

DOING MISSION TODAY: Where We Do It, How We Do It, What We Do

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Introduction

In my first talk I tried to engage our theological imaginations in order to come to a fresh way of understanding mission. Mission is first of all God's mission, as God moves through the world as all-pervasive Spirit and in the concrete body and history of Jesus of Nazareth, calling all creation—but especially women and men—to communion with the Mystery at creation's heart. God's act of creation is God's first act of mission, and God has been active, flowing through creation with a life-giving, loving, challenging, redeeming, and healing embrace from the first nanosecond, through the presence and power of the Spirit. Jesus was anointed by that Spirit for his mission and ministry, and, as Resurrected Lord, has lavished that Spirit upon us. Since Pentecost—or perhaps even more precisely, since Antioch—we the church have continued Jesus' mission and ministry as God's Holy People, the Body of Christ, created continually by the Holy Spirit. We don't do mission because we are *commanded* to do it. We do mission because we have been plunged into God's very life by Baptism, called to be God's partners in continuing God's mission of creating the world.

My task in this second talk is to reflect with you on the practical implications of what all this means, particularly in a more secularized culture like my own American one, and that of Australia. I'm going to do this in three parts. In a first part I'm going to reflect on *where* we need to do mission today, and I'm going to speak very briefly and very broadly about the context of secularized countries in general and of Australia in particular. Please bear with me, an outsider, for any stupid remarks I make here. My source for much of what I want to say is from a wonderfully thoughtful paper by Noel Connolly, but I take full responsibility for any mistakes I make in interpreting him. Second, I'm going to reflect on *how* we need to do mission in this particular context, and suggest that it should be done with a spirituality of "prophetic dialogue." Third and finally, I'm going to reflect on *what* we might do in this context, basing my thoughts on several of the six elements of mission that I have proposed with my friend and colleague Roger Schroeder in our book *Constants in Context*.¹

Where We Do Mission

Almost a quarter century ago now, in his great encyclical on Christian Mission, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), Pope John Paul II spoke of mission as carried on in three kinds of situations (see RM 33). In the first situation, and the one on which the encyclical focused primarily, the church addresses "peoples, groups, and sociocultural contexts" in which the gospel has not been accepted or adequately taken root. The pope calls this mission *ad gentes*. Second, the church's mission is carried out in Christian communities that are solid in their faith, have appropriated its content in terms of their culture and context, and are engaged in witnessing to and proclaiming the gospel to the world that surrounds them. This is the work, says the pope, of pastoral care. In the third place, in particular situations throughout the world, the church recognizes that "entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith," or simply exist without faith at all. This is the situation addressed by what John Paul, since early in his Pontificate, had spoken of as the "New Evangelization." Such "New Evangelization," says the pope requires a "new

¹ See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

ardor,” “new methods,” and “new expression,”² to re-present Christianity to the women and men of many technologically advanced secularized societies, like my American society, and yours here in Australia.

Pope John Paul admits that the boundaries between each of these situations “are not clearly definable,” and that it would be wrong to put them in “water-tight compartments” (RM 34). He even recognizes that there is a growing interdependence that has developed. In fact, all three aspects of mission are needed in Europe, North America, and Australia and New Zealand. There are needs for primary evangelization, for pastoral care, and for the New Evangelization. Mission is complicated by the dazzling diversity of nationalities and cultures in our countries and in our church communities, often through migration—Australia is the most multicultural country in the Western world.³ Mission is faced with a culture that is highly secularized, highly individualistic, virtually addicted to accumulating material goods, influenced by narcissistic athletes and entertainers, the youth of which, according to Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith, are practitioners of a “therapeutic deism,” by which religion basically functions to help people feel good about themselves, and not to challenge them to fuller and greater life.⁴

