
From Missions to Mission – and beyond?

Changes in the Concept and Practice of Mission since Vatican II

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Abstract

As a first step, the text sketches some parameters (1.) that influenced Vatican II's understanding of mission (1.1) and summarizes the key theological factors that shaped the conciliar teaching on mission (1.2). After this it focuses on the changes in the concept and practice of mission, distinguishing between the efforts to implement the council's ideas on mission (2.) and some developments pointing beyond what the council fathers had or could have envisaged (3.). In each step the text addresses the relations with other ecclesial traditions, other religions and contemporary culture.

Keywords

→ *Ad gentes*
→ *Evangelii nuntiandi*
→ *Redemptoris missio*
→ *Evangelii gaudium*

Zusammenfassung

Zuerst skizziert der Text einige Parameter (1.), die das Missionsverständnis des II. Vatikanums beeinflusst haben (1.1), und umreißt die theologischen Schlüsselfaktoren, die die konziliare Lehre von Mission geprägt haben (1.2). Danach richtet sich der Fokus auf die Wandlungen von Begriff und Praxis von Mission; dabei wird unterschieden zwischen den Bemühungen, die Ideen des Konzils zu Mission umzusetzen (2.), und einigen Entwicklungen, die über das hinausgehen, was die Konzilsväter gemeint hatten oder gemeint haben könnten (3.). In jedem Schritt spricht der Text die Beziehungen zu anderen kirchlichen Traditionen, anderen Religionen und der zeitgenössischen Kultur an.

Schlüsselbegriffe

→ *Ad gentes*
→ *Evangelii nuntiandi*
→ *Redemptoris missio*
→ *Evangelii gaudium*

Sumario

Como primer paso, el texto esboza algunos parámetros (1.) que influyeron en la comprensión de la misión en el Vaticano II (1.1) y resume las claves teológicas que dieron forma a la enseñanza conciliar sobre la misión (1.2). A continuación, se centra en los cambios en el concepto y la práctica de la misión, distinguiendo entre los esfuerzos por poner en práctica las ideas del concilio sobre la misión (2.) y algunos desarrollos que apuntan más allá de lo que los padres conciliares habían o podrían haber previsto (3.). En cada etapa, el texto aborda las relaciones con otras tradiciones eclesiales, otras religiones y la cultura contemporánea.

Palabras clave

→ *Ad gentes*
→ *Evangelii nuntiandi*
→ *Redemptoris missio*
→ *Evangelii gaudium*

What did mission look like in the Catholic Church sixty or seventy years ago? Even if we might personally not remember, there are reliable accounts: For most Catholics in Europe or ›the West‹ mission was being done far off, in foreign lands. It did not form part of their everyday lives, but was a kind of adventure undertaken by courageous priests and audacious missionary congregations of women or men in the colonies and the distant missions beyond or at the margins of Western civilisation. Mission was not just territorial, it was done at the *other* end of the earth. And over there, at those other ends of the earth, what was it like? »Before the 1950s«, James Chukwuma Okoye summarizes his experience, »I went to the ›Catholic Mission‹ in my homeland Nigeria. By 1960 (the date of independence from Britain), I was going to the Catholic Church.«¹ Mission was not only territorial, but also closely connected with the colonial heritage. In this quote Okoye links the change mainly to political developments, but there was also another seminal event that shaped the current state of mission in the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council.

1 Some Parameters for Vatican II

1.1 On the way to Vatican II

In 1910 in Edinburgh, 1200 representatives of the major protestant denominations and mission societies gathered »to consider Missionary Problems in relation to the Non-Christian World«.² The spirit of the conference was driven by the watchword of the protestant missionary societies at the time: »The evangelization of the world in this generation«,³ which also was the title of a book by the American Methodist John R. Mott (1865-1955) who chaired the Edinburgh sessions. In order to enhance their credibility and to achieve the aim of worldwide evangelization Christians should strive for unity. Only nineteen delegates were natives of mission territories.⁴ Despite of the gathering's worldwide claim neither Roman Catholic nor Orthodox delegates were present. However, in 1920, the Ecumenical Patriarch sent an encyclical from Constantinople »to the Churches of Christ everywhere«⁵ which suggested that the divided churches should discuss doctrinal differences and engage in common witness, whereas in his encyclical *Mortalium animos* (1928), Pius XI warned against such modernist ideas as unbalanced ›Pan-Christianism‹.⁶

On the field of mission, however, a new phase had already begun in 1919, when Benedict XV in his apostolic letter *Maximum illud* called for the new churches' being implanted in the culture of a country.⁷ Pius XI corroborated this in his mission encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) by identifying the objective of missionary work: »What, We ask, is the true object of these holy missions if it be not this, that the Church of Christ be founded and established

¹ James Chukwuma OKOYE CSSP, *The Bible in Catholic Mission 1910-2010*, in: Stephen B. BEVANS SVD (ed.), *A Century of Catholic Mission*, Oxford 2013, 123-132, 123.

