numerous delicacies!

Insights from Pope Paul VI.

Another recollection spontaneously sprang to mind: the masterful 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) by Saint Pope Paul VI (1963-1978), canonized on October 14, 2018. He will always be remembered as a modern missionary pope, taking the name “Paul,” and making missionary journeys to all continents. His “Vatican II centered” understanding of missionary evangelization reflects a comprehensive and inclusive view, respecting the fullness and complexity of contemporary mission.

Paul VI strongly insists upon integrating and balancing all facets of evangelization. “Any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even distorting it” (EN 17). “Evangelization, as we have said, is a

complex process made up of varied elements; they are complementary and mutually enriching” (EN 24). The missionary Church needs “to relate these elements rather than to place them in opposition one to the other, in order to reach a full understanding of the Church’s evangelizing activity” (EN 24).

In the six decades of the Vatican II era (1962-2022), a comprehensive vision of missionary evangelization has become widely accepted in the Church; it is diversely termed “integral” / “holistic” and coupled with “evangelization” / “liberation” / “salvation.” We wholeheartedly agree with the broad and inclusive manner in which Paul VI speaks: “evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity” (EN 18)! Friends, these perspectives prepare us for the rich treasures found in *New Trends in Mission*.

Pope Francis’ Contribution.

Another interesting fact is that *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is the most quoted document in Pope Francis’ 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*); it is quoted on thirteen different occasions. One finds that Pope Francis, beginning early in his pontificate (now in its tenth year: 2013-2023), regularly quotes and praises EN. In 2013 Francis said that EN includes words that “are as timely as if they had been written yesterday” (May 17); he called EN “a very full text that has lost nothing of its timeliness” (June 13). As Francis described evangelization, he asserted that EN was “that basic point of reference which remains relevant” (July 27). The pope went even so far (June 22) as to describe EN as “to my mind the greatest pastoral document that has ever been written to this day.” Undoubtedly, EN is the fertile soil from which Francis drew much as he authored his *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Furthermore, on June 16, 2014 when he opened the pastoral convention for the Diocese of Rome, Pope Francis, in reference to EN, stated: “Still to this day it is the most important post-

Conciliar pastoral document, which hasn't been surpassed. We should always go back to it."

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is a great source of inspiration. Theologians have noted that it was the work of Saint Paul VI, flowing from his own hand. After the 1974 Synod on evangelization, the delegate-bishops could not decide whether they should do an exhortation or not. Finally, the *relator* (it was Saint John Paul II) took all the papers and just handed them to the Pope, as if to say: "You handle this, brother!" Paul VI read them all and, with that patience of his, began to write. Indeed, EN is truly a missionary testament of the great Paul VI! It—coupled with Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*—is a wealth of resources for all dimensions of Church life.

Describing Missionary Evangelization.

Evangelization, for many Catholics, is a generally unfamiliar and relatively new term; only recently has it been gaining wider currency. The Second Vatican Council as well as recent popes have placed evangelization at the center of the Church's identity and mission. One key goal of this presentation is to use the rich content of *New Trends in Mission* to focus on the understanding of evangelization in all of its rich, complex, multi-faceted, and interrelated dimensions. In a word, this extended book review explores evangelization viewed holistically and integrally.

The word "evangelization" does not occur in the New Testament; however, *euaggelion* meaning "gospel" or "good news" occurs 72 times, 54 of which are in the Pauline corpus. It has a wide range of meanings: the whole Christian message (Mk 1:1); the good news of Jesus (2 Cor 4:4); it is for all (Mk 13:10; 16:15); it is a revelation of God (Gal 1:11-12) which is to be believed (Mk 1:15) and proclaimed (1 Cor 9:14, 16, 18). One must risk all for the gospel (Mk 8:35; Rom 1:16), serve it (Rom 1:1; 15:16), defend it (Phil 1:7, 16). *Euaggelion* is the good news of truth (Gal 2:5, 14), of hope (Col 1:23), of peace (Eph 6:15), of immortality (2 Tim 1:10), of the risen Christ (1 Cor 15:1ff; 2 Tim 2:8), and of salvation (Eph 1:13).