Especially in the last several years as well, Catholics in these areas have been alienated from the church and religious practice on account of widespread revelations not only of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, but also—and in many ways even more devastating—of an equally widespread cover up by the Catholic Hierarchy. Add to this what some have called a “hemorrhaging of women” leaving the church on account of the church’s inability to include them in major decision making—let alone admitting them to office in the church; the perceived inability of the church to listen with a sympathetic ear to those who struggle with its teachings on abortion, homosexuality, end of life issues, or fertility procedures; at least in the United States, the meddling of the church in national and local politics; the rather heavy-handed imposition of a new, for many, clumsy translation of the liturgical texts—and we see places that are in need of a vigorous New Evangelization. There is in the church, as modern prophet Joan Chittister has written eloquently in *The National Catholic Reporter*, a general weariness, “an ennui that set in when people get nothing but old answers to new questions.”⁵ In the United States, we say that if Catholics are the largest religious group in the country, the second largest group, are *former* Catholics. And one of the fastest-growing movements in American religion—and I suspect the same is true here in Australia—is the growing number of people who do not identify with any religion—“nones,” as the sociologists call them. All the problems of the Western, globalized, secular world are here in spades.

But there is also an amazing vitality. Americans and Australians alike are deep believers in democracy and participation, and so want to have a say in the church and its governance. They are also some of the best-educated people in the world, and so can’t be talked down to or swayed by any kind of authoritarianism or papal mystique. As is evidenced by the response of people to tragedies such as Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Sandy—or several years ago after the horrible forest fires in Victoria—they are

² See John Paul II, “The Task of the Latin American Bishop,” *Origins* 12 (March 24, 1983): 661. Referred to in Avery Dulles, “The New Evangelization: Challenge for Religious Missionary Institutes,” in ed. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Word Remembered, Word Proclaimed: Selected Papers from Symposia Celebrating the SVD Centennial in North America* (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1997), 19.

³ Noel Connolly, “New Evangelisation in Australia,” Draft of a paper given at the SEDOS Conference, Rome, April, 2013, 2.

⁴ On “therapeutic deism” see Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

⁵ Joan Chittister, “Listen to the Hopes of a Weary People,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 29, 2013: 4 (Kindle edition).

amazingly generous and compassionate. Because of this, I think, our efforts at evangelization need to take a clue from a truly missionary attitude that recognizes that there is a “secret presence” of God in all nations and cultures (AG 9)—even in cultures like our own.

We Americans are among the most religious nations on earth. A friend of mine—not an American—once told me that the most religious place he had ever been was India, and number 2 was the USA. This religiousness is borne out time and time again in polls and surveys, and once more lately by Gallup Pollster Frank Newport in a book significantly titled *God Is Alive and Well: The Future of Religion in America*.⁶ The basic thesis in Newport’s book is that although Americans tend to shy away more and more from “organized religion”—“I’m spiritual, but I’m not religious”—this does not mean that Americans are abandoning religiosity as such. Newport says that the statistics point to the conclusion that “Americans have potential religious energy locked up, ready to be converted to activated energy if and when the time is right. This sets the stage for future religious developments.”⁷

Noel Connolly writes that “Australia is a postmodern, secular and multicultural country. But secular does not necessarily mean irreligious, anti-religious, or lacking in spirituality. Religion and spirituality are growing but the churches have lost their monopoly.”⁸ Connolly contests the notion that Australia is the most secularized country in the world. While Australians have a great reluctance to talk about religion—John Thornhill calls religion for Australians “The Embarrassing Subject.”⁹ Nevertheless there exists in Australians (in the words of Manning Clarke) “a whisper in the mind and a shy hope in the heart.”¹⁰ “Many Australians,” writes Connolly, referring to Thornhill, are searching for the transcendent and we need to learn to tell the Jesus story in an understandable and attractive rather than a doctrinal way.”¹¹

From this perspective, as a theologian and missiologist, my sense is that with the proper spirituality and methods of evangelization by a church that is deeply faithful to the spirit and message of the gospel on the one hand and faithful “signs of the times” on the other, mission has a real chance of achieving some modest success in this time and this place. The challenge of mission in the US and Australia, in the same way as New Zealand theologian Susan Smith suggests in her own context, is somehow to tap into the experience of transcendence that people continue to experience in their lives.¹² This is why the *how* and the *what* of mission are important. And so it is to these that I turn in the second and third parts of my presentation.

