

MISSION UPDATE

United States Catholic Mission Association

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Mission Conference 2012 Learning's and Reflection:

By Michael Linden, SJ

I was the facilitator at the United States Catholic Mission Associations' annual conference in Los Angeles and the title of the conference was "Forging New Paths: Interreligious Dialogue." We met in Los Angeles, the time was some what auspicious because the synod of Bishops had just concluded its efforts around the New Evangelization and of course, Hurricane Sandy was about to hit the east coast of the United States.

We met as a community of interested members. We had a large number of very stimulating activities together, panels, two keynotes, and a number of workshops, all of which were addressing in one way or another the challenge of interreligious dialogue and for our membership and others who are watching this video, the question of interreligious dialogue has been one which has been raised as a possibility for the association for a number of years. But it is a difficult area of concern because it involves dealing with our own inabilities to dialogue, dealing with a low, perhaps, of

low levels of experience and dealing also with some of the great difficulties in prejudice and other things which happen when we raise the subject of interreligious dialogue. It is not surprising that there are not a lot of things being done but it is courageous on the part of our Association that we dedicated this conference to this difficult subject. I believe all of us have a number of things that we are taking home.

We saw a number of very fine analysts, analyzing Christianity and one or another of the world's great religions. They are incredible witnesses as well, Cardinal McCarrick, the three ministers of religion who gave us a panel on the Abrahamic faiths and the three wonderful dedicated women who are practitioners in very important ways in interreligious activities and in addition we saw and received tremendous capacity for mission from the environment and from the city of Los Angeles.

What do I take home? First of all, I have an enhanced sense of the importance of this dialogue. The dialogue is not easy as I mentioned before and I believe all of us who received something at this conference received some tools. We re-

"The 'door of faith' (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church."

--- Pope Benedict XVI,
Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* for the Indiction of the Year of Faith.

YEAR OF FAITH 2012

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ceived a wonderful education in dialogue 101. Both the content of religious expressions as well some of the methods and so I think all of us are better prepared with some of the tools, particularly, with respect to the Jewish faith and also the Muslim faith.

Another thing we have taken home with us, is a sense that there are real levels to this dialogue, something we knew intuitively. Practical activity, prayer, pastoral work, joint action, social justice are open to interreligious activity and us as Catholic Christians to participate in them.

What about the terms of the dialogue? We heard it before in conflict resolutions and we hear it similarly in this kind of dialogue. We are to approach one another as equals; we are not going to be fundamentalist's of our own side. We expect to contribute and we expect to receive a true dialogue and we expect we will find our own faith is going to be enhanced by the ability we have to interact with men and women of other great faiths. We are better, they are better. This is what is known as respect. Respect does happen. It is available in this dialogue as one of the big fields with this kind of human respect and religious respect that can take place. It is not going to be a boxing match it is going to be a true dialogue.

Local, where is it best done? We know the struggle of some communities to engage in these dialogues. It is very difficult, there is conflict, there is a lot of manipulation, there is a lot of frustration, there is a lot of story telling, and that makes our position in the United States all the more important. We are an open society and have the enviable position of being the type of society where a lot of issues can be talked about. This is one of them and we saw fruits of this in the conference with the marvelous capacity of our own presenters who came from different faith positions to interact with one another to appreciate one another, to like one another, and to respect one another's way to God. This is one of the areas where

we as Americans have a peculiar form of stewardship. If people in other parts of the world can not dialogue, we can. What we do in this area as dialogue makes us better and when we are better the people we talk to are going to benefit. There is a way we in America can talk about this without going to war and it will help others who are much more constrained, out of necessity, from talking about it in their cultures.

There is something that has been really moving me; and it came from Cardinal McCarrick, a man of the 20th to 21st century. A churchman of the highest order in our community. He has spent his retirement from the episcopacy struggling with these questions. He goes to many dialogues. He participates and he advocates. Cardinal McCarrick spoke to us in a moving, faithful, and very incredible witness way and he said something which is really sticking with me. Paraphrasing, he said, "...[T]he quality of our own practice of Christianity will be measured by our ability to undertake this dialogue...." That is a high mandate and it is a mandate by a man who is 82 years old, who has a life full of ministry and responsibility in our church. It is something to listen too mull over because my credibility, my church's credibility, our credibility is receiving a measure here and it is a measure of God's need to engage in a mission with those who believe in him and despite the plurality of our faiths. I believe God is telling us that there is a radical unity to this practice and sentiment of belief and all of us can work on this dialogue. Thanks to the members of the association and thanks to the executive who put this conference together and let us pray that all of us may have the tools, the willingness, and the capacity, and some of the blessed opportunities to engage in interreligious dialogue. ++



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From the Executive Director

Rev. Jack Nuelle, MS

A beautifully expressive African adage states clearly what I experienced as the office staff of USCMA prepared for and completed the USCMA 2012 Conference in Los Angeles: *Individually we are all small grains of sand. Bound together we become a solid stone.*