Vatican II speaks of evangelization in varied contexts: it is especially the bishops' task to promote evangelization by the faithful (CD 6); it is associated with the mission of the laity (AA 2,

6, 20, 26; LG 35); priests are to learn the methods of evangelization (PO 19); the Eucharist is the source and summit of all evangelization (PO 5). The Decree on Mission (AG) is replete with references: "the specific purpose of missionary activity is evangelization and the planting of the Church" (6); "the Church has the obligation and the sacred right to evangelize" (7); catechists have an important task to evangelize (17), as do the laity (21); the call to evangelize arises from a charism of the Spirit (23); various roles are fulfilled by missionary institutes (27), *Propaganda Fidei* (29), the people of God (35, 36), bishops and priests (38), religious institutes (40), and young Churches (LG 17).

Following upon the solid foundations in Sacred Scripture and in the documents of Vatican II, the pivotal contributions of Popes Paul VI (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*) and Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium*) have located evangelization on "center-stage" in describing the Church's contemporary mission. With this rich background, we now move to explore the broad panorama of resources found in *New Trends in Mission: The Emerging Future*.

Overview and Organization.

New Trends in Mission is encyclopedic; the total number of printed pages exceeds 400. The material is presented in three major sections:

I. "Evangelization and Mission"; II. "Ways of Doing Mission"; and, III. "New Trends in Mission." Each section opens with an overview introduction to the content of the section and the specific articles; these brief, informative pieces are presented by Michael McCabe, SMA (I), Susan K. Wood, SCL (II), and Bryan Lobo, SJ (III). In broad terms, one may assert that each section addresses a specific dimension of contemporary mission: I. The foundations and the "why" of mission; II. The "ways-when-where" of mission engagement; and, III. The "practical-contextual" implementation of missionary evangelization.

In addition to the three major sections of this volume already noted, one finds additional treasures. Pope Francis has provided an "Opening Message" to the participants of the October 2021 SEDOS symposium. An "Inaugural Address" by Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples contains important questions and observations; Tagle noted the significance of opening the symposium on October 11, the opening day of Vatican II in

1962 as well as the feast day of Saint Pope John XXIII.

One also finds a “Preface” to the volume by Tesfaye T. Gebresilasie, MCCJ, and Mary T. Barron, OLA. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, in his “Introduction,” provides a splendid road-map to the rich materials contained in this “mission encyclopedia.” Two additional contributions are included in the final pages of the book: the “Conclusion” authored by Marie-Hélène Robert, OLA and the “Appendix,” which is a summary of the 2021 SEDOS Mission Symposium, composed by the redaction committee for the event. This review now moves to a presentation of the contents of the three thematic sections of *New Trends in Mission: The Emerging Future*.

PART ONE: Evangelization and Mission.

This 82-page section contains six items by various authors. **Michael McCabe, SMA**, provides an introduction to this part of the book. He contextualizes the Church’s missionary initiatives within the mission theology emerging from Vatican II which asserts that “the pilgrim Church is essentially missionary.” **Rekha M. Chennattu, RA**, explores the “why” of mission by focusing on the biblical trends in mission for our changing times. She takes us through a biblical journey of God’s mission, Israel’s role, the Prophets, Jesus, Paul, and the Church’s mission today viewed through biblical insights and challenges.

Joseph S. Palakeel, MST, focuses on the “what” of mission, seeking to refine our comprehension of mission. He admits that our understanding of mission is constantly being renewed and refined; his rich insights are well documented—in over 100 footnotes! **Stephen B. Bevans, SVD**, entitles his presentation: “Theological Evolution in Mission: A Theology of Mission.” Bevans centers his contribution within four perspectives; mission is validly viewed as “the Completion of Creation,” as “a Single but Complex Activity,” as “Discipleship,” and as “Prophetic Dialogue.”

Paul Béré, SJ, gifts us with “Pope Francis and Mission: A Call to Hear the Crying Existential Peripheries.” He notes that “Pope Francis’ call to become a missionary disciple community looks backward and forward” and adequately highlights this assertion throughout his presentation. The final piece in this first section is by **Aloysius**

Pieris, SJ, entitled “The Role of Missionary Religious Institutes: A Strange Species of Christians?” Pieris asserts that charismatic leadership in mission needs the following characteristics: “itinerant, trans-local, frontier, charismatic, pioneering, and witnessing to the Marian character of the Church.”