How We Do Mission

When I speak here of “*how* to do mission,” I am not speaking of a kind of “instruction manual” for doing mission. Mission is not something that can be pre-programmed or worked out in advance. It can only be done in day-to-day reflection on and prayer about our ministry, in community discussion and discernment. When I speak of the *how* of mission, rather, I mean the basic *attitude* that we need to bring to mission,

⁶ Frank Newport, *God Is Alive and Well: The Future of Religion in America* (New York: Gallup Press, 2012).

⁷ Newport, 19.

⁸ Connolly, 1.

⁹ This is the title of Chapter 8 of John Thornhill, *Making Australia: Exploring Our National Conversation* (Newtown, NSW: MillenniumBooks, 1992), 167-219. Quoted in Connolly, 1.

¹⁰ Quoted in Connolly, 1.

¹¹ Connolly, 1.

¹² Susan Smith, “What Needs to be ‘New’ about the New Evangelization in New Zealand,” Draft paper for SEDOS Conference in Rome, April, 2013, 8.

or even the basic *spirituality* that is behind our missionary activity. My friend and colleague Roger Schroder and I have called this attitude or spirituality one of “Prophetic Dialogue,” borrowing the phrase from our SVD Thirteenth General Chapter, held in 2000.¹³

In what follows I’m going to focus in the “dialogue” aspect of prophetic dialogue, even though both are equally important. This is partly because of the limits of time, but also I believe that, in our particular contexts today, *how* we do mission needs first and foremost to be rooted in a commitment to dialogue. By this I mean that we need to cultivate a fundamental stance of openness, of respect, of friendship, of deep listening, of vulnerability. This is by no means arbitrary. We do mission this way because God does mission in this way—it is a Trinitarian practice. As Pope Paul VI expresses it in his wonderful encyclical on dialogue: “the whole history of humanity’s salvation is one long, varied dialogue, which marvelously begins with God and which God prolongs with women and men in so many different ways.”¹⁴ If the triune God carries out the divine mission *in* dialogue and *for* dialogue, so must those women and men baptized in the Trinity’s name.

What does it mean to do mission in dialogue? Primarily, it means that we must have a heart “so open,” as African American novelist Alice Walker describes it, “that the wind blows through it.”¹⁵ My colleague at CTU Claude Marie Barbour explains such openness and vulnerability as “mission in reverse.” Rather than arriving somewhere and right away serving or preaching or teaching, Barbour has insisted over forty years that the minister/missionary needs first to be evangelized by those whom she or he evangelizes. The people that we serve, she insists, must be the teachers before we dare to teach.

The first step in mission, then, is that deep listening, docility (the ability to be taught), gentleness, the ability to forge real relationships.¹⁶ Noel Connolly suggests that “most people listen more willingly to people who appreciate them and are learning along with them.”¹⁷ “Give us FRIENDS” was the heartfelt cry of Indian churchman A. S. Azariah in his famous speech about missionaries at the 1910 Edinburgh World Mission Conference.¹⁸

Connolly writes, “we are most missionary when we move out to discover what God is doing around us. Then we will be a more authentic and convincing sign of God’s hopes for the world.”¹⁹ This same idea was expressed in an editorial in the *American National Catholic Reporter* during last year’s Synod of Bishops on the New

¹³ See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 348-95; Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 19-55; Roger Schroeder, Presidential Address, “Proclamation and Interreligious Dialogue as Prophetic Dialogue,” *Missiology: An International Review* 41.1 (January, 2013): 50-61. See *In Dialogue with the Word Nr 1* (Rome: SVD Publications, 2000), esp. 30-32.

¹⁴ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam_en.html, 70. Accessed March 28, 2013.

¹⁵ Alice Walker, “A Wind through the Heart: A Conversation with Alice Walker and Sharon Salzburg on Loving Kindness in a Painful World,” *Shambala Sun* (January, 1997): 1-5.

¹⁶ See Claude Marie Barbour, “Seeking Justice and Shalome in the City,” *International Review of Mission* 73 (1984): 303-9.