² Thus reads the subtitle of the 9-volume publication of the proceedings, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=genpub;idno=1936337> (28/02/2022).

³ John R. MOTT, *Evangelization of the World in This Generation*, New York 1900, also available at <https://archive.org/details/evangelization-woomotgoog>.

⁴ Cf. Brian STANLEY, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910*, Grand Rapids, MI 2009, 12-13, who identifies Mark C. Hayford from Ghana and 18 Asian delegates.

⁵ Cf. the English version of the Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical of 1920, http://orthodox-voice.blogspot.be/2011/04/patriarchal-and-synodical-encyclical-of_26.html (28/02/2022).

⁶ Cf. PIUS XI, *Mortalium Animos* (6 January 1928) 4, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos_en.html (28/02/2022).

⁷ Cf. e.g. BENEDICT XV, *Apostolic Letter Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919) 16, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xv_apl_19191130_maximum-illud.html (28/02/2022).

in these boundless regions?«⁸ He consequently made a strong point for establishing, also among non-Christians, a fully-organized church comprising native clergy. Along similar lines, in *Evangelii praecones* (1951), Pius XII argues for preserving the positive elements of »native customs and traditions«.⁹ And in his second mission encyclical, *Fidei donum* (1957), he seeks the collaboration of the entire Church for the task of mission.¹⁰ He identifies lay involvement as an important factor and encourages the sending of diocesan priests to serve in mission. In his mission encyclical, *Princeps pastorum* (1959), John XXIII finally shows that the times of ›colonial mission‹ have irrevocably passed. On the other hand, he cautions the young local churches in the former colonies against ultra-nationalism.¹¹

All these topics from the five papal mission documents just mentioned return in the teaching of Vatican II. The council's task was to consolidate and develop the concept of mission emerging from them.

1.2 Vatican II's teaching on mission

It would mean carrying coals to Newcastle, if I were to describe in detail the council's teaching on mission in the context of this *Festschrift*. The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples works on a daily basis with *Ad gentes* and the other conciliar documents relevant for mission and is doubtlessly familiar with the extent of the contributions by Johannes Schütte SVD, Yves Congar OP, and others to the formulation of the decree on mission.¹² Instead I will focus on the factors in the council's teaching which were apt to bring about some of the major changes in the concept and practice of mission ever since, in each case relating them to *Ad gentes* as the key document. These factors are the understanding of redemption, revelation, and church which led to affirming religious freedom and in turn influenced the approach to other Christians, other religions, and contemporary culture.

God wills the salvation of all. The sign and instrument of God's salvation is the Church (LG 1) and God »works out the history of salvation by means of mission« (AG 9). But God may also use other ways known only to Him. The Church has a unique role in mediating salvation whereas at the same time the possibility of salvation in Christ through the Spirit remains open to non-Christians. Summing up this idea, *Lumen gentium* 14-16 culminates in: »Whatever good or truth is found amongst them [i.e. non-Christians] is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.« Yet the objective salvific will of God, which applies to everyone, is distinguished from the subjective acceptance of salvation, which implies that individuals can refuse. This differentiation also opens the way to *Dignitatis humanae*, Vatican II's declaration on religious freedom. That all peoples have a right to religious freedom has forever cut the ground from under any proselytism in the name of the Church or the Gospel (DH 1). *Ad gentes* 13 corroborates this; it prohibits proselytism and appeals to religious freedom.

8 Cf. PIUS XI, Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 February 1926) 21, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_28021926_rerum-ecclesiae.html (28/02/2022).

9 PIUS XII, *Evangelii Praecones* (2 June 1951) 58, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_02061951_evangelii-praecones.html (28/02/2022).

10 Cf. ID., *Fidei Donum* (21 April 1957) 46; 64, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_21041957_fidei-donum.html (28/02/2022).

11 Cf. JOHN XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum* (28 November 1959) 24-26, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_28111959_princeps.html (28/02/2022).

12 All the quotes of conciliar documents are taken from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm (28/02/2022).