Myriad individual efforts converged to make the 2012 USCMA Conference a success. Activities ranged from long-range planning **by the Board, to the office staff's coordinating activities, to creatively artistic endeavors** by the Los Angeles Archdiocesan Mission Office and local Mission Network, to widespread participation of USCMA membership, to enthusiastic presentation of workshops and dialogue sessions, to faith-filled interreligious sharing, to diversified exhibits, and to scholarly keynote addresses. To the above can be added music, atmosphere, joy, companionship, interfaith prayer, good food and a movie! As we stirred all these activities together in generous proportions the result was a remarkable conference. Thank you, missionaries, for bonding together to form a solid foundation for interreligious dialogue, which our mission calls us to be aware of today. May the new path we have forged together lead to a more complete understanding and **acceptance of God's unconditional love of all people, regardless of religion, race, color, gender, or social standing.**

As we journey farther into the Advent season we recognize how the embodiment of unconditional love in the person of Jesus is what we will soon be celebrating at Christmas. Although his mission was local (*"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* Mt 15:24) Jesus' scope was global, universal (*"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations"* Mt 28:19), without barriers, limits, or exclusions! The perennial question remains, **"How did he accomplish his mission and how can we fulfill ours?"**

Following Jesus through the Gospel narratives we see clearly that, whether he directed his attention to a restricted group of disciples or to the sprawling throng, he made use of all the usual means at his disposal to communicate. He chose the media of parables, comparisons, and stories. Other means were public declarations and statements of truths (*Amen, Amen I say to you...*). In-depth teaching of his followers was done on journeys across, and even out of his homeland. Retreats into deserted mountains provided healthy means of silence and prayer. Sometimes he accepted invitations to dine in the homes of both friends and enemies where avenues for teaching became available. At other times he shared meal with thousands in an open field. His words, whether spoken or written in the sand, were sharp and clear. His media presentation was always interactive and focused on people (*"Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from*

him and healed them all." Lk 6:19). He was an expert in all available fields of communication. He used them to teach and to challenge the status quo of his day; *"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors ... But I say to you..."* (Mt 5:21-22)

Beginning with that first century, through the Middle Ages, and into this **"Year of Faith," the means used to communicate Jesus' message** have continually changed. Initially transmission of the Good News was accomplished through verbal proclamation. Think of how the Word of God become more accessible to people once the first Bible was printed! Radio and TV have propelled Scripture into every aspect of society. Vatican II points us toward dialoguing and interfacing with people. We are called to do more than just **"proclaim" the Good News as if we "owned" it, and are now generously doling it out to others.** Rather by our witness we are creating a space for grace in both our lives and theirs, listening to the voice of the Spirit alive also in them, in their history, their culture, their world. **Thereby God's boundless Word is communicated, nourished and developed.**

Today new tools and channels for evangelization have been opened for us, both locally and globally, through Social Media. Facebook, Twitter, different blogs, video chatting, You-Tube, webinars, and the many communication-cousins can be on-line means of transcending cultures which divide our world, means of bringing the Good News to people everywhere while not leaving home or stepping across any borders.

Social Media as a New Language for Mission is the theme chosen for USCMA 2013 Conference, which will take place in St. Louis, MO, October 25-27, 2013. Please plan to join us.

The Vatican has become more accepting of and familiar with the use of Social Media. In June 2011, with a click of a mouse, Pope Benedict XVI launched an official news website, news.va. This official Vatican news site will rely heavily on Social Media. Streaming papal events is a near reality. Pope Benedict XVI will be launching a new Twitter account at his weekly general audience, and we can watch it happening live around midday, Rome time, on Wednesday December 12th. **In this year's Message for World Communications Day Pope Benedict words alluded to this reality. "In concise phrases, often no longer than a verse from the Bible, profound thoughts can be communicated – as long as those taking part in the conversation do not neglect to cultivate their own inner lives." Now he himself will be tweeting some of those concise phrases – less than 140 characters to be precise – to try and share the Good News of Christ with those seeking answers to life's key questions on their computers, iPads, tablets or smartphones.**

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From the President

Teresita Gonzalez de la Maza

“O Come O Come Emmanuel...”

During the Advent reflection for the Pastoral Center last year, Archbishop Wenski urged us to consider *“what gives our ‘present’ meaning?”* He noted that Advent is a time to *“refresh”* our awareness of God among us, and for that to *“awaken us from a complacency that often masks our own fears or quiet desperation.”* I have been thinking about that ever since, particularly this year as Advent comes amidst a bitter political year, and the great suffering caused by Hurricane Sandy. I am spending time wondering: Am I complacent with the bitter nature of our political discourse and the way in which it has spilled into everyday life, out of my own fear? Am I challenged by the response of heroes whose actions speak of God’s presence in times of crisis? Do I have the courage to search for truth and common ground amidst difficult conversations even in my Church community?

