



United States Catholic Mission Association

Mission Update

Volume 22; Issue 3
Autumn 2013

SOCIAL MEDIA: A NEW CONTINENT FOR MISSION

By Stephen F. Scott
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In a few short weeks members and friends of USCMA will gather in St. Louis to discuss and reflect on how Social Media is a new language for Mission. Throughout history the Church has reflected on the question of how we communicate the Good News whether through words, action, art, symbol, music, and other modes of expression. The development of Social Media and Social Networks in recent time again has us asking the question of how we share the Good News.

Almost fifty years ago Pope Paul VI promulgated the Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica*, or the *Decree on the Media of Social Communications*.¹ The decree acknowledged the growing importance of what we would call Mass Media (movies, periodicals, radio, television, etc.) and how it could be used as both a tool for good and evil. The decree goes on to state its purpose that, “this sacred Synod, attentive to the watchful concern manifested by the Supreme Pontiffs and Bishops in a matter of such great importance, judges it to be its duty to treat of the principal questions linked with the media of social communication.”² The decree speaks about the importance of using Social Communications as a tool for teaching the faith and tending to the pastoral needs of all people who share in Social Communications.

My own encounter with social communication started at an early age. My father, and my grandfather before him, have worked in the computer and technology field for as long as I can remember. The explosion of area codes in New Jersey due to the increased need for telephone lines dedicated to faxes and pagers had a great impact on my life. My collegiate years were filled with changes in forms of communication from e-mail to online chat rooms and even instant messaging; all of these resulted in my own interior need to figure out how I could use these quicker forms of communication and how I could moderate my use of them to find a balance in how I communicate. Pope Benedict XVI was correct when he said that online social networks “are helping to create a new ‘agora’, an open public square in which people share ideas, information and opinions, and in which new relationships and community can come into being.”³ Throughout my entire adult life I have found myself in two lands, one physical and another online.

In his *Message for the 47th World Communications Day* Pope Benedict XVI

Prayer is the breath of faith: in a relationship of trust, in a relationship of love, dialogue cannot be left out, and prayer is the dialogue of the soul with God.

- Pope Francis
Angelus, October 6, 2013

<i>In this Issue:</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Mission and Social Media Reflection</i>	1 - 2
<i>Letter from USCMA’s Board of Directors</i>	3
<i>Executive Director’s Letter</i>	4
<i>Special Announcements</i>	5
<i>Periodic Paper: Reflections on “Together Towards Life”</i>	6 - 11
<i>Mission Conference Insert</i>	12 - 13
<i>Pope Francis at Aparecida</i>	14
<i>Upcoming Events and Mission Resources</i>	15

Mission Update ☀ **Autumn 2013**

called for a continued commitment on the part of people engaged in social networks to be people “engaged in building relationships and making friends, in looking for answers to their questions and being entertained, but also in finding intellectual stimulation and sharing knowledge and know-how.”⁴ These same actions are found in our *off-line* activities with the people we engage with and the books we read; the main difference between these engagements is one of physical proximity.

My own experience with social networks has evolved over time. I used to see instant messages (IMs) as a way to plan events with friends on campus or across town. To me, IMs were an easier form of communicating than e-mail or even a phone call. As time has passed however, I use social networks to share news, stories, ideas, and events that are important to me, as well as to interact with friends both far and near who are sharing the same things.



Pope Benedict XVI's explanation resonates with me when he says “social networks are the result of human interaction, but for their part they also reshape the dynamics of communication which builds relationships.”⁵ His own involvement with Social Networks, especially in using his iPod, iPad, and sending tweets on Twitter, were all moments that took me by surprise because each showed me how these “toys” that I enjoyed for entertainment and the occasional distraction were really tools that I could use in my own interactions and that every person with access to social networks could join in and share in digital communication and activity. My own ignorance about the people who would use social networks was enlightened by his simple use of Social Communications and it called me to think of this form of communication in a new way.

Pope Francis continues to challenge and enlighten me in regard to Social Communications. His conversational tone, whether in his homilies, interviews or tweets, encourages people to step into Social Communication. He echoes Bl. Pope John Paul II's theme of *do not be afraid when he calls on people to not be afraid “to enter, with discernment, into the environments created by new technologies, into social networks, in such a way to reveal a presence that listens, converses, and encourages.”*⁶ He addresses the fear and anxiety of delving into new technology and ways of thinking that are constantly changing, fears that even I have from time to time, and calls us not to run away or ignore the challenge, but to share this challenge with one another just as we share our own journey of faith with our family, friends, and communities.

I have learned from many missionaries how their lives were changed when they were sent to work in territories far from home and the people who were a part of their daily lives. Even if they were afraid in one way or another of what could happen in that far off land, their vocation and faith called them to embrace the challenges that awaited them in their work and their witness. Their example has helped me in my own understanding of how I am called to be in Mission in my own life. Recently I ran into an acquaintance who I have known for many years in DC and on Facebook. Our conversation moved from the standard conversation and he started asking me questions regarding my own faith based on what I have shared on Facebook; my participation in Social Networks truly opened up my interactions with people IRL (*in real life*).