God reveals God-self, not a range of propositions to believe. The divine self-communication reaches its climax in Jesus Christ and is mediated through the Holy Spirit (DV 2). The Church is the place to encounter the living God in word and sacrament. But the Church also has to recognize the ecclesial reality of other churches and ecclesial communities by admitting that, also from a Catholic point of view, they comprise and sometimes even better preserve some of the elements of truth and sanctification, although they are still lacking some of the necessary requirements for full unity (LG 8 and UR 3).

In addition to the elements of truth in other ecclesial traditions the council recognizes that every religion contains »seeds of the Word« (AG 11) and »rays of that Truth that enlightens all women and men« (NA 2). Therefore it can state, »[t]he Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions« (NA 2). This recognition »opens up mission not only to a clear proclamation of the gospel message, but a proclamation in the context of dialogue and an effort to understand the sincere beliefs of those to whom the gospel is presented.«¹³

Moreover Christ's presence does not destroy a culture, but brings it to perfection (AG 9). Recognizing the »seeds of the Word« in people's culture and values calls for participation with them (AG 11). This even means to identify with their needs, »[t]he joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts« (GS 1).

Stressing the intimate and unbreakable connection between mission and Church and the ecumenical dimension of mission »[t]he proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root« (AG 6). This does not only settle the debate between the two pivotal schools of missiology in the early 20th century, Münster and Louvain,¹⁴ but above all, through mission, it links salvation and church more closely. The Catholic watchword now runs, »[t]he pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature« (AG 2). Consequently mission needs to be based on a sound theology of the local church. And the missionary activity is identified as the task of the entire Church and should be performed by all the faithful. In Catholic thinking ›mission without church‹ is inconceivable. If we phrase the development so far in slogans, we moved from ›The Church has missions‹ via ›The Church has a mission‹ to ›The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature‹ (AG 2). And we are now on the way to ›Mission has a Church‹.¹⁵ But what are we to do, if mission has more than *one* church?

This touches on the ecumenical significance of mission. The link between ecumenism and mission is one of the foundational ingredients of *Ad gentes*. From its founding in 1622 onwards the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith not only had the task of spreading the faith and protecting it in areas of Catholic diaspora, till 1960 it was responsible for dialogue with other Christians in order to restore unity. This is universally known. Less well known is that in April 1965 in Crêt-Bérard, Switzerland, a small informal meeting of

13 Stephen B. BEVANS SVD, Mission at the Second Vatican Council: 1962-1965, in: ID. (ed.), A Century (n. 1), 101-111, 102.

14 Münster had seen the goal of mission in conversion in order to save souls. Louvain had focused on church planting.

15 Thus reads the title of an article by Stephen B. BEVANS SVD, The Mission has a Church: An invitation to the dance, in: Australian eJournal of Theology 14/1 (2009) http://aejt.com.au/2009/issue_14/?article=197644 (28/02/2022).

experts from the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches contributed to *Ad gentes*. The scope of the meeting was to exchange mutual information about the respective positions in regard to missionary theory and practice.¹⁶ The traces of this background can still be seen in *Ad gentes* 6 which stresses the importance of common witness.¹⁷

In view of the »scandal of division« *Ad gentes* 29 recommends »fraternal cooperation as well as harmonious living with missionary undertaking of other Christian communities«. Even more explicitly voiced is the call to cooperation in *Ad gentes* 15: »Catholics should cooperate in a brotherly spirit with their separated brethren«. From now on, like an *ostinato*, mission resounds in the magisterium's ecumenical initiatives and ecumenism in its missionary wisdom.

2 The Implementation of Vatican II

This second step focuses on the three papal key texts on mission published after Vatican II, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975), *Redemptoris missio* (1990) and *Evangelii gaudium* (2013). Using one of them in turn this section exemplifies the developments with regard to the approach to other Christians, other religions and contemporary culture since Vatican II.

2.1 Relations with other ecclesial traditions and *Evangelii nuntiandi*

In the wake of the council a whole wealth of practical initiatives emerged. One of them is SEDOS, the service of documentation and study of global mission, founded in 1964. In addition many missionary orders and congregations strove to adjust to the council's concept of mission. For instance, in the 1967 Chapter of the Missionaries of Africa Vatican II was quoted 447 times.¹⁸

Nevertheless, theologically the first decades after the council meant a period of crisis for mission: Since salvation outside the church no longer was regarded as impossible, it seemed difficult to still justify the necessity of mission. It rather seemed a patronizing indoctrination, an undue interference with foreign cultures, and was too closely intertwined with colonialism. The well-being of the poor and oppressed might be better promoted by political action. The mutual toleration of religions and cultures might be better served by dialogue.