¹⁷ Noel Connolly, “New Evangelisation in Australia,” draft paper to be presented at the SEDOS Conference, April, 2013, 8.

¹⁸ Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).

¹⁹ Connolly, 9.

Evangelization. Most lapsed Catholics or that rising group of “nones” are not particularly interested if we simply come to them with ready-made answers, the editorial said.²⁰ As I like to say, the New Evangelization cannot be saying the same thing we’ve always said, but saying it louder. The NCR editorial asks, “Is it possible that ‘nones’ can teach us something about God? Or at least can we learn something from listening to their questions? The church’s challenge is not to supply answers but to accompany people on their spiritual quests.”²¹ Dialogue is the sine qua non of the New Evangelization, which includes primary evangelization and pastoral care.

This past February, Annie Selak, a rector of one of the dormitories at Notre Dame, contributed to a blog in the *Washington Post* in which she asked the question “What do young Catholics want?”²² She offered four answers, and all of them revolved around the idea that the church needs to be a community of openness and dialogue. Selak was speaking for “young Catholics.” My own sense is that the relevance of what she said articulates the wants of a much wider age group as well.

“We want the church to ask the questions we are asking,” she says. These are questions, she explains, that deal with some of the hard issues in today’s world and church. These are questions about women’s equality and participation in the church, about sexuality, including homosexuality, and about truth outside the pale of Christianity. In this way, she says, the church would begin to model to the world the inclusivity of Jesus. “There is an urgency to these issues, as these are not nameless people on the margins, these are our friends, family members, mentors, and leaders.” This generation of young adults has grown up with non-Christians, and Selak says that they are among “the holiest people we know.” Selak’s words remind me of the intervention of Archbishop—now Cardinal—Luis Antonio Tagle at last October’s Synod. Perhaps rather than always speaking, Tagle said, the church needs to keep silent and listen: “The Church must discover the power of silence. Confronted with the sorrows, doubts and uncertainties of people she cannot pretend to give easy solutions. In Jesus, silence becomes the way of attentive listening, compassion and prayer.”²³ To be an open church, a learning church, a vulnerable church—what a witness to the world we could be.

Within—and only within—the context of dialogue, we also do mission in prophecy—proclaiming hope, proclaiming the message of the gospel, witnessing its the transforming truth, confronting any injustice. Dialogue, however, is the “condition for the possibility” of prophecy, as Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham, England pointed out at the 2013 Synod. For him, the first step of evangelization has to be “profound listening.” “There can be no effective proclamation of the faith, he said, ‘without an attempt to understand how the message is likely to be heard, how it sounds to others.’”²⁴

What We Do in Mission

In our book *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Roger Schroeder and I proposed six “elements” of mission as a kind of framework for understanding what mission should be in today’s world and the ways in which it is done.

²⁰ *National Catholic Reporter*, Editorial, October 27, 2012, cited in Connolly, 10.

²¹ *National Catholic Reporter*, cited in Connolly, 10.

²² Annie Selak, “The Church Young Catholics Want,”

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/the-church-young-catholics-want/2013/02/14/de08eae2-760a-11e2-95e4-6148e45d7adb_blog.html.

²³ Thirteenth Synod of Bishops, October 7–28, 2012, on the New Evangelization, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/xx_plurilingue/b07_xx.html, (unofficial translation) Accessed March 29, 2013.

²⁴ Archbishop Bernard Longley, quoted in Connolly, 9-10.

These six elements are (1) witness and proclamation; (2) liturgy, prayer, and contemplation; (3) justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; (4) interreligious and secular dialogue; (5) inculturation; (6) reconciliation. I have also come to realize that these six “elements” are also “practices” rooted in Trinitarian life and mission.²⁵ The idea is that mission is a multi-faceted reality, and cannot be reduced to one or the other activity. It is, in John Paul II’s words, “a single, complex reality” (RM 41).