In the Mission Conference in October we shared many challenging ideas about interreligious dialogue which are urgent for all types of dialogue we engage in today. Our speakers reminded us that sometimes dialogue is influenced by the assumptions of those filled with fear. We are called to a different path of dialogue, to approach others with love and compassion as Christ did; to change the fear and the language of conquest, as described by Scott Alexander, which seems to prevail over honest and curious search for truth. Advent is a good time to refresh and awaken us to a new path for the Lord.

There is so much to be thankful for this year. It is with a grateful heart that we bid farewell to board members: Fr. Arturo Aguilar, Sr. Madge Karecki, Sr. Mayon Sylvain, Deacon Bob Laremore, Mrs. Rachel Tomas-Morgan, and Mr. Andy Thompson, who are ending their terms on the Board and have shared many gifts with the USCMA. As USCMA members they will never be far away, and neither are any of you! **Please don’t forget to submit your suggestions of members to be considered for the Board, we do have some spots that will be available in the coming terms.** I am excited about the new year and our next Conference in St. Louis! Please stay tuned because the diversity of ideas and experiences you share are what drives the conversation and the creativity of USCMA!

“O Come Emmanuel” - “God with us” urges us to recognize the presence of God in our differences, and to find a common language to pave a path to peace. So that we...in the concluding words of the Archbishop: *“can awaken from our complacency”* to a **“NOW charged with meaning..and a hope that defines the WHY.”**

Rejoice! Rejoice!





Living into God's Mission of Dialogue: An End to Triumphalism in the Hope of Solidarity

Transcribed from the Keynote Address given by Dr. Scott Alexander, PhD
at Mission Conference 2012 *Forging New Paths: Interreligious Dialogue*

Introduction

Sometimes we talk about experience and theology in ways that create a false dichotomy; when what we are really trying to do is to make sure that the two are not disconnected. As a historian of religion with a specialty in both Islamic and Christian history, when I do theology, even under academic credentials, I actually do so as an amateur. The theology I will attempt to present to you is actually the fruit of years of experience in multidimensional dialogue. It is not a theology that is abstract and decontextualized.

The image of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI with Mustafa Çağrıçı, chief Mufti of Istanbul, from November 2006 is an image to me which suggests the end of Triumphalism in the hope of Solidarity. In one of his first Papal visits abroad, following in the footsteps of his predecessor Bl. Pope John Paul II who visited Turkey shortly after his election, he took a page from the playbook of Bl. Pope John Paul II. Like Bl. Pope John Paul II, the great theologian of gesture, who recognized the importance of deeds and gesture over words in certain circumstances, he entered the well-known Blue Mount in Istanbul and stood before the mihrab (the prayer niche) with his hands in the Sunni prayer posture and meditated in his own tradition, standing shoulder to shoulder in this sacred space with his new friend, Mustafa Çağrıçı. In fact when this image went viral it brought a great deal of healing to the hurt feelings that were created by misunderstandings of Pope Benedict's earlier address at the University of Regensburg.

Mission and Interreligious Dialogue

I would like to begin by talking about mission and interreligious dialogue. One of the many outstanding Catholic Theologians that I have the pleasure to call

my colleague at The Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois, Rev. Stephen Bevans, SVD, has articulated a simple, yet revolutionary, missiological insight. Let me put this insight into a Matthean idiom, "You have heard it said that God has a church and the church has a mission; Amen, Amen I say to you that God has a mission and the mission has a church." What has this mission, which has brought about the church into being, to do with interreligious dialogue, and vice versa?

For me, and I hope for you as well, the lifetime journey of seeking the full answer to this important question has its starting point in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Paul reminds us that God has reconciled us to God's self through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to God's self, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. Christ came to heal the sinfulness and brokenness of every human person and at the same time the resulting divisions and enmity in the human family.

Another Paul, His Holiness Pope Paul VI, once referred to this process of reconciliation initiated by God in Christ Jesus, as God's dialogue of salvation; a dialogue God is having with the world. "The dialogue of salvation sprang from the goodness and the love of God. 'God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son.' (Jn 3:16) Our inducement, therefore, to enter into this dialogue must be nothing other than a love which is ardent and sincere."¹ In this same encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, the pope speaks of the church's need to be in dialogue with all of humanity, especially with people of other religions and with our Moslem sisters and brothers, which the Second Vatican Council would acclaim the Church "esteems" in *Nostra Aetate* #3.

As I reflect on Pope Paul IV's teaching about this redemptive dialogue initiated by God, I cannot help but conclude that it is rooted less in divine choice than it is in God's very being. God calls us into dialogue because God is essentially, intrinsically, ontologically dialogic: a Trinity of persons. In so far as we are people of theosis, people who are to be transformed sacramentally into the life of the Trinity, we cannot escape, nor should we ever seek to escape the dialogic imperative of our baptism into the life of the Triune God.