In 1974 Paul VI convoked a Synod of Bishops on *Evangelization in the Modern World*. »Mission« was deliberately avoided in the title. In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*,¹⁹ published in 1975, Paul VI describes his concept of mission, now

16 This meeting also sparked off the work of the Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches which resulted in its 1970 document *Common Witness and Proselytism*. Cf. Basil MEEKING, After Vatican II, in: *International Review of Mission* 73 (1984) 57-65, 59.

17 Cf. also AG 36 on the ecumenical value of the testimony of a good life.

18 Cf. Society of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), Documents of the XXth Chapter Rome 1967, pro manuscripto, Rome 1968.

19 All references to PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* are taken from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html (28/02/2022).

20 Cf. Roger P. SCHROEDER SVD, Catholic Teaching on Mission after Vatican II: 1975-2007, in: BEVANS (ed.), *A Century* (n. 1), 112-120, 114.

21 The Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *Common Witness and Proselytism*, A Study Document, no. 1, http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/jwgc/doc/e_jwgc-n3_06.html (28/02/2022).

22 Cf. MEEKING, After Vatican II, (n. 16), 61.

23 Philip POTTER, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, in: *Monthly Letter about Evangelism of WCC/CWME* (January 1975) 2.

substituted by ›evangelization‹. This expanded understanding of mission includes direct proclamation, planting the church and a variety of other activities. Against the tendency to reduce evangelization to only proclaiming Christ to those who do not yet know him, Paul VI states: »It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization unless one tries to keep in view all its essential elements« (EN 17).²⁰ Chapter II of *Evangelii nuntiandi* describes these essential elements. Evangelization »means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity [thus hopefully converting] both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs« (EN 18). Paul VI calls the latter an evangelization of »man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots)« (EN 20).

The pope builds his broad concept of mission on the strong connection and continuity between Jesus' mission of the reign of God and the church, which is »the normal, desired, most immediate and most visible fruit of this activity« (EN 15). Evangelization without the church is impossible, it »is not accomplished without her, and still less against her« (EN 16). On the contrary, »[e]vangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity« (EN 14). Since the entire church is missionary by nature, »it is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole« (EN 16). The missional nature of the Church does not mean that she possesses and disposes of mission out of her own accord. »The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself [...] by constant conversion and renewal, in order to evangelize the world with credibility« (EN 15).

This expanded understanding of mission leads to the recognition that »[b]etween evangelization and human advancement – development and liberation – there are in fact profound links« (EN 31). For »evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, [...] – a message especially energetic today about liberation« (EN 29). In fact, the exhortation insists on a balance between evangelization and liberation. But that does not mean that the Church is dedicated to a »simply temporal project«, rather she proclaims the message of liberation with the »authority to proclaim freedom as in the name of God« (EN 32).

The principal results of *Evangelii nuntiandi* actually are in close keeping with the understanding of mission in the ecumenical world. There, in 1961, the International Missionary Council had merged with the World Council of Churches and become the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). At the turn of the years 1972/1973, the World Mission Conference in Bangkok had taken place. It took a holistic approach to the theme *Salvation Today*, encompassing spiritual as well as socio-political aspects.

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr Philip Potter, a Methodist pastor who till 1972 had been director of CWME, had been invited to the 1974 Bishops' Synod. He had addressed the bishops quoting a passage from the *Joint Working Group* document on *Common Witness and Proselytism*: »Unity in witness and witness in unity. This is the will of Christ for his people.«²¹ He had combined this with the Synod's working paper's statement: »The ecumenical movement finds its origin, among other things, in the requirements of evangelization that call for unity among Christians.«²² He then had continued:

»Evangelism is the test of our ecumenical vocation [...] The challenge facing the churches is not that the modern world is unconcerned about their evangelistic message, but rather whether they are so renewed in their life and thought that they become a living witness to the integrity of the gospel.«²³

These words of his still resound in *Evangelii nuntiandi* 77 where Paul VI seems to enter into a dialogue with Potter's speech at the Synod:

»Indeed, if the Gospel that we proclaim is seen to be rent by doctrinal disputes, ideological polarizations or mutual condemnations among Christians, at the mercy of the latter's differing views on Christ and the Church and even because of their different concepts of society and human institutions, how can those to whom we address our preaching fail to be disturbed, disoriented, even scandalized?«