In this section I’d like to reflect on some of these six elements or practices that Roger and I propose. Naturally I can’t tell you exactly what you need to do, but I hope that my reflections will help you in coming to concrete practices yourselves in your own Australian context. I won’t reflect on every one of these elements per se—we just don’t have that much time—but I will refer to all of them in some way in what follows. They are all intertwined, and blend into one another, and so I’ve chosen more of a path of integration, which is, I think, less abstract and theoretical.

Witness, Authenticity, and Equality

I am pretty convinced that one of the most important of these elements for the New Evangelization in our societies—if not the most important—is the practice of the credible, joyful, challenging witness of individuals, but especially of communities. Paul VI wrote that “the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life,”²⁶ and, at least for me, this is proven quite dramatically in these first days of the papacy of Pope Francis. His joy, his simplicity, his concern for human beings, I think, have done more for the New Evangelization than all the talk at the October, 2013 Synod. Somewhere long ago I heard a line attributed to the atheistic philosopher Nietzsche that has always struck me: “the problem with you Christians is that you don’t *look* redeemed!” That’s it. We need to look redeemed. Then people can see with their own eyes what happens when individuals and communities actually open themselves up to living the gospel. Pope Francis “looks redeemed.”

Where the church has broken down in the last several years is largely in the area of witness. People simply find it hard to believe what we stand for. Sadly, so many religious and clerics have proved to be false witnesses to the gospel. As Noel Connolly puts it, it is ironic that the New Evangelization is asking us to call Australians back to the church in a time when the church has never been more distrusted.²⁷ Because of this, our mission today calls us to divest ourselves of anything that would compromise our authenticity. We really have to work, for example, in eradicating any kind of clericalism—either among ourselves or in our relationships with laity. We can only do this if we are deeply convinced of our fundamental baptismal equality and live our of that conviction. The kind of real collaboration that comes out of this lived understanding is a major aspect of giving witness.

It is in this witnessing to authenticity and equality that we can practice at least one aspect of the element of reconciliation. As we work to be more authentic, transparent, and collaborative, we can do much to reduce the tensions in the church among Aboriginals and among women—both groups in different ways so often disenfranchised and looked down upon—and the victims of sexual abuse, who have been so wounded by the church, especially its clerics, in the past. Robert Schreiter talks about how the Christian

²⁵ See Stephen Bevans, “Mission as Trinitarian Practice,” draft of an article for a forthcoming Catholic introduction to Practical Theology, edited by Claire Wolfteich.

²⁶ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html, 41.

²⁷ Connolly, 14.

community needs to be a “safe place” for those who have been in any way wounded.²⁸ An authentic and equal church—gender-wise, race-wise, victim-wise—can be that safe place and speak volumes by such a witness. A major task of the church, and religious communities in the church, is to help build such safe spaces, spaces of renewed life.

Effective Proclamation

Preaching

I’ve spent a good deal of time on witness, because, as I have said, I think it is the most crucial aspect of mission today, especially in our US context. I think that a church or community that shines in authenticity and joy is the best way that we can tap into that deep religiosity that still exists in our cultures, despite the growing number of people who do not identify with one or the other particular religious community. Nevertheless, the specific practice of proclamation is obviously a necessary element of mission. We have a message, a powerful message of life, and it needs to be worthily communicated.

Probably the place we do this most in our missionary activity is, for those of us who are ordained, in our homilies at Eucharist. And if there is anything we have to work on in terms of the New Evangelization, it is the constant improvement in our preaching. For me, preaching is one of the most invigorating, wonderful, and rewarding things that I do, but it is probably *one* of if not *the* most challenging, difficult, and even scary things that I do as well. I’ve been preaching for over forty years, but it is something that I always feel is a skill at which I need continually to improve.

If we are to be better preachers, the first thing we have to do is take the time to prepare—I try to prepare about six to eight hours a week when I preach, and some preaching experts say that a preacher needs even more time. I try to read as many homily helps as I can, and I regularly have recourse to *The Interpreter’s Bible*. I strongly believe that such constant and deep Bible study is a sine qua non of good preaching. As one of my colleagues, Dianne Bergant, always says, God’s people deserve to be nourished on our tradition.