Already in this “Part One” of *New Trends in Mission*, one senses the vast panorama of mission experience contained in this volume. For example, the pieces found here are authored by contributors from Ireland, India, USA, Burkina Faso, and Sri Lanka. These women and men, in turn, have been missioned in numerous countries on various continents. This same rich panorama continues in all subsequent sections of *New Trends*. Hopefully, these brief bits of data will further attract readers to appreciate the many varied treasures contained between the covers of this book!

PART TWO: Ways of Doing Mission.

This second section is the shortest of the three-fold division of *New Trends* (66 pages). In her introduction, **Susan K. Wood, SCL**, presents “the where, who, what, and how of mission,” giving a thumbnail sketch of these four foundational themes. **Alfred Maravilla, SDB**, discusses “The ‘When’ of Mission: Rediscovering ‘Initial Proclamation’ in Evangelization.” He notes that it was Pope Paul VI who first used the term “initial proclamation” in a pontifical document (EN 51-53). This multi-faceted presentation promotes “the rediscovery of the relevance of initial proclamation.”

The authors, **Ida Colombo, CMS**, **Hélène I. Kamkô, CMS**, and **Maria T. Ratti, CMS**, together present “The ‘Who’ of Mission: We are Mission.” These three Comboni Missionary Sisters describe their joys, hopes, experiences, challenges, dreams, as well as the beauty of witnessing together “with a great deal of synodal creativity.” **Anthony Arinwale, OP**, gifts us with “The ‘Where’ of Mission: Fifty Years of *Ad Gentes* in Africa.” He concretizes his insights by presenting four proposals for a more fruitful mission. **Pudota R. John, SJ**, describes “The ‘How’ of Mission: Going ‘Outside the Gates’ for the Kingdom’s Sake.” His presentation draws on his own personal experience as well as insights from the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences).

PART THREE: New Trends in Mission.

This third section is the largest one, occupying over 200 pages, fully one-half of the entire volume. Here one finds twenty thematic or topical presentations on diverse concrete initiatives in contemporary missionary evangelization. In his introduction, **Bryan Lobo, SJ**, asserts that “the phrase *new trends in mission* is another way of verbalizing how mission is moving and life-giving.” He also acknowledges that “new trends in mission always begin with questions that are not easy to answer.”

In “Secularization: Mission in a Secular Age,” **Daniel P. Huang, SJ**, describes and analyzes the contemporary phenomenon of secularization; he challenges Christians committed to mission to address this phenomenon with “much more analysis, discernment, and creative thinking.” **Carmen E. Bando, SSPS**, draws upon her own experience of movement as well as her religious formation to speak on “Mission with Migrants: The Roots of ‘People on the Move.’” She notes how both faith and daily life share the “two intrinsic elements of *roots* and *movement*.”

Two Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, **Marvi Delrivo, SFP**, and **Licia Mazzia, SFP**, seek to address mission with those on the margins of society in their presentation “Mission among the Poor: ‘You Always Have the Poor with You’ (Mk 14:7).” They emphasize that the preferential option for the poor has been “passionately relaunched by Pope Francis from the very first days of his pontificate.” **Anne B. Faye, CIC**, presents “Reconciliation: The New Face of Evangelization in Africa.” She sees that working for reconciliation “is an act of hope” through which “Christians look to the future” that opens “with and in God for all human beings.”

Mary T. Barron, OLA, addresses the topic of “Mission and Women: ‘Her-Story’ of Mission,” noting that the topic can only be considered within the “wider church context” and that it “conjures up different scenarios, possibilities, contexts and situations.” **James H. Kroeger, MM**, explores the broad area of “Peacebuilding: Peace Promotion as Integral to Evangelization.” The presentation is made in five interrelated sections: Church Teaching, Scriptural Insights, Saints of Peace, Four Foundational Principles, and various Strategies and Programs.

“Interreligious Dialogue: Interreligious Dialogue in the Context of Mission” by **Maria De Giorgi, MMX**, traces the evolution of dialogue in the Church’s awareness and practice. She believes that in the vision and practice of dialogue the Church is still only “at the beginning of a journey.” **John Mallare, CICM**, in “Islam: A Mission of Mercy” sets his focus on “the theme of mercy in relation to doing mission, particularly in an Islamic context.” He believes that in dialogue, “we need to start from the things that are similar and familiar to both parties,” and that “both Christianity and Islam present to us the image of a merciful God.”