Pope Francis encourages all of us to see how Social Networks are “the great digital continent” and how it “does not only involve technology, but is made up of real men and women who bring with them what they carry inside, their hopes, their suffering, their concerns, their pursuit of truth, beauty and good.”⁷ Whether we are called to serve at home, in a different city or a far off land, all of us can bring ourselves onto this “great digital continent” and bring Christ to all we encounter online through sharing our lives with them and our sharing we will receive so much more.

1. The exact date of Pope Paul VI's promulgation of the Conciliar Decree was December 4, 1963.

2. *Inter Mirifica*: “Decree on the Media of Social Communications, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, December 4, 1963. #2 http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html

3. *Message for the 47th World Communications Day*: Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, 24 January 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20130124_47th-world-communications-day_en.html

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. *Pope Francis: Social Communications is for bringing others to Christ*: Vatican Radio September 21, 2013. <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-social-communications-is-for-bringing>

7. Ibid.

Image from ABCNews: <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/pope-twitter-pope-benedict-xvi-pontifex-blesses-followers/story?id=17942589>

But Why Should We and the Church Learn This Language?

Amy Woolam Echeverria
USCMA Member-at-Large

In grade school my teacher would send me to the office to make copies on the mimeograph machine. **In high school I learned how to type... on a typewriter. In college I used the card catalogue to find books and I did my research on microfilm machines.** I used to carry change so that I could make a phone call from a phone booth if I needed to. My reaction when someone told me about email or the first time, **“What?! You can send a letter anywhere in the world instantly and for free?!” Totally unbelievable!**



However, having worked with student interns and post-grad volunteers for several years, I've been invited to learn a new language. Today we Google, like, and tweet our way through learning, relationships, work and life. This is a new language which like any other language must be studied and practiced if we hope to have any fluency. It brings new meaning to, *Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation* (Mk 16:15).

But why should we and the Church make the effort to learn and use this language? The same reason that Jesus told parables and that Paul wrote letters because each age has its tools for evangelization, each audience has its ears to hear. The message is meaningless unless it can be spoken and delivered in a way that the audience can meaningfully hear it. From story-telling and the written word, to radio, T.V., and now the internet and social media, the Church is challenged to both speak the language of its day without losing its core message of justice, love, peace, and right relationships. Using social media is one way we can challenge structures and change lives in ways that reflect our missionary calling to be inclusively cross-cultural.

As one social media activist writes, “The key work of [social] change continues to operate on a person-to-person level because relationships are how people make real change. Today, social media tools, can disseminate messages quickly on platforms that cross boundaries of age, gender, race, and economic status, making online organizing an effective method for gathering, inspiring, and translating collective power into common solutions.”¹ For missionaries, anything that can help break down barriers and bring people together is something that should be taken seriously.

The Church has been a strong proponent of using social media. Pope Francis recently said at the annual assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in September that the Church must work **“with discernment, to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses and encourages.”**

Ultimately, social media is a tool for evangelization, an e-vite to bringing the Gospel to our world. As missionaries, we understand the importance of meeting people where they are and using the language that speaks to their heart. **Creating an online community for people to encounter Christ is as valid today as Paul's home churches were for early Christians.**

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1Jn 1:3). Nothing can replace a flesh and bone human encounter, but through modern technology, we can build communities that bring us into relationship, move us to action, and sustain us in our faith.

1. Choi, Jeannie, “A Web of Power”. *Sojourners*. July 2011, p. 20.

WITNESSING MISSION WITH THE CLICK OF A MOUSE:
MISSION CONFERENCE 2013

Fr. Jack Nuelle, MS
USCMA Executive Director

USCMA members are preparing for the 31st Annual USCMA Conference, to be held in St. Louis, MO on October 25-27, 2013. **Each year's conference has given membership an opportunity to delve into a distinctive area of the ministry of Mission.** Over those 31 years we were invited to see through new eyes, to journey with hope, to push out into the deep, and to forge new paths. We found ourselves struggling under challenges, emerging from the chaos of a globalized world as we strove to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth ... and beyond. **We opened ourselves to being transformed and changed by the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus yesterday, yet which remains relevant in today's culture ... and breaks through into the future.** Every aspect of Mission provided an opening to new horizons as we sought more meaningful ways to proclaim that the Pascal Mystery is the beating heart of the Church's mission. (Homily of Pope Francis on July 7, 2013) **With its nearly 900 members, touching 236 different faith-based organizations, USCMA continues forging ahead with dedication and zeal to keep alive and deepen the awareness of Mission within the U.S. Church and around the world.**

My thoughts revert back to Our Holy Father's homily on Pentecost Sunday – that Mission Day par excellence. Pope Francis brought us into the day's scriptural scene as he spoke of the Holy Spirit who unleashed his irresistible power with amazing consequences. ... **A completely unexpected scene opens up before our eyes: a great crowd gathers, astonished because each one heard the apostles speaking in his own language. They all experience something new, something which had never happened before: "We hear them, each of us, speaking our own language".** Pope Francis went on to speak of newness which always makes us a bit fearful, because we feel more secure if we have everything under control, if we are the ones who build, program and plan our lives in accordance with our own ideas, our own comfort, our own preferences. And then he asked the important question: **Are we open to "God's surprises"? Are we open to the Spirit who is the soul of mission? That Spirit has been given to all baptized. So his final question was: Do we tend to stay closed in on ourselves, on our group, or do we let the Holy Spirit open us to mission?**