The bishops of Aparecida remind us of essential truth about our identity as Christians. Reflecting on the lights and shadows of our age, the bishops proclaim that by virtue of our baptism, all Christians "have received priceless gifts that help us view reality as missionary disciples of Jesus."² Thus to view and live reality as the heirs to God's mission, we must live into the reality of dialogue. As we are called share in the life of the Triune Godhead our mission is rooted in this call, therefore our mission has to be essentially dialogic.

A Central Challenge in Christian-Muslim Relations

In my experience some aspects of the Christian/Muslim dialogic dynamic have broader implications for all of interreligious dialogue as an essential part of mission. The history of Christian/Muslim relations basically unfolds on two narrative tracks: one of cooperation and convivencia, while the other is one of conflict and clashing. These tracks have been unfolding from the very beginning. Christians and Muslims have been living in cooperation and harmony with each other from the days of the first Christian/Muslim encounters; and they have been in conflict with each other in some ways since those days. Often these two narrative tracks can intersect, and often do, in the same place and at the same time.

So this is the two-fold reality of the history of Christian/Muslim relations. Underlying the conflict is a complex of socio-political and ideational factors. In most cases, when we hear or think of Christian/Muslim conflicts we make the mistake of thinking these conflicts are religious in nature. Religion often times plays an important role in these conflicts, but usually these con-

flicts involve a contextualized power struggle, whether political imbalance, economic, perceptions of justice, etc.

On an ideational level you have what I call "competing universalisms." When I speak about competing universalisms it is based in how Christianity and Islam make particular truth claims (as seen by people of other religious traditions) that are lifted up to a universal level and both present these claims as universal to those outside their traditions. This can be demonstrated by the example that Christians claim that all salvation is accomplished in and through Christ and Christ alone; while Muslims claim that the Qur'an is the final and most definitive of all divine revelations.

Thus Christianity, in regard to how mission was traditionally understood, and Islam in regard to Da'wa, are seen by some as the two great predatory religions of the world. This is a term that was used in a global interreligious conference where indigenous traditional religious practitioners (namely Hindus, Buddhists, Shinto practitioners, etc.) were referring to Christianity and Islam as the predatory religions. I don't think that either Jesus or Mohammed would want the traditions that emerged as a result of their mission and ministries to be seen that way.

Why are they seen that way? There has been a marriage of convenience in the history of both Christianity and Islam. A marriage between what I am calling witness and domination. There has been a marriage between the two dynamics of "mission and proclamation," and "conquest and domination." In short the aim to proclaim and witness to the Gospel to the world, and the practice of bringing about Christian societies or Christendom has been married to a history that has involved conquest and domination to achieve such societies.

Similarly, with Da'wa, or the invitation into accept Islam, and the Dar al-Islam, the notion of the area in the world where people are submitting to God or living just lives, respecting one another's rights that come from God. These two have also been historically married to conquest and domination. As modes of witness, proclamation and Da'wa are essential, but the question I would like to propose is this: is the marriage of each of these to domination also essential? It has been a very

important part of the history of both traditions, but do we need to keep it?

Is the Problem Exclusivist Claims to Universal Truth

Some people say that the problem underlying all of this is exclusivist claims to universal truth. We should get rid of conquest and domination, but in order to get rid of conquest and domination, we have to ask what is motivating people to do that. And the mistake that is made in attempts to answer this question about what is motivating people to do that is, a commitment to truths that they believe are universal. While that is a small part of it, the problem with that is that it is a distortion of commitment to universal truth. I would propose that the will to dominate others is a result of what we as Catholics call Original Sin, not the Gospel, and not even in a way the essence of Koranic teaching.

So is the problem exclusivist claims to universal truth? Some think it is. To a certain degree Paul F. Knitter has identified the claim to universal truth as a problem. He talks about the “religious Rubicon” that has been crossed in many faith communities, but in particular in the Christian global community. “Like Caesar and Rome, Christians found themselves contemplating crossing a river that appeared to be as necessary as it was full of potential risk. Given their growing awareness of both the reality and validity of other religions, *followers of Christ found it increasingly difficult to stand before the entire world and claim that theirs was the only or the best religion.* ...The religious Rubicon, we now know, runs not only through Christianity; it confronts all religions.”³

Now there is a counterpoint to Knitter. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who is now His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, spoke about the dangers of ‘Relativism’ when he wrote that “the Church’s constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure* (or in principle).”⁴ Religious pluralism as a fact is part of the life of the world and it needs to be honored and respected. The question is: does it need to be encouraged or should there be complacency of proclamation in the face of religious pluralism?

He goes on to say that, “on the basis of such presuppositions...certain theological proposals are developed—at times presented as assertions, and at times as hypotheses—in which Christian revelation and the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church *lose their character of absolute truth and salvific universality*, or at least shadows of doubt and uncertainty are cast upon them.”⁵ What he has done is to point out a real threat to something that has been, for many centuries, a critical component of our understanding as missionary disciples of Jesus of the nature of our faith as a missionary faith.