I’m lucky that I preach in the same community most of the time, and so I really do know the people to whom I preach. The community in which I preside and preach regularly has liturgy preparations two weeks before the liturgy at which I’m going to preside and we spend about an hour sharing about the readings before we get down to the nuts and bolts of organizing the celebration.

The point is that the homily on Sunday is the most important eight or ten minutes that we have to proclaim the gospel and make it come alive, and we simply can’t squander that time. And you never know who is there, especially at weddings and funerals and baptisms. There might be a guest who has not set foot in a church for years, or someone who has been disillusioned by the church, or someone who has no faith at all but might be struck by the message in a new way.

I wonder if we who are ordained, who are entrusted with “ordering the church’s faith,” if we should not take every opportunity possible to share our preaching with the lay people with whom we collaborate. There are many occasions on which it is perfectly legitimate to have a preacher who is not ordained—e.g. children’s Masses, Fathers’ Day, Mothers’ Day, youth Masses. This would allow women’s voices to be heard, lay voices of parents to be heard, other members of our community as well who have special skills and areas of expertise.

Preaching and Inculturation

²⁸ See Robert J. Scheiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 128-29.

It is in particular in preaching that we can engage in the practice of “inculturation.” Inculturation isn’t something for the experts, but it is something we’re called to do every time we approach the pulpit. The old adage attributed to Karl Barth is still valid: we need to preach with the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. This is why it is important to be constantly on the lookout for songs, contemporary film, novels, poetry, or contemporary issues that connect with, or illumine the lectionary readings and/or liturgical texts.

On the other hand, inculturation is not only about illuminating the contemporary context with the gospel, or the gospel in the light of the contemporary context. It can also be—and in U.S. and Australian cultures it should often be—a challenge to the culture. I’m not advocating scolding, however, and I like always to make the distinction between being *countercultural* rather than *anticultural*. American Ronald Rolheiser likens ministering within secular culture to dealing with an adolescent: it is not bad; it is simply unfinished.²⁹ The theologian on whom I wrote my doctoral dissertation, John Oman, once referred to the eighteenth century abolitionist Quaker preacher John Woolman who wrote that when he would prepare to preach to slaveholders he would “tender his heart” toward them. Only when he felt “the temptations of his brethren and the forces against which he too might have been weak,” was he able to give his stern message.³⁰

Proclamation and Adult Education and Formation

But the practice proclamation is more than preaching. It has to do with teaching as well, and here I think especially about adult education and lay formation. This may indeed be the key to the New Evangelization. This past February I gave a talk introducing people to Vatican II at a parish in Addison, Illinois. About sixty people showed up and their reaction to my talk was amazing. Yes, they had heard of Vatican II, they said, but they really had no idea of its impact on the church in the last fifty years. I’ve had other experiences like this as I’ve given talks around the Chicago area and in several other places around the country, and I’m convinced that people are hungry for good adult education in their faith. I also believe that it’s not just a matter of “preaching to the choir,” in the sense that if people become better formed in their faith, and become more exposed to the beauty and power of the church’s tradition, they will in turn be able to be better proclaimers and explainers of the faith to others—people with whom they work, go to school, friends they have over for dinner, and the like. It will mean, of course, we will have to attend to our own continuing theological, biblical and moral education, going to workshops and seminars ourselves.

Liturgy as Mission

Liturgists speak of liturgy as *theologia prima*, or theology as it is lived out at the most fundamental level. We might also speak of it as *missio prima*, or a fundamental way by which mission is lived out. People are either attracted or repelled by liturgy. It is a missionary act.

I think we also need to come to the liturgy with a missionary sensitivity as well. A great little book to read on this is by Gregory Augustine Pierce, entitled *The Mass is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World*. Pierce makes the point that the most important part of the Eucharist is not so much the Scripture readings, or the homily, or even the Eucharistic Prayer and Words of Institution. It is the dismissal. As Pierce writes, at the dismissal (enhanced in the new translation—one of its better aspects) commissions us “to be the body and blood of Christ in the world. ... And so we

²⁹ See Ronald Rolheiser, *Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to Our Children* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 28.