On Potter's remark that »Evangelism is the test of our ecumenical vocation« the pope comments, »Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church. This is a source of responsibility and also of comfort« (EN 77). The convergences in the dialogue began to gradually find structural expression. The Synod of Bishops had called for concrete steps to foster ecumenical cooperation and the pope agreed.²⁴ Already at the Bangkok Mission Conference twelve Roman Catholic observers, named by the Holy See, were present. Immediately after Bangkok the CWME commission met for an amendment of its constitution to allow for consultative relations with non-member bodies. »In 1974, the Secretariat for Christian Unity, in collaboration with the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples and with the help of the Unions of Superiors-General, named four mission-sending institutes to a consultative relationship with the CWME.«²⁵ In addition three Catholics appointed by the same dicastery serve as commissioners on the CWME commission. In 1984 the institutional cooperation culminated in the appointment of a Catholic consultant to work for the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and be seconded to Geneva as a staff member of CWME. From January 2011 till October 2013 I held this position. In 2014 the consultancy would have celebrated its 30th anniversary, yet it was abolished when I left. Nevertheless, there are still many topics to be dealt with jointly, because the issues facing all mission communities, Catholic, historic and evangelical Protestant, as well as Orthodox »look very similar [...] and comprise a): focus on God's mission, partnership between younger churches and their churches of origin, justice, evangelical methods, inculturation, liberation, common witness, and the mission of the whole people of God, inter-religious dialogue, and the theological basis of mission.«²⁶ Our next step will pick up one of these issues and focus on the approach to other religions.

2.2 Relations with other religions and *Redemptoris missio*

Redemptoris missio was promulgated on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ad gentes* (December 7, 1990). It returns to the term »mission« and, while affirming the development of mission since Vatican II, admits to have been written out of concern that neither the significance of Jesus Christ nor the importance of the Church in mission nor a focus on *missio ad gentes* and proclamation were sufficiently being upheld.

In response to these concerns John Paul II presents salvation in Christ as the foundation of mission.²⁷ The encyclical addresses the horizons and paths of mission. It distinguishes three situations of evangelization today. The first one »is *missio ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term« (RM 33). It consists in »proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building up the local Church and promoting the values of the kingdom« (RM 34) to non-Christians. The second one is pastoral care of Christian communities (RM 33). And »[t]hirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots [...] where entire groups

of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a ›new evangelization‹ or a ›re-evangelization‹ (RM 33). In all three situations, the territorial dimension of mission ›remains important for determining responsibilities, competencies and the geographical limits of missionary activity‹ (RM 37). It is, however, complemented by new horizons of mission which arise from contemporary social phenomena.

Redemptoris missio puts the main emphasis on *missio ad gentes* and at the same time expands its scope. It addresses the need for an initial evangelization in large cities, with youth, communities of migrants, and the poor. Recalling St Paul's preaching on the Areopagus in Athens, it identifies new areopagi, i.e. ›new sectors in which the Gospel must be proclaimed‹ (RM 37c). Here it lists the ›world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a ›global village‹‹ (RM 37c) as well as ›commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities; the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world‹ (RM 37c). All these areas demand *missio ad gentes*.

Missio ad gentes can take various paths, and inter-religious dialogue is one of them. As a matter of fact, *Redemptoris missio* identifies inter-religious dialogue as a ›method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment‹ and refers to it for the first time as forming ›part of the Church's evangelizing mission‹ (RM 55). To relate proclamation and dialogue is not just a tactical move. Dialogue ›does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit‹ (RM 56). On the other hand, ›dialogue does not dispense from evangelization‹ (RM 55). It does not lessen the task to proclaim Jesus Christ. The Church is the ordinary way of salvation, yet, at the same time, ›other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church‹ (RM 56). The need for authentic dialogue is therefore strongly affirmed. This means to avoid all close-mindedness as well as all ›false irenicism‹ (RM 56). Inter-religious dialogue is a ›path toward the Kingdom‹ (RM 57). It can take different forms showing that dialogue takes place among people not between religious systems. These forms range

›from exchanges between experts in religious traditions or official representatives of those traditions to cooperation for integral development and the safeguarding of religious values; and from a sharing of their respective spiritual experiences to the so-called ›dialogue of life,‹ through which believers of different religions bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society‹ (RM 57).

24 *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 77: ›More-over we make our own the desire of the Fathers of the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, for a collaboration marked by greater commitment with the Christian brethren with whom we are not yet united in perfect unity, taking as a basis the foundation of Baptism and the patrimony of faith which is common to us. By doing this we can already give a greater common witness to Christ before the world in the very work of evangelization.‹

25 Joan DELANEY, *The Relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches*, in: *Verbum* 28 (1987) 82-88, 83; cf. also MEEKING, *After Vatican II* (n.16), 62.