The focus of this year's USCMA Conference will let us take a qualitative leap outward, looking at Mission from a forward-thinking perspective – Social Media: A New Language for Mission. Those of us who have worked in cross-cultural ministries have experienced learning a new language, along with the joy of having new sounds convey meaning, of humilatingly using wrong expressions and saying the opposite of what we really meant, of stumbling over tongue-twisting words, and of **finally feeling good about our ability to convey Christ's message to ears, hearts, and minds eager for the Words of Life.** The 2013 USCMA Conference will delve into social media as a new language for many of us as we promote mission, a world-wide tool with almost limitless possibilities, a channel tailored to transmitting the Word of God, a pathway forged through cyberspace allowing people to encounter the God who is eternal yet dwells in time, a vehicle roving the information superhighway through which we can lead fellow voyagers to discover a God who is infinite but chose to be clothed in human flesh.

Social media is the digital aeropagus of the 21st century. Rather than being the "unknown god" that is worshiped in today's world, it could be a forum to proclaim "the God who made the world and all things in it" (Acts 17:24); a forum which Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, on the World Day of Communications 2011, encouraged Catholics to use confidently and with responsible creativity. We may be fearful of social media that is so secularized and seemingly anti-religious. We may harbor uncertainty about its suitability as an avenue for mission activity, or anxious about being cajoled into learning this new language, or hesitant to decipher its contents and discern its effectiveness. We may be skeptical as to which of its ever-growing platforms we could utilize. We may have mixed feelings as to whether this is an adequate forum for our group, congregation, parish, or mission entity as we advocate – locally and globally – for Gospel justice and peace. Through its keynote presentations, dialogue sessions, workshops, and table interaction at this year's Conference you could experience a quelling of those fears "with the click of a mouse!"

Special Announcement:

In an effort to hold our organization to the highest standards of global responsibility and to act as stewards of our money, USCMA has determined that it will publish one (1) more copy of the Mission Update to be sent out to our members. Beginning with our Spring 2014 Issue we will distribute the Mission Update via email. **In addition our website also features a member's only section which is accessible through a username and password. Mission Updates will only be accessible in their entirety on the member's only page.**

To ensure that we have your correct email you will be receiving a letter from our offices in the coming weeks with more details about this move to a more efficient use of USCMA resources, better environmental concerns and deliberate operations.

Take part in USCMA's New Blog Series!



Faces of Mission

is a new bi-weekly blog series that will go online starting in January 2014. Faces of Mission will highlight our members and their sending organizations to share your stories among USCMA members and with the broader public. With your help we will be able to share stories representing the mission work that USCMA members do, have done, or support.

*Share your story of mission
with us today!*

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Mission Update ISSN:1542-6130

“Together Towards Life”:

Reflections on the Proposed WCC Mission Statement

by Rev. Stephen Bevans, SVD



This coming October, 2013, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) will present a document on mission for the approval of the Tenth General Assembly of the WCC in Busan, Korea. The title of the document is **“Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes” (TTL)**, echoing the general theme of the Assembly, **“God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace.”**¹

Since the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) into the WCC in 1961, the 1982 document **“Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism”** has been the World Council’s only official **“position statement” on Mission.**² After the Ninth WCC Assembly in Puerto Alegre, Brazil in 2006, the CWME had been working on a new

statement, which went through a number of revisions, including a major one after a CWME Assembly in Manila, Philippines in March of 2012. Subsequently the document was approved for submission to the General Assembly by the WCC Central Committee in Crete, Greece in September, 2012.

This reflection on the statement will be divided into four parts. A first part will present a brief overview of the document, showing how it develops and highlighting its major foci and emphases. The second part will offer a brief comparison **between this current CWME document and the 1982 document “Mission and Evangelism.”** A third part will highlight several of the major themes of the document, and a final part will offer a brief critique of the document and some of its parts.

PART I: OVERVIEW

TTL is not written in what we might call the **“linear” style common in Western thinking, but in a more “circular” style** perhaps more at home in Asia. It is impossible to capture the complete richness of the document in the short summary that follows, but it is possible to present the major divisions and themes by which the document is developed.

TTL begins with a short **“Preface,”** connecting the present statement to the previous 1982 Mission Statement. Since 1982 the world in which the church participates in God’s mission has changed significantly, and so it was felt that a new statement was needed. Accordingly, this statement aims **“to seek vision, concepts and directions for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in changing landscapes.”**³ The Preface also states that the document is addressed to a wider audience than WCC members and affiliates. It is not stated specifically, but that wider audience consists of the Evangelical churches affiliated with the Lausanne Movement and World Evangelical Federation, Pentecostal and Independent Churches, as well as the Roman Catholic Church.