³⁰ John Oman, *Honest Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941), 78-79.

say ‘Thanks be to God,’ not because the Mass has ended, but because it has just begun.”³¹ We do liturgy in church, my colleague Richard Fragomeni has said, to worship God with our lives.

Good, powerful liturgy is first of all meant, of course, for the regular faithful, for their nourishment, inspiration, challenge, and consolation. As such, it is an essential component of pastoral care. But it is, as I have said, a powerful attracting force for those who are trying to find a place for inspiration, and to channel that basic religiosity that we’ve spoken of before. But liturgy can also be a place for primary evangelization and re-evangelization—those visitors from out of town who just happen to stop by, those relatives who have left the church who come for a Baptism, a wedding or a funeral, or those non-Christian friends who attend these as well.

This is why having good liturgy is so important in a mission-oriented church. I believe that anyone who is committed to mission today, especially in terms of the New Evangelization, needs to work to make liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, an experience of prayer, of beauty, of reflection, of nourishment of the community. To do this takes work. Liturgies need to be prepared. Lay ministers need to be scheduled and trained. Environment has to be attended to. Music needs to be chosen appropriately. Relevant Prayers of the Faithful need to be written, not just, as it were, taken out of a can. Times of silence need to be factored in—our liturgies are sometimes too wordy. Here is again where the element of inculturation comes in, and where discerning the “signs of the times” in a globalized, secular society is relevant as well. So often our parishes are multicultural and multi-lingual, and so we need to create liturgies at which all feel included, all have a voice. It’s hard to imagine today that a parish could get along without at least a part-time music director and liturgy director.

And, like preaching, presiding takes work. Like I’ve preached for over forty years, I have also presided for that long. But I believe I need constantly to be working at presiding well—being prayerful, informal but not too much so, offering informative but not wordy introductions to the Eucharist, being welcoming to visitors, articulating the words clearly and expressively, using my body language as best I can. As much as we want to include a variety of ministers in our liturgies, it remains a fact—for good or for ill—that a good presider can make all the difference. He can actually take a fairly bland liturgy and make it into something meaningful and interesting. Or he can really ruin the best prepared of liturgies with sloppiness and rambling.

Working for Justice, Protecting Creation

In the several weeks since the election Pope Francis in March, renewed emphasis has been placed on the need for the church to live simply, in solidarity with the poor, and with a particular focus—especially seen from the Pope’s inaugural homily—on the care of creation.³² Of course, the question of justice and peacemaking—particularly justice—has been a major focus of mission since the 1971 Synod of Bishops.³³

Practicing Justice

³¹ Gregory F. Augustine Pierce, *The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2007), 61.

³² Pope Francis, Inaugural Homily, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato_en.html. Accessed March 29, 2013.

³³ 1971 Synod of Bishops, “Justice in the World,” <http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/file/view/Catholic+Bishops+on+Justice+in+the+world+1971.pdf>, Accessed March 29, 2013.

This, of course, is a very vast area, and I can only ask questions. A first area that I focus on in terms of “being with and for the poor” would be the places where we choose to work, and the people among whom we choose to work, especially in these days of dwindling personnel and resources. What kind of parishes do we want to work in? What kind of people do we want to attract to our retreat houses, or study centres, our schools of theology?

Secondly, how do we want to use your resources? How will we continue to invest our money? To which justice and peace organizations do we donate regularly? Are we willing to engage in prison ministry, immigration ministry, justice ministries like Network or Center of Concern, or similar organizations within the Australian context? Would some of our religious communities be willing to support or partner with NGOs run by various religious communities at the United Nations?

Third, in what political issues should you become involved in some way? Immigration issues? Gun control? Right to Life issues? School of the Americas? Economic issues?

Fourth, how do we pray—connecting justice with liturgy, prayer, and contemplation? Do social justice concerns find regular place in community prayers and liturgies? Do they find a place in our personal prayer? Does our prayer transform us into action? Being a church with and for the poor is a *sine qua non*, it seems to me, of the New Evangelization.