26 Jeffrey GROS FSC, *A Century of Hope and Transformation: Mission and Unity in Catholic Perspective*, in: BEVANS (ed.), *A Century* (n.1), 162-171, 165.

27 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio* 10. All quotes of RM are taken from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html (28/02/2022).

In identifying these four forms *Redemptoris missio* actually builds on the results of the work of the Secretariat for Non-Christians,²⁸ meanwhile called the Dicastery for Inter-religious Dialogue. The 1991 document of the same dicastery *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*,²⁹ deepens this point, »[p]roclamation and dialogue are thus both viewed, each in its own place, as component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church. They are both oriented towards the communication of salvific truth« (DP 2). *Redemptoris missio* set off a whole series of reflections on new ways and concepts of inter-religious dialogue, also in papal teaching. This might be summarized best by Benedict XVI's observation on the two directions of inter-religious dialogue during his visit to the UK in September 2010: »As followers of different religious traditions working together for the good of the community at large, we attach great importance to this ›side by side‹ dimension of our cooperation, which complements the ›face to face‹ aspect of our continuing dialogue«. ³⁰ As a matter of fact, also Christians of different traditions who are engaged in inter-religious dialogue experience this ›side by side‹ dimension as they grow in unity.

2.3 Relation with contemporary culture and *Evangelii gaudium*

The most recent of the documents discussed here, *Evangelii gaudium*,³¹ was published on November 24, 2013 in order to mark the conclusion of the Year of Faith. It summarizes the outcome of the Bishops' Synod in October 2012 on *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Faith*. Pope Francis takes seriously the affirmation that has been reiterated time and again since *Fidei donum*, namely that the entire People of God proclaims the Gospel. The reader is treated like an ›insider‹. The pope addresses all the *baptized* as evangelizers, not just the professional missionaries; and he addresses *all* the baptized, not just the Catholics. The pope invites all Christians to embark on mission in the joy of the Gospel. »Mere administration‹ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ›permanently in a state of mission‹« (EG 25).

Pope Francis draws on the three situations of mission sketched in *Redemptoris missio*. Mission and evangelization are once again interchangeable concepts. Yet the essence of evangelization does not change: it remains the proclamation of Christ. Spirit-filled evangelization is the order of the day: »I dream of a ›missionary option‹, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation« (EG 27).³² Here the

²⁸ Cf. SECRETARIATUS PRO NON-CHRISTIANIS, The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations in Dialogue and Mission, in: Bulletin. Secretariatus pro Non-Christians 56 (1984/13) 126-141, no. 37.

²⁹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, Dialogue and Proclamation (19 May 1991), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (28/02/2022).

³⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Address to Clerical and Lay Representatives of Other Religions (17 September 2010), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100917_altre-religioni_en.html (28/02/2022).

pope refers to the Church's home-made problems that need transformation, conversion and renewal.³³ »A Church which ›goes forth‹ is a Church whose doors are open« (EG 46).

Evangelization means to share what has been received in baptism. Every single baptized Christian accepts the call to mission. But mission is not an isolated individual activity. It is accomplished in a community. »Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ›peripheries‹ in need of the light of the Gospel« (EG 20). This communitarian aspect of mission is closely connected with its social and cultural scope. The social relevance of mission becomes crucial regarding the present crisis of communal commitment and the economic and cultural challenges that accompany it. The »preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care« (EG 200, cf. also EG 48). Yet, moreover, »[i]n a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter, it is time to devise a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society« (EG 239). To reach this goal is not an easy task, especially in the context of modern megacities. »A completely new culture has come to life and continues to grow in the cities« (EG 73). Drawing on *Redemptoris missio* 37b Pope Francis describes the social and pastoral situation of urban cultures (EG 71-75):

»Cities are multicultural; in the larger cities, a connective network is found in which groups of people share a common imagination and dreams about life, and new human interactions arise, new cultures, invisible cities. Various subcultures exist side by side, and often practise segregation and violence. The Church is called to be at the service of a difficult dialogue. On the one hand, there are people who have the means needed to develop their personal and family lives, but there are also many ›non-citizens‹, ›half citizens‹ and ›urban remnants‹. Cities create a sort of permanent ambivalence because, while they offer their residents countless possibilities, they also present many people with any number of obstacles to the full development of their lives. This contrast causes painful suffering« (EG 74).