Actually, I think that this whole argument about universal truth claims being problematic is what leads to all of the conquest and domination. The response that if we go down the path of religious pluralism we will lose a very important dimension of what it means to be Christian, and possibly lose the faith entirely one day. I do not know if we can go anywhere in this debate between ideologies of ‘Absolutism’ and ‘Relativism,’ but I would suggest that instead we reconceive and re-name the problem.

What about Re-conceiving and Renaming the Problem?

I would like to re-conceive and rename the problem as Triumphalism. The Oxford English Dictionary defines triumphalism as “The sense of pride (often linked with ostentation) in the rightness and achievements of one’s Church (used pejoratively).” I was really surprised because I had developed this concept theologically in a book project, but I didn’t know that a standard dictionary definition would actually focus on this as a theological term. For the purpose of this presentation I would define triumphalism as a praxis of asserting the authenticity—and oftentimes the universal truth claims—of one’s own religious tradition or identity, by exercising the will to dominate and subordinate religious others.

It would be unfair to say that you are a triumphalist if you hold to your universal truth claims; however, a triumphalist is one who give into those claims by dominating and subjugating others. This triumphalism can be actualized in many aspects of our live, in interpersonal relations as well as inter-communal contexts. It spans the ladder or spectrum of human

relationships. By shifting the focus from the content of religious conviction, to a modality of religious praxis, I would argue that the problem becomes much less the reality of conflicting universal truth claims, and far more the manner in which religious folk live out their convictions and the manner in which they give witness to what they understand to be universal truth.

Two examples of this can be seen in the images of Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moorslayer) and St. Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamil. This idea of celebrating one's faith in the form of dominating another is palpably expressed in the iconic motif of St. James. A newer iconic motif is that of the legendary encounter of St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik al-Kamil. Both men were deeply committed to their respective faith traditions. St. Francis' journey to Egypt to meet the Sultan during the Fifth Crusade, a crusade which he preached against because of its the brutal and mercenary tendencies, in attempt to evangelize to the Muslims. He expected martyrdom, but was instead transformed by his journey into the Muslim lands and there are elements of that transformation and his respect for Islam in the Franciscan Rule.

So we are talking about a difference in praxis. You can believe in the universal salvific efficacy of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and express that a la Santiago Matamoros or a la St. Francis and Sultan. We have to make choices as people of faith in terms of how we're going to express our commitment to universal truth. Maybe the commitment to universal truth is not the problem.

Issues in the History of Christian and Muslim Triumphalism

I wanted to point out an odd, but ironic, connection between Christian and Muslim triumphalism on the one hand and at least the rhetoric of the social justice liberationist drive at the heart of each tradition on the other. This is seen in the rapid growth of Muslim control of governments from west to east, while the process of mass conversion took many centuries. The theological justification of this was the belief that they had God's law of justice and were commissioned to spread this justice throughout the world and so others

may practice their faiths while living in this Dar al-Islam as long as they abide by Koranic principles of justice because that's God's will. So there is a liberationist impulse in spreading this Dar al-Islam. Similarly, over 90 percent of the Muslim world was conquered by Western domination and lasted for over two centuries. That was the civilizing mission of Western humanity; to civilize the "savages" and to bring them Christianity all bound up into a single reality. This was seen theologically as a liberationist move. In both the Muslim and Christian cases it was triumphalism in the worst sense, but coupled with notions of liberation. However, the question now remains that if we get rid of triumphalism, must we also rid ourselves of our critically important liberationist impulses? Perhaps we can keep universal truth, but what about these important parts of the teachings?

It is important to consider scripture in support of triumphalism. It is puzzlement to me why the Great Commission (Mt 28:20) was interpreted by Christians as perhaps involving coercion of any kind. Since when did Jesus Christ use coercion of any kind? All of the subtle kinds of ways to use power to coerce others to accept a truth you believe to be universal strikes against, the ethos of the Matthean Gospel that speaks of God's unlimited generosity, and the command to not to keep the truth to yourself but to go and share the gift that you have received with all people. Gift and coercion do not and cannot occupy the same ideational or practical space. They are mutually contradictory. In the Qur'an (Q 9:29) the idea of spreading justice for the betterment of others, even though it may lead to conflict at times in defense of justice. Unfortunately, it has been decontextualized and taken throughout history as a command to conquest, even some Christians and Jews who do not practice what they preach, and force them to submit to God's justice.

There is a theological fallacy at the heart of Triumphalism for Christians, Muslims and perhaps of any religious traditions. Although triumphalism may be a natural outgrowth of religious traditions with competing universal truth claims, nothing actually undermines such claims more than attempts to use them as a means of personal, cultural and/or political domination. Nothing undermines claims to universal truth more than attempts to use those claims to dominate

another. If I want to witness to/share a truth I believe is universal, but in the carrying forth of that witness I try to dominate you in some way and you are aware of that, the last thing you are going to believe is that that truth is universal. It will strike you as my selfish agenda, a rational to justify my selfish agenda and those of my people so that I can dominate the other, either interpersonally or inter-communally to take their resources; to gear their economic system to my economic system. We can reject triumphalism through alternative paradigms in Christianity and Islam.