Paragraphs 1 to 11 introduces the theme, and is really a summary of the entire document. It lays out the major themes of the document—mission is rooted in the mission of the Triune God who is the God of Life, mission is carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit moves the church to protect the entire creation, the main cooperators in mission are Christians from the Global South and on the margins of society, mission is integrally connected with justice, and the church **engages in a “confident and humble”**⁴ sharing in the faith with includes both engagement in interreligious dialogue and sensitivity to particular contexts.

Toward the end of the Introduction we are introduced to fourfold division of the statement itself. It is built around several **“key developments in understanding the mission of the Holy Spirit within the mission of the Triune God.”**⁵ Reflecting on

these four developments, we read, “enables us to embrace dynamism, justice, diversity and transformation as key concepts of mission in changing landscapes today.”⁶

Part I, entitled “Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life,” is paired with the idea of “dynamism.” It is the Spirit who calls the church into being, and in today’s changing landscape the Spirit directs the church in a particular way to care for the entire created cosmic order. It is the Spirit who endows Christians with a spirituality that offers them strength to carry out the life-giving transformation that is mission’s goal.

Part II, “Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins,” is paired with “justice,” and develops what CWME Moderator Metropolitan Geevarghese Mor Coorilos speaks of as “the defining perspective”⁷ of the statement: that mission is understood today not as a rich, powerful “center” going to the periphery, but as the work of those on the margins who are empowered by God’s Spirit. In this way, mission seeks to bring life by working for justice and inclusivity, healing and wholeness.

Part III is entitled “Spirit of Community: Church on the Move,” and connects with the concept of “diversity.” The church comes to be by its participation in God’s mission, existing “by mission, just as fire exists by burning,”⁸ an allusion to the famous phrase by Emil Brunner. The ecumenical task, the statement insists here, is an essential part of mission, but the statement calls Christians “to an even wider understanding of unity: the unity of humanity and even the cosmic unity of the whole of God’s creation.”⁹ This section of the statement also calls for an understanding of hospitality as central to mission, particularly in the context of the massive migrations of peoples in our day. In addition, it calls for local communities to be missionary in their own context, and to develop a global vision as well.

The final section of TTL focuses on evangelism with the title “Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All,” and makes the connection with “transformation.” It is clear about its endorsement of evangelism as “mission activity which makes explicit and unambiguous the centrality of the incarnation, suffer and resurrection of Jesus Christ without setting limits to the saving grace of God.”¹⁰ It is equally clear that “proselytism is not a legitimate way of practising evangelism,”¹¹ and that evangelism includes interfaith dialogue and cultural sensitivity. The church calls human beings to personal, communal, cultural, and institutional transformation, a transformation which leads to the fullness of life.

The statement ends with ten “Concluding Affirmations” that once again summarize the whole document in terms of a “Feast of Life.” The final paragraph restates the theme once more: “The Triune God invites the whole creation to the Feast of Life, through Jesus Christ who came ‘that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness’ (John 10:10, REB), through the Holy Spirit who affirms the vision of the Reign of God, ‘Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth!’ (Isaiah 65:17 KJV).”¹²

PART II:

COMPARISON WITH THE 1982 “ECUMENICAL AFFIRMATION” (EA)

The first thing to notice is that TTL is a much longer document than the 1982 statement. TTL consists of 112 paragraphs, in comparison to the Ecumenical Affirmation’s 47—and so it is almost three times as long.¹³ I have already pointed out the more “circular” style with which TTL is written, and this is in contrast to the rather more “linear” style of EA. Rumor has it that the principle author of EA was David Bosch, the eminent South African missiologist.

EA begins from eschatology and human sinfulness. Its opening lines situate mission as response to the biblical promise of a new earth and a new heaven, a vision contrasted with today’s reality of “the monstrosity of human sin, the evil unleashed by the rejection of God’s liberating will for humankind.” Accordingly, “The Church is sent into the world to call people and nations to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relations with God and with neighbours through Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ In contrast, TTL’s starting point is creation: “We believe in the Triune God who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all life.”¹⁵ Sin is certainly mentioned in the document—explicitly and implicitly—but the basis of mission is more geared toward working with God to continue to bring life to creation: “The church is commissioned to celebrate life, and to resist and transform all life-destroying forces, in the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶ In addition, TTL has a more cosmic perspective, while EA is more anthropocentric.¹⁷

Both documents come out of the *Missio Dei* tradition of the WCC that can be traced back to the 1952 Willingen Con-

ference. TTL, however, has a stronger Trinitarian focus, especially in its emphasis on the mission of the Holy Spirit within **the context of the Trinity's mission. As we saw from our overview above, the entire document is organized around the Spirit's mission in the world and the church's participation in that mission. This is not at all to the detriment of the mission** of the Son, but it represents a fresh perspective that attempts to take into account some of the emphases of both the Orthodox Churches and the many Pentecostal Churches throughout the world today.

There is a real continuity between the earlier document and this most recent missiological reflection. Both contain emphases on working for justice and peacemaking.¹⁸ While TTL embraces ecology in a major way, it is not totally lacking in EA.¹⁹ Both speak of the Eucharistic dimensions of mission, if only briefly.²⁰ Both speak of sensitivity to local cultures,²¹ and **EA alludes twice to what TTL speaks of so prominently as "mission from the margins."**²² Both documents forbid proselytism, although EA speaks more strongly of proselytism as a sin, rather than, as does TTL, an illegitimate way of practicing evangelism.²³

Overall, my sense is that the newer statement has built on the older one, and in certain areas has gone well beyond it in breadth and in depth. It has truly charted a theology and practice of mission in today's "changing landscapes." Our next section will reflect on several of these newer perspectives.