Social impact and human advancement thus are a major concern of ›urban‹ mission. In facing the challenges of the urban culture the pope recommends: »The unified and complete sense of human life that the Gospel proposes is the best remedy for the ills of our cities, even though we have to realize that a uniform and rigid program of evangelization is not suited to this complex reality« (EG 75). In any case, such a communication of the Gospel is not the transfer of European culture. Despite of globalization, there is no monolithic culture but a variety of different cultures. As legitimately autonomous, culture exists of its own right. Here

31 FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html (28/02/2022).

32 Cf. *ibid.*, 49.

33 In this the pope follows four principles (cf. EG 222-237): time is greater than space, unity is greater than conflict, reality is greater than ideas, the whole is more than its parts.

Pope Francis draws on the important distinction which *Evangelii nuntiandi* makes between legitimate secularity or secularization on the one hand and secularism on the other.³⁴ In such a situation, the traditional model of »[t]he parish is not an outdated institution« (EG 28). It provides the space for personal encounter with God and with one's fellow believers.

3 Developments beyond Vatican II

In what way can mission along the lines of Vatican II still serve as a compass for evaluating more recent developments? There have been a lot of changes since the last council which saw the end of colonialism. Christianity now truly is a world religion. More Christians are living or have their origins in the global south than in the north. What were formerly called ›Christian countries‹ have witnessed a significant decline and now need re-evangelization. On the other hand, the group of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians has today become the second largest one, after the Roman Catholic Church. The rapid growth of new independent churches challenges the traditional ecumenical movement. The percentage of Christians in the world population, however, has not changed significantly for the last 100 years, holding steady at around 33%.³⁵ Migration is a steadily increasing global phenomenon. Worldwide globalization challenges traditional identities rooted in specific cultures. ›Liquid modernity‹³⁶ denotes the shift from a ›solid‹ hardware-centred modernity to a ›liquid‹ software-based modernity that profoundly changes all aspects of the human condition. Moreover, pluralism reflects the situation of a differentiated world that has no centre and no unity. The ›universe‹ has become a ›pluriverse‹. What is the place of mission in it?

3.1 Relations with other ecclesial traditions

The Catholic Church came to recognize also other movements and institutions than her traditional partners. As they became institutionalized, the Global Christian Forum, the Lausanne Movement, and the Evangelical World Alliance are such new partners. The major challenge with regard to mission does not lie so much in the official relations but in the day-to-day encounters and the cooperation on the scene of action. For here the issue of proselytism or, to put it more bluntly, of ›sheep stealing‹ comes up. The challenge is how to find ways together which do not just stop a growing de-Christianization, but rather foster a credible common Christian witness.

3.2 Relations with other religions

Evangelizing all peoples stays a permanent concern but with different names. The boundaries of mission have become much wider than Vatican II imagined. No way leads back behind the broad concept of evangelizing mission which indispensably comprises serious commitment to inter-faith dialogue.

Due to migration local churches in various parts of the world need to learn what inter-religious ›dialogue of life‹ means on a daily basis. In their dialogue encounters on various levels the different world religions strive to recognize and live up to their common responsibility for peace and justice. In the face of religiously motivated violence, however, the desirability of religious freedom and the scandal of the persecution of so many Christians remains an issue regularly addressed by the pope himself and curial institutions like the Dicastery for Inter-religious Dialogue, especially in their meetings with Muslims.

3.3 Relation with contemporary culture

Ever since Vatican II, mission is an outreach to persons. It ceased to be a territorial outreach from ›West to rest‹, solely directed towards foreign lands. It also is an outreach into foreign structures, aiming at the evangelization of cultures (EN), areopagi (RM), cities (EG), in short, an evangelization of the changing social and cultural realities of human life. The juridical and geographical idea of a mission that rather aimed at ›Christianization‹ than ›Evangelization‹ is overcome. Facing the pastoral crisis in the West which creates a kind of ›holy remnant‹-feeling among the still practicing Catholics the Church also is about to realise that for the pastoral aspect of mission personal relations and encounters may be as important as humanitarian aid.

Inculturation still remains highly important in contemporary mission, but it no longer refers only to the fact that the Christian faith is implanted into foreign cultures and to the task to preserve foreign native customs and traditions. The cross-cultural character of mission and the unifying ecclesiological concept of *communio* render the distinction between ›sending churches‹ and ›receiving churches‹ less important. On the other hand, intercultural formation and missiological anthropology play an increasing role in the formation of missionaries.