Rejecting Triumphalism: Alternative Paradigms in Christianity and Islam

Some might say that it is part of our history. We have things in our respective traditions that were very much a part of those traditions that are not a part of it any longer, yet our tradition has survived and gotten better because those things have gone away or been eschewed. Slavery is a good example of a practice that has gone away. The fundamental message of both Christianity and Islam have yet to emerge fully and to be fully and genuinely expressed, especially by those very institutions that were founded to do so. This is not radical theology, this is in many way magisterial. As Fr. Tom Ryan speaks of, truth for Muslims and Christians is not an abstract formula of words, but truth (God) is something that we are called to be in relationship with and something we want to be possessed by not something we can possess and use against others. This paradigm is one of Emergentism.

Emergentism is the freeing of Tradition from tradition. One example is the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. This council causes some controversy because it manifests this emergentist dynamic. As seen in the document "Faithful Revolution," the Council, while remaining faithful to the church's tradition, it freed the Tradition from some of the elements the Fathers deemed no longer vital or central to the Tradition. How do we apply this dynamic to the scriptures?

The Great Commission of Matthew 28 is not about coercion, but generosity—being willing to share the good news of the Gospel, even with the Gentiles! *Sura Tawba* (Q 9) is not about domination of the other,

but precisely the elimination of the rampant injustice and persecution Muhammad was called to confront and transform. And so in our day and age, that very same passage in the Qur'an that might seem to be read as giving permission to dominate people of other traditions, actually calls for the respect of the person's religious beliefs, in respect of God's justice.

As Christians we have the Triumph of the Cross. As Paul writes, "but may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal 6:14) An apparent oxymoron and yet the central mystery of the Christian faith is that sin and death--the true enemies of humanity (not our fellow human beings)--are conquered through self-sacrificial love: agape. There is a triumph for us Christians, though it is not in a worldly sense. In fact it radically undermines and undercuts the worldly notion of triumph, because it the triumph of God which comes from love and self-sacrifice.

In the Qur'an, there is a beautiful passage that says, "Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ." (Q 5:48) The notion found here in the Qur'an is that religious plurality is part of God's plan and that this planned diversity is a proving ground for what you have received from God. For all humanity is in relationship with God in these diverse communities. Vie with each other in good works, not bad.

This verse does not deny unitary truth; in fact, its context appears to be one of debates Muhammad is having, presumably with Jews and Christians. It is not suggesting that there is not one truth, nor does it encourage relativism. Yet, the verse implicitly rejects triumphalism in favor of a paradigm of competitive interreligious complementarity. According to this paradigm, the only triumph is God's, because in this race, goodness (and thus the common good) is advanced, rather than the interest of one human group over another. It is a competition that brings out the best in the other, not one that seeks to dominate another.

Whither Da'wa and Christian Proclamation

In light of the long and painful history and legacy of Christian and Muslim triumphalism, adherents of these two great faiths can legitimately propose them to others only in a dialogical context of mutual trust and cooperation for the common good. If we are committed to witness as both Muslims and Christians, to overcome the past triumphalism, the only way to effectively witness to one another is relationships of mutual trust and respect. To overcome all the years of pain and hatred, there cannot be any witnessing other than that. This is the only way the true liberative and redemptive force of these faiths can be unleashed.

One example of this can be seen in the formation of youth for the deconstruction of religious tribalism. The dialogue recognizes both Muslims and Christians the often neglected imperative to inform the next generation of the faithful as interreligious peace builders, committed to rescuing our traditions from their built in tribalist impulses. We must both teach and learn from our youth. We must listen and interact with the youth of our tradition and not be afraid of the passion and vision of our young people. We must stop seeing it as a threat to tradition, and instead prudently and critically welcome it as an important part of the future vitality of the tradition.

If, as missionary disciples of Jesus, we can help empower youth and be educated by them in new ways, we can fight against the tribalization or politicization of our religious values within our faith communities. Perhaps we can have a positive effect in helping to name and de-construct the more insidious elements of tribalism in our common civic life. To do this however, we need to integrate interreligious and intra-religious dialogue. We must dedicate ourselves to and convince our co-religionists of a simple truth: because God is calling us to live into the freedom of an authentic 'we' that only God convenes, we should never use God's name to create a false 'we' conjured by all the terrifying imagined 'they's' of all our deepest fears and insecurities.

If, by God's grace, the interreligious movement can do this maybe we can credibly demonstrate to the wider world the myriad of ways in which our faith traditions can enhance and strengthen the solidarity of the human family, rather than threaten the solidarity that it

has done so often in the past. If we can do this as people of faith in dialogue, then we can lead and governments and other civic organizations can follow. Contrary to what some of us might think, the governments of the world need us to show them the way. Though this might be a difficult journey we must always remember that we follow Christ, and as Christ reminds us, all things are possible for God.