Protecting Creation

The connection of mission with working for the integrity of creation is a relatively new one in mission thinking. I like to tell the story that before our 2000 SVD Chapter a draft document was issued which put this issue in the forefront of our missionary efforts, and it was basically set aside as not seeming to be very important for a missionary congregations concerns. In the decade and a half since, however, the issue of ecology has come up more and more in papal and episcopal magisterial documents, with John Paul II calling for an “ecological conversion,” and our new pope Francis obviously seeing it as something central for Christian life and mission. Australian theologian Denis Edwards speaks of ecology as “at the heart of mission.”³⁴

I think that engaging in the advocacy for greater ecological integrity is an essential aspect of today’s missionary efforts, especially in terms of the New Evangelization. Commitment to care for creation, first of all, is a powerful witness to the world in an area that is gaining more and more urgency. It also puts Christians in dialogue with other people of faith and those of no faith who have a similar commitment. It is therefore one of those “Courtyard of the Gentiles” areas, called for by the 2013 Synod, where believers and unbelievers can come together to discuss and work for a common cause.³⁵

Again, I can only ask a few questions here. A first area, it seems to me, would be institutional. How “green” are our homes, or parish buildings, our retreat centres, our schools? When we build, do we care to spend the extra monetary resources on ecology-friendly materials? How do we handle waste and trash? Where do we buy our food? Do

³⁴ For an overview of the Roman Magisterium and its documents on ecology, see Denis Edwards, “Ecology at the Heart of Mission,” in ed. Stephen B. Bevans, *A Century of Catholic Mission: 1910 to the Present* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books, 2013), forthcoming. On John Paul II and ecological conversion, see John Paul II, General Audience Address, January 17, 2001, quoted in Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 3.

³⁵ Final List of Propositions for the Synod of Bishops, <http://www.zenit.org/article-35831/?l=english>, 44. Accessed March 29, 2013.

we contribute to offset carbon footprints when we travel? This is certainly an area in which I need to grow—it's often so inconvenient—and the SVD does too. But I think that besides a new facet of missiology that is emerging, there is also emerging a new facet of spirituality and asceticism.

Second, to repeat questions asked about justice. Where do you aim your resources? Where do you appoint your personnel? To what ecological causes do you donate funds? Third, again, what political issues regarding ecology do you engage in? And finally, once again, does the integrity of creation find its way into your liturgical celebrations and prayer?

Conclusion

I would like to conclude these reflections by emphasizing that, as Robert Schreier says of the work of reconciliation, mission in our world today is ultimately more of a spirituality than it is of one or a number of strategies. *How* we do mission, in other words, is much more important than *what* we do. To use a phrase attributed to Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, we are not asked to be successful. We are asked to be faithful. I think it ultimately comes down to a certain vulnerability that we have to assume—a vulnerability not unlike that of God's Word itself, who "emptied himself ... coming in human likeness" (Phil 2:7), a vulnerability like Mary, whose sinlessness made her totally available for God's work.

In a powerful article, written during the recent *sede vacante* period, Italian theologian Severino Dianich argues that only a church that will take up the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, freed from what Benedict XVI called "the material and political trappings and privileges" of the past can "show a face" that reveals the gospel to today's world.³⁶ These are the trappings and privileges *from* which we need to turn away if we are to engage in mission in today's world.

In his inaugural address, however, Pope Francis articulated the positive aspect of this vulnerability in these words:

... caring, protecting, demands goodness, it calls for a certain tenderness. In the Gospels, Saint Joseph appears as a strong and courageous man, a working man, yet in his heart we see great tenderness, which is not the virtue of the weak but rather a sign of strength of spirit and capacity for concern, for compassion, for genuine openness to others, for love. We must not be afraid of goodness, of tenderness!³⁷

Tenderness. Perhaps that single word expresses it all. Given the lack of credibility of the church for many today, given the meanness of some actions the church has taken in our day, given the hope that the New Evangelization holds, a tender church would be wonderful, good news indeed.

³⁶ Severino Dianich, "Una Corragiosa Reforma," *Speciale Benedetto XVI, Il Regno*, Supplemento 3 (2013): 19-20.

³⁷ Pope Francis, Inaugural Homily.