PART III: SOME MAJOR THEMES

The Holy Spirit

While "mission begins in the heart of the Triune God," TTL takes pains to reflect on the theology and practice of mission from the perspective of "a renewed appreciation of the mission of the Spirit."²⁴ It does acknowledge that one theological perspective does emphasize a more Christo-centric understanding of the Spirit, but the perspective from which the statement works is much more rooted in the mission of the Spirit. The Spirit is present from the very beginning of creation and leads Israel "inspiring wisdom ... empowering prophecy ... stirring life from dry bones ... prompting dreams ... and bringing renewal ...,"²⁵ and is the same Spirit who takes part in Jesus' conception and empowers and commissions Jesus at his baptism. Jesus commissions the disciples by breathing the Spirit upon them and so sends them in the same way that the Father had sent him (Jn 20:21-22), a commission that is ratified so to speak in the Lucan story of Pentecost and the growth of the community in the Acts of the Apostles. The community is the witness of the Spirit to the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, and the church's task in mission, in an allusion to a phrase by Rowan Williams, is to find out where the Spirit is working in the world and join in.²⁶ Part of that discernment is to discover among the many spirits of the world, which are good—reflecting the Holy Spirit—and which are evil.

The Spirit, the document states, works "often in mysterious and unknown ways beyond our imagination."²⁷ In two other places we read about how the Spirit surprises us, leading us across boundaries, subverting our plans and those of the powerful, working through people the world least expects to be significant.²⁸ **The Spirit's mysterious ways means that it works beyond the church, in other faith traditions, and in all the world's cultures.**²⁹ Christians can never afford to be smug, confident that the Spirit is with them: "The claim that the Spirit is with us is not for us to make, but for others to recognize in the life that we lead."³⁰

As far as I know, no other WCC document has thought so thoroughly or consistently about the implications of mission when reflected upon through the lens of God's ever-present, all-pervasive, always illusive Holy Spirit.

Spirituality

The statement also reflects, if somewhat briefly, upon spirituality, which is another fresh emphasis in it. The spirituality in the statement is a transformative one. It is not only, and not primarily, about the individual, but one that endows us with energy and wisdom to serve humanity and all of creation. We cannot belong to God without belonging to our neighbor,

and we need to avoid the kind of spirituality “that simply makes us feel good while other parts of creation hurt and yearn.”³¹

Connection with creation is one of the sources of such spirituality. The document speaks about the need for a conversion to the work of the Spirit that will lead to a “new humility” with regard to creation. Such “life in the Holy Spirit is the essence of mission.”³² While we have in the past understood mission to be something that human beings do *to* and *for* others, the Spirit leads us to understand that mission is done *with all creation*. In fact, “in many ways, creation is in mission to humanity, for instance the natural world has a power that can heal the human heart and body.”³³

Mission spirituality “that flows from liturgy and worship connects us to one another and with the wider creation.”³⁴ Liturgy “only has full integrity when we live out God’s mission in our communities and in daily life,”³⁵ participating in the “liturgy after the liturgy,”³⁶ as Orthodox theologians put it.

Mission from the Margins

Mission from the Margins, as I pointed out previously, is considered the statement’s “defining perspective” by one of its principal authors.³⁷ It involves a radical reversal of perspective—from the imagination that mission is done by the rich and powerful *for* those who are poor and powerless to the recognition that it is among the poor and powerless where God is really acting, and where Christians are called to join in God’s work. “God chooses the vulnerable and the alienated, those at the margins, to fulfill God’s mission of establishing justice and peace. People at the margins are thus the primary agents of God’s mission of affirming life in its fullness.”³⁸

Those who are on the margins are Christians in the poorer parts of the world, in those places to which the “center of gravity” of Christianity has shifted. They are those at the margins of every society, such as “Dalits, women, farmers, Adivasis, fisher folk, sexual minorities, disabled, people with HIV and AIDS.”³⁹ They are migrants in all parts of the world. People like these, who are victims of the greed of the rich and powerful, are in the best position to understand what are the deepest needs and concerns of people like themselves, and so are in the best position to lead efforts of real transformation of the structures that oppress them. They are the ones who recognize that mission today has to be a movement of struggle and resistance.⁴⁰

No longer, therefore, can the West set the agenda for mission. No longer can it see itself as the primary agents of mission. We in the West need to listen, to work in solidarity, to support our sisters and brothers in their struggles. Joining in with the Spirit’s work of bringing life means “discerning and unmasking the demons that exploit and enslave,”—“deconstructing patriarchal ideologies, upholding the right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples, and challenging the social embeddedness of racism and casteism.”⁴¹ But this is the work of those people’s themselves.