A PDF copy of Dr. Scott Alexander's PowerPoint Presentation is available on our website at:

<http://www.uscatholicmission.org>

Endnotes

1. Paul VI. Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (*The Pope Speaks*, 10 (Summer, 1965), 253-92). par. 73.
2. Aparecida Concluding Document. Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2008. Par. 153.
3. Knitter, Paul F. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (1987) in *The Myth of Religious Superiority* (2005), p. vii.
4. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Domini Iesus*. Vatican City, August 2000. par. 4.
5. *ibid.*

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In 2011, backed by the Vatican, an Italian group launched a portal site for Catholics, www.aleteia.org. This site is a collaborative network that brings questions about faith, life, and society to the forefront in a format that allows them easily to be accessed and shared in five different languages. If you “like” a document, just click on the Greek anagram **ΙΧΘΥΣ** represented as a “fish”

the traditional Christian symbol of the 1st and 2nd centuries – and it will post to your Facebook page.



Missioners recognize the need to adapt to the times, cultures and circumstances of people to whom they bring the Gospel. **Today’s missioners are drawn into a world of social networking.** Evangelization is about getting the Good News out there, reaching a new generation of people who wouldn’t otherwise necessarily have access to information about Christ. USCMA, through Mission Conference 2013, intends to focus on helping missioners acknowledge and use Social Media, not just to share information but to promote the cross-cultural and global mission of Jesus in service to Church and people of the world. Social Media allows us to do that – even without leaving home or stepping across borders.



Find out more information about the ways you can help to promote mission and global solidarity on our website:
uscatholicmission.org

Questions or do you have a mission related event? Send us the information and we will help to publicize!
uscma@uscatholicmission.org

Mission Conference 2012 Resolution

Mindful of the increased growth of twinning relationships between organizations, dioceses, parishes and religious orders, the members of USCMA passed a resolution on covenantal relationships. Here is an excerpt from the resolution:

Building Effective Covenant Relationships

PREAMBLE:

Among U.S. Catholic mission groups a growing trend continues to be the phenomenon known as “twinning” or “partnership”, and which we will refer to as a “Covenant Relationship”. Along with a “preferential option for the poor” these mission groups, whether lay organizations, religious communities, dioceses, parishes or schools, strive to affirm genuine mutuality. For both parties of the covenant relationship, translating into action their desire to reach out to others in mutuality can be challenging, especially at the outset. Avoidable mistakes often occur, however, because one or both parties are unaware that valid tools are available to guide them in their mission endeavors. Through USCMA support of the following resolution many mistakes can be avoided.

RESOLUTION:

Be it resolved that the United States Catholic Mission Association acknowledges, appreciates and endorses the use of the document produced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services entitled *Parish Partnership Manual*. Focused on building a covenant relationship, this document brings to the forefront and clarifies many of the best practices to guide both US mission groups and their international partners toward a mutually beneficial and sustainable relationship. It is based on solid Catholic Social Teachings and Traditions leading to solidarity, mutuality, transparency and subsidiarity.

Link to the *Parish Partnership Manual*: <http://uspartners.crs.org/downloads/haiti/manual-for-partnerships.pdf>.

Welcome to the newly elected and re-elected board members of the USCMA! We are excited to continue the mandate to promote mission and global solidarity with the vision and skills of our new board.

New Board Members:



Sr. Liliame Alam, FMM is a Franciscan Missionary of Mary. Originally from Lebanon, she holds degrees in Economics and the Spirituality of Theology. A native Arabic and French speaker, Sr. Liliame also speaks and writes English, Italian and Spanish. She ministered in leadership in the five countries **of the Middle East Province of the FMM's**, and also ministered in the Generalate House in Rome and Morocco, and in Egypt where she was the Project Director for Caritas.

Sr. Liliame was missioned to the USA Province in 1995. As Executive Director with Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso, Texas, she dealt with immigration procedures and laws, political asylees, detained unaccompanied children, battered women, human trafficking, migration and globalization concerns. Recently, she was the CFO of Franciscans International at the United Nations. At present she is the Director of Finance and Administration of Holy Name of Jesus Church, New York, NY.



Ms. Amy Woolam Echeverria was born in St. Louis, MO, but has roots in Philadelphia and New Jersey. Amy recalls her first missionary calling at the tender age of 6 when she could often be found pouring over the pages of a photo journal of missionaries in India. After college Amy worked in the Diocese of Charlotte in their Refugee Resettlement Office. Eventually Amy went to Chile with the volunteer program Response

-Ability sponsored by the Society of the Holy Child Jesus where she lived for 5 years. Ministries there included working with women and youth in economically and socially vulnerable communities as well as with migrants and refugees.

Amy returned to the U.S. in 2003 and is currently the Director of the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach which coordinates the national Columban JPIC ministry as well as programs that invite people to join Columbans in mission such as the Advocacy Internship, volunteer opportunities and mission exposure trips, and a teaching program in China. Amy is the mother of two and says that through her son (11) and daughter (6) she experiences daily the Paschal Mystery.