Inculturation now also refers to the fact that foreign (Christian and non-Christian) cultures encounter Western Christianity, especially via migration. The host community is challenged to engage with the migrants and to come up with appropriate forms of intercultural ministry. The migrant community is challenged as to how to relate to the host community. It can do this either through finding its place within an existing local church, or by setting up new networks and congregations. In any case the diaspora factor plays an important role. From a Western point of view ›mission comes to us‹.³⁷ Thus migrants' mission forms a new important paradigm.

3.4 ... and beyond?

What are the emergent themes of mission in 2022? One topical issue definitely are the different, sometimes new directions of mission: mission *ad intra* and *ad extra*, ›mission in reverse‹ or from the ›rest to the West‹³⁸ and ›*missio inter gentes*‹. Most of these recently developed directions of mission can be seen as an expression of the Church's catholicity.

The lay involvement in mission increases, as huge numbers of short-term missionaries worldwide take part in mission trips that are limited in time. What then is the fate of the ›professional‹ missionaries and their *missio ad vitam*? Organizations like the Volunteer Missionary Movement³⁹ try to ensure a continuation of subsequent short-term engagements through partnerships and long-term planning. This tendency towards an increasing number of short-term missions seems to corroborate Pete Ward's hypothesis that the broader context of ›liquid modernity‹ also leads to the phenomenon of a

34 Cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi 55.

35 Cf. Ernst PULSFORT (ed.), *Herausgeber neuer Atlas der Religionen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 75.

36 Cf. Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge 2000.

37 Cf. Graziano BATTISTELLA, *La missione viene a noi*. In margine all'Istruzione *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, Vatican City 2005.

38 Cf. Peter VETHANAYAGAMONY, *Mission from the Rest to the West: The Changing Landscape of World Christianity and Christian Mission*, in:

Ogbu KALU / Peter VETHANAYAGAMONY / Edmund KEE-FOOK CHIA (ed.), *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*, Louisville, KY 2010, 59-70.

39 Or other organisations listed on OSCAR, <https://oscar.org.uk> (28/02/2022).

›liquid church‹.⁴⁰ Yet ›liquid modernity‹ does not mean new stability and order, only an unmanageable and overwhelming disorder of the present. If the church were to survive in a liquefied present, this would no longer be possible according to the principles of a ›solid church‹, which are parish-oriented with a central Sunday service as their standard. Ward thinks, »[w]hat is needed is a more flexible church, one that is able to respond to the changing needs of people. The challenge for the liquid church is how it can do this without losing its theological heart«.⁴¹ Contradicting Ward, Kees de Groot underlines the ambivalences of a ›liquid church‹: »Whereas Bauman says, ›Watch out! Beware liquid modernity!‹, Ward exhorts, ›Behold, society is liquid! Church should be likewise!«⁴² De Groot exposes Ward's rather uncritical adaptation of a late modern consumerist culture. If the church were to become fluid, this would not lead to truly better mission. »After all, it is not church growth, nor the flow of the liquid church, that constitutes the mission of the Church. Its mission is entailed in the difference a church makes in a world, where salvation and solidarity can be absent or present.«⁴³ Thus, an openness to new forms of inculturation is advisable whereas a total metamorphosis into a ›liquid church‹ is not. The reason for this is not an adherence to the eternally outdated but the theological tenet that the church is a place of hope where God can be found in communion, not in individual outings and trips in search of meaning. For this reason some of the new developments are no option for Catholic mission; I refer to the increasing number of individuals, groups and organizations that are engaging in mission activities which are independent of the mission work undertaken by the existing churches.⁴⁴ Mission is no pastime activity. It asks commitment and involvement in the church. For as Lesslie Newbigin, once General Secretary of the International Missionary Council and subsequently Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, pointed out, »[t]he logic of mission is: the true meaning of the human story has been disclosed. Because it is the truth, it must be shared universally. When we share it with all peoples, we give them the opportunity to know the truth about themselves, to know who they are because they can know the true story of which their lives are a part. Wherever the gospel is preached the question of the meaning of the human story – the universal story and the personal story of each human being – is posed. Thereafter the situation can never be the same.«⁴⁵ ◆

40 Pete WARD, *Liquid Church*, Peabody, MA/Carlisle, Cumbria 2002.

41 *Ibid.*, 64.

42 Kees DE GROOT, *The Church in Liquid Modernity. A Sociological and Theological Exploration of a Liquid Church*, in: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6 (2006) 91-103, 99.

43 *Ibid.*, 100-101.

44 Cf. www.faith2share.net (28/02/2022).

45 Lesslie NEWBIGIN, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids, MI 1989, 125.

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