The text does not exactly say it, but it seems to me that Mission on the Margins should open us up to be evangelized by those who are struggling to work with the Spirit of life. In them we can see the poor, vulnerable God who revealed Godself in the cross. In them we see that Christianity is not so much a way to another world, but a way to serve and heal this one. It is perhaps through the service of those who have no power and no resources that we in the West might find again the power of the good news and be converted anew to the wonder of the gospel.

PART IV: SOME WORDS OF CRITIQUE

TTL is a dense document, and in some ways difficult to read (at least for a linear thinker like me!), but I do think it bears patient study. There is a lot in the document, and there is much wisdom and challenge in it. It is not, of course, a perfect document, however, and I might offer a few critical reflections in this final section.

As is found in many documents written by “liberal” Christians, capitalism gets a bad wrap in this statement.⁴² While there is certainly truth in such condemnations of the “free-market economy,” economists often point out the naivité of Christians in these matters. Often some kind of modest prosperity is the result of “capitalist” initiatives such as cooperatives or micro-businesses. Often it is the greed of the owners of global businesses and corporations that is the problem, not so much the capitalist system itself.⁴³

Although the document several times condemns patriarchy,⁴⁴ it seems to stop short of condemning *sexism*. It condemns racism and classism, but not sexism. It could be because the question of women's rights and equality is not equally appreciated in all cultures and contexts throughout the world, particularly in some Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. Nevertheless, the fact is that a woman, Kirsteen Kim, was one of the major authors of the statement. There is some recognition of women—for example, the statement that although women, children, and undocumented workers are the most vulnerable of migrants, “women are also often at the cutting edge of new migrant ministries.”⁴⁵ Still, one would want to see women's plight and women's roles more highly emphasized in a document that will be the WCC's official statement on mission in the years to come.

The statement's treatment of evangelism is nuanced and complex, but I wonder if it might be sometimes simplified and clarified. On the one hand, evangelism is described in terms that make it sound like what Roger Schroeder and I have called “proclamation”:⁴⁶ “evangelism ... focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel ...”⁴⁷ On the other, evangelism is in some ways used as a term for mission itself—it does not exclude “the different dimensions of mission,”⁴⁸ and includes the practice of interfaith dialogue and contextualization.⁴⁹ I wonder if “evangelism” might simply be used as a synonym for mission itself, which is clearly a multi-faceted reality, and the clear articulation and inviting aspect of doing mission might simply be called “proclamation.” Perhaps the time has come to move away from a narrowly focused understanding of evangelism.

Finally, a small style issue. Paragraphs 35, 54, and 79 are wonderful “segues” at the end of sections that prepare the reader for the next section. Paragraphs 35 and 54 nicely speak of the Holy Spirit, thus tying the proceeding and following sections together with the statement's basic Trinitarian perspective. Paragraph 79, moving from an understanding of the church to evangelism, does not do this, however. Too bad the sentence that is 79 does not read something like: “As the church discovers more deeply, *through the working of the Holy Spirit*, its identity as a missionary community, its outward-looking character finds expression in evangelism.”

CONCLUSION

“Together Towards Life” does address mission in the changing landscapes of today's world and today's church. It may not be as concise and as clear as its predecessor document, written in 1982, but it does justice to the complex world of the twenty-first century in which it was written. It succeeds, at least basically, in embracing the theologies and ecclesiologies of church communities beyond the pale of the WCC, and it presents a fairly consistent treatment of mission from the fresh perspectives of a theology of the Holy Spirit and a missiology developed from the margins. The discussion it will create will guide our thinking on mission in the years to come.

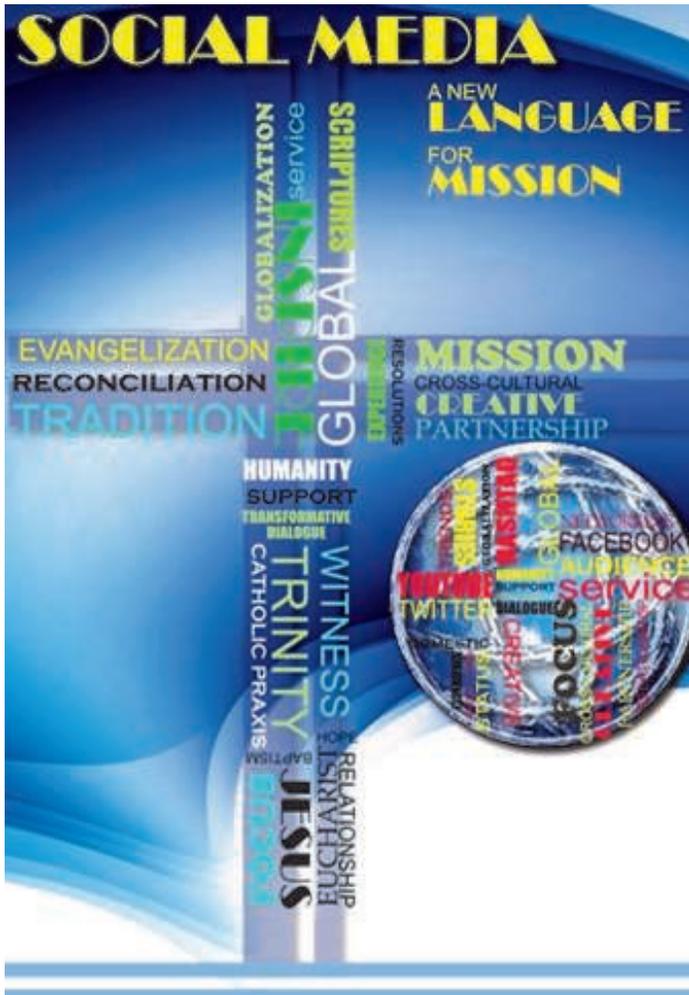
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NOTES