Ms. Janice England comes from Southern California, and served as a Lay Mission-Helper in Sierra Leone from 1989-93. She joined the staff of Lay Mission-Helpers in 1994, serving in various capacities, and is currently the Program Director. She obtained a BA in **Liberal Arts from Mount St. Mary's College** in Los Angeles. She has served on the Board of Directors of From Mission to Mission, Mission Doctors Association, and Comboni Lay Mission Program.



Rev. Melanio Viuya, MJ, S.S.L. was born in the Philippines and finished his Philosophical studies at St. Louis University in Baguio City and his theology in Maryhill School of Theology in Quezon City. He was a missionary in the Congo (Africa) for seven years where he served itinerant priest for St Raphael (Yakamba) and St Egide (Ndage) parishes visiting 64 and 94 villages respectively from 1992-1999. He studied at Pontifical Biblical Institute in

Rome, Italy (1999-2003) where he earned his Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures (S.S.L.). During the four years of studies, he spent six months in Jerusalem where he followed some Archaeological and Biblical courses at the Hebrew University. He taught Sacred Scripture in various institutions in the Philippines while acting as Assistant to the General Superior of the Missionaries of Jesus (MJ). He is presently the Director of Missions, Secretary and Treasurer of the Missionaries of Jesus, District of the Americas.

Re-elected Board Members:



Sr. Judith Gomila, MSC, is a Marianne Sister of Holy Cross. She holds a Masters in Theology and Religious Studies from St. Paul University, Ottawa, Canada. Sr. Judy began her service to the Church as a classroom **teacher in the early 60's. She has ministered** as a DRE in the inner city, on the bayou, and in the Alaska bush. Her emphasis includes evangelization side by side with Catholic Social Teaching.

Sr. Judy ministered for 10 years with the Pontifical Mission Societies in the Archdiocese of New Orleans and is presently a Mission Consultant for the Black and Indian Mission Office in Washington, DC. In her religious Congregation, She is the PR/Communications person.

Social Media: Even the Pope is getting into it

More Than 700,000 Already 'Following' Pontiff

By Junno Arocho

VATICAN CITY, DEC. 12, 2012 (Zenit.org).- Benedict XVI sent out his first tweets today on Twitter. The Twitter account, @pontifex, which was announced Dec. 3 by the Holy See Press Office, is being used as a way for the Holy Father to communicate with the faithful and answer their questions on faith. <https://twitter.com/Pontifex>

The Pope's first tweet, sent via iPad immediately after his weekly General Audience, thanked followers and imparted his blessing. "Dear friends, I am pleased to get in touch with you through Twitter. Thank you for your generous response. I bless all of you from my heart," the tweet stated.



According to a communique from the Holy See Press Office, the Holy Father was assisted in sending out the tweet by Thaddeus Jones, a representative of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication, and Claire Díaz-Ortiz, director of Social Innovation for Twitter. Also present were two students from the University of Villanova who currently work at the Pontifical Council for Social Communication, Mika Rabb and Andrew Jadick, as well as Mexican journalist Katia Lopez-Hodoyan.

The first papal tweet was sent out in various languages from their respective papal Twitter accounts. In two hours, the first papal message was re-tweeted, or shared by followers, over 27, 000 times. Currently, Benedict XVI has well over 700,000 followers since the account was opened a little over a week ago.

Shortly after his first tweet, Pope Benedict sent out a second tweet, relaying one of thousands of questions sent by his Twitter followers regarding the Year of Faith. "How can we celebrate the Year of Faith better in our daily lives?" was the question that was posed. Responding to the question in a third tweet, the Holy Father stated: "By speaking with Jesus in prayer, listening to what he tells you in the Gospel and looking for him in those in need."

In the press conference regarding Pope Benedict's Twitter account last week, Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication, stated that the 140 character limit on tweet was not a problem, but that the main concern was to give a profound human expression to the words that are chosen.

The Holy Father's Twitter account, he said, would allow the Pontiff the opportunity to express his "pearls of wisdom." The Holy See Press Office said that Pope Benedict XVI is expected to answer two more questions later today regarding the Year of Faith.

As we get closer to Mission Conference 2013: Social Media- A New Language for Mission, we will highlight more news articles on the role of Social Media in Mission.

Faces in Mission:

"The call of God is to listen with an open heart." Columban Fr. Arturo Aguilar offers this insight when asked about the impact of mission in his life. Hear him and other missionaries on the newest feature of the USCMA website *Faces in Mission*. Every person has the chance to live into their mission identity with a mission spirit. Listen to what other missionaries have to say about their own experience in mission. **Share your mission story with the USCMA by e-mail uscma@uscatholicmission.org**

Photo credit: St. Cloud Diocesan Mission Office



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Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

*During this joyous season, we pray that the Lord will
bless you, your loved ones and friends for all your
support for those in need.
As we continue to work together to proclaim the
Gospel in all our actions, we thank you for your sup-
port and pray that you will continue to shine the
Lord's light on all you reach.*



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