Gerard Hall, SM, explores the subject of “Eastern Religions: Trusting Christianity’s ‘Incarnational’ Thrust.” He uses the term “Eastern Religions” to refer to the “non-Abrahamic religions of East Asia.” The author admits that “deep dialogue with the Eastern traditions ... is challenging from a multitude of viewpoints.” The topic of “Indigenous Religions: Religious Congregations and Indigenous Australians” is presented by **Robyn Reynolds, OLSH**. She affirms that engagement with Aboriginal Christians today means “being respectfully present in solidarity” with “the nation’s First Peoples, namely, the Indigenous Australians.”

In his presentation “African Traditional Religion: Working Together to Promote the Culture of Life,” **Bede Ukwuije, CSSp**, observes that these are the traditions “in which most Africans were born and bred.” They still “determine the existential choices of many Africans” and thus dialogue with them is “more relevant than ever.” **Marie-Hélène Robert, OLA**, uses her contribution “Ecumenism: Mission and the Search for Unity” to explore and promote “evangelization and common witness together.” Boldly, she asserts that “an evangelization that rejects common witness produces scandal and does not bear lasting fruit.”

“Interculturality: Culture and the Experience of God” by **Tim Norton, SVD**, employs a creative methodology to communicate his insights about spirituality and interculturality. He narrates original insights by providing a “dialogue” with six individuals, followed by his personal reflection on the exchanges. Listening to the

“spiritual experiences of others” is in itself “*interculturality at work.*” **Monique Tarabeh, RGS**, addresses the topic of “Media and Mission: Staying Connected,” drawing on her years of experience as congregational communications coordinator. Her piece affirms the vision of Pope Francis that communication has “the power to build bridges, to enable encounter and inclusion, and thus to enrich society.”

Agnes Lanfermann, MMS, enlightens us with her reflections on “Medical Mission: Mission as Healing.” She describes “the evolution in medical mission that took place in many congregations,” using her own congregation as a concrete example, and providing insights from Medical Mission Sisters and Associates in East Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. Exploring “Education: The Transforming Role of Education,” **Maria A. Pereira, FMM**, believes that the Church “must make education a mission to empower, enable, and elevate the masses in order to educate human beings to be capable of upholding life and the rights of all.”

In his presentation “Missionary Parishes: Growing as a Missionary Parish,” **Lazar T. Stanislaus, SVD**, reaffirms that “parish ministry is one of the powerful means of building and engaging a Christian community.” Yet, it is imperative that parishes must be transformed into *missionary parishes*; Lazar enumerates several creative approaches to achieve this rejuvenation. **Oliver Aquilina, SDC**, enlightens us through his presentation, “Laity in Mission: The Laity: More than a Lending Hand.” This piece traces the steady growth of the laity’s involvement in mission in the Vatican II era, noting that they are definitely included when the Church affirms that “beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.”

Together **Teresa Gómez** and **Nestor Anaya, FSC**, address the topic of “Youth in Mission: Believing in Young People.” Drawing on their lived experience in various countries and on World Youth Day events, they affirm that today “the church recognizes the importance of the *encounter and participation of young people*” for promoting “a missionary spirit in faith and joy.” “Integrity of Creation: Our Work Is Loving the World” is the title of the presentation by **Ilia Delio, OSF**. This Franciscan sister notes that “our

planet has been in peril for the last several decades” due various environmental problems. Drawing on several authors (e.g. Pope Francis and T. de Chardin), Delio asserts that “through the energies of love we participate with nature in shaping the earth’s future.”

Conclusion. Our lengthy journey through *New Trends in Mission: The Emerging Future* has been completed; it covered 38 presentations by over 40 contributors. Yes, it has been an extended journey, but also a fulfilling and renewing pilgrimage. As illustrated by these materials, it is an understatement to assert that missionary evangelization is “a complex process made up of varied elements” that are “complementary and mutually enriching” (EN 24). This “mission encyclopedia” deserves to be on the shelves of every theological library, seminary, and convent, as well as in the bibliography of all courses of ecclesiology and mission. Friends, consider obtaining an individual copy for your personal use and enrichment—truly a wise investment! We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who had a hand in bringing this project to fruition! In the words addressed to Saint Augustine, I say: “*Tolle, lege.*” Take and read! You will be richly rewarded; your missionary spirit will be strengthened. Indeed, “*Tolle, lege*”!





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