1. "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes" (TTL), in Mélisande Lorke and Dietrich Werner, ed., *Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century: A Reader for Theological Education* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013), 191-206. The document is also available online at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>.
2. TTL, Preface, Lorke and Werner, 191. Hereafter I will refer to the document by paragraph number.
3. TTL, Preface.
4. TTL 8.
5. TTL 11.
6. TTL 11.
7. Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos, "God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace: Some Missiological Perspectives," *International Review of Mission* 102, 1 (396) (April, 2013): 5-16, at 9.
8. TTL 57. The allusion is to Emil Brunner, *The Word in the World* (London: SCM Press, 1931), 11.
9. TTL 61.
10. TTL 80.
11. TTL 82.
12. TTL 112.
13. See WCC Central Committee, "Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism" (EA), in ed. James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans, *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 1: Basic Statements 1974-1991*, 36-51 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992). See also *International Review of Mission* 71, 2 (284) (October 1982): 427-47.
14. EA Preface.
15. TTL 1.
16. TTL 2.
17. See, for example, TTL 4.
18. See EA 12, 14-17, 26, 31-36; TTL 31, 45, 77-78, 92.
19. EA 19.
20. EA 21; 74.
21. EA 26; TTL 97-100.
22. EA 36; 40.
23. EA 39; TTL 82.
24. TTL 2.
25. TTL 12.
26. TTL 18, 25. See Rowan Williams, "Fresh Expressions" website, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/principles/transform>; see also Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London: Epworth Press, 2009). Kim is the vice-moderator of the CWME and one of the authors of the statement.
27. TTL 15.
28. TTL 25, 35.
29. TTL 93.
30. TTL 28.
31. TTL 21.
32. TTL 3.
33. TTL 22.
34. TTL 104.
35. TTL 74.
36. TTL 17. See Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC, 1996). Note 3 in paragraph 17 says that "the term was originally coined by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos and widely publicized by Ion Bria."
37. Coorilos, 9.
38. Coorilos, 12.
39. Coorilos, 10.
40. TTL 40, 43.
41. TTL 43.
42. TTL 7, 108.
43. On this, see Eugene Ahner's thoughtful reflections in Chapter 1 of his *Business Ethics: Making a Life, Not Just a Living* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 1-24.
44. TTL 43, 90.
45. TTL 70.
46. See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 352-61.
47. TTL 81.
48. TTL 81.
49. TTL 93-100.

Mission Conference 2013

Social Media: A New Language For Mission



Being Digital Immigrants

Bishop Ronald Herzog of Alexandria spoke to the USCCB Fall Assembly in 2010 on the need to incorporate Social Media into the US Church's overall communications.¹ In his address he stated, "Although social media has been around for less than 10 years, it doesn't have the makings of a fad. We're being told that it is causing as fundamental a shift in communication patterns and behavior as the printing press did 500 years ago."²

Throughout his presentation Bishop Herzog returns to the call for the Church to *Push Out into the Deep* and be a part of this form of social communication. He spoke of how "social media is not the latest fad, but a paradigm shift".³ His words to the bishops should also ally to us:

*On the Digital Continent, "if you build it, they will come" does not hold true. It takes careful strategizing and planning to make social media an effective and efficient communication tool, not only for your communications department, but for all of the church's ministries. We digital immigrants need lessons on the digital culture, just as we expect missionaries to learn the cultures of the people they are evangelizing. We have to be enculturated. It's more than just learning how to create a Facebook account. It's learning how to think, live and embrace life on the Digital Continent.*⁴

Even though this new form of language and communication can appear to be an obstacle in our work and lives as missionaries, we should open our hearts and minds to see how each of us can work to build online communities that will tighten the bonds already present in our physical communities and bring new people into those communities.

Notes:

1: USCCB Press Release, November 15, 2010, <http://old.usccb.org/comm/archives/2010/10-210.shtml>

2: Text from Bishop Herzog's speech from Whispers in the Loggia: <http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/2010/11/as-great-challenge-as-reformation.html>

3: Ibid.

4: Ibid.

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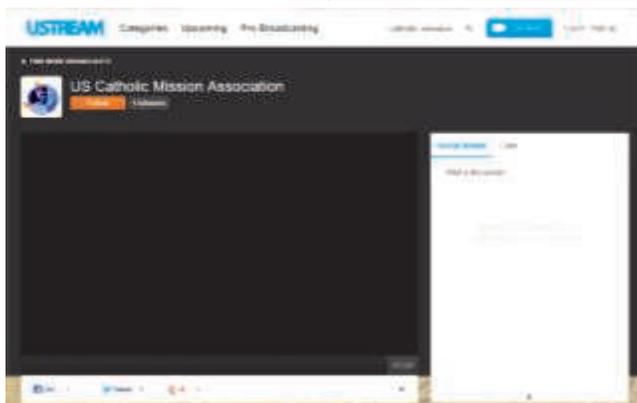
Friday, October 25, 2013, 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Opening Ceremony Keynote Video and Reflections

Saturday, October 26, 2013, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM
Opening Prayer and Keynote Address

Sunday, October 27, 2013, 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM
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Aparecida: Where Francis' Pontificate Began

BY ANDREA TORNIELLI
JULY 24, 2013 IN APARECIDA

The Church needs to "rid itself from all expired structures that do not favour the transmission of the faith." This is what point 365 in the concluding document of the last general assembly of Latin American bishops at Aparecida, Brazil's most important Marian shrine. The meeting set in stone Jorge Mario Bergoglio's leadership and transformed the document into a manifesto for his pontifical programme.

It is significant that Francis wanted to add this trip to the shrine to his World Youth Day schedule. Today he will be here to venerate a little 40 centimetre -tall black statue of the Virgin Mary which was found in three pieces by three fishermen, in October 1717 in the Paraiba river. According to tradition the statue is black because it wants to be close to the oppressed and the fact it was found in pieces symbolises the broken lives of slaves.

The meeting of Latin American bishops in 2007 was the first general assembly to be held in a Marian shrine and the fact bishops had constant contact with faithful there - millions of them every year -, influenced their work, as it helped them to understand the importance of devotion and popular piety. "Celebrating the Eucharist with the people is different to celebrating it separately amongst us bishops. That gave us a live sense of belonging to our people, of the Church that goes forward as People of God, of us bishops as its servants."

It was the first time one of the bishops' General Conferences "didn't start out from a pre-prepared basic text but from open dialogue" "to receive everything that came from below," the future Pope explained. During that time, Latin America's bishops got to know Bergoglio's working style. His ability to listen and take all bishops had to say into account. Some of these bishops voted for him in the Conclave last March. It could be said that the election of the Pope "from the other side of the world" actually started at Aparecida.

The Aparecida document contains the key words and the messages which Francis now communicates to the entire Church, starting with his call to people to be missionaries: "To remain faithful we need to go outside. Remaining faithful one goes out. This is the message Aparecida essentially aims to get across," Bergoglio said. In the Gospel, the most beautiful encounters between God and humanity take place on the street. Centuries of Christian history tell us this," the late Franciscan archbishop and cardinal Aloísio Lorscheider used to say.

What emerges from these texts is the image of a Church that puts mercy first, a Church that tries to help people in their faith rather than trying to regulate it and which wants to be close to those suffering, "like a mother". A missionary Church that is free from bureaucracy and pointless structures, that presents itself as a joyful and merciful entity that is not full of "sad, impatient and anxious evangelisers."

This specific reference to the need for the Church to free itself from pointless structures that serve no purpose in transmitting the faith but can end up hindering it, has become a leit-motif of Francis' papacy. Starting with his efforts to reform the Roman Curia and economic and financial bodies like the IOR.

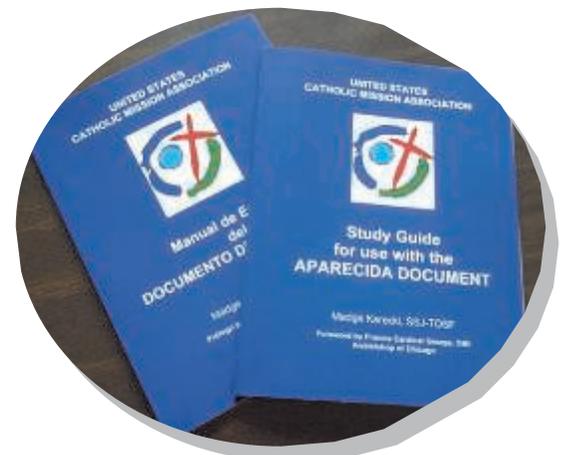
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To learn more about the Aparecida Document you **can order USCMA's Study Guide for use with the Aparecida Document for \$13.00.**

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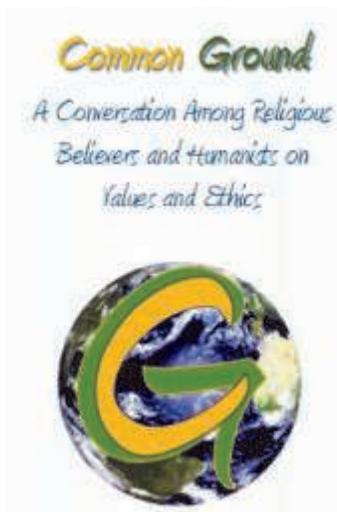
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The annual Preparing for Cross-Cultural Ministry Program sponsored by Intercultural Consultations Services will be held in San Antonio, TX from January 21 – February 29, 2014. This nationally and internationally acclaimed program with its consecutive 33 years of existence continues to be highly recommended for missionaries (lay, clerical, and religious) who are considering intercultural ministry here in the United States or overseas. The registration process needs to be started by November 15, 2013.

For more information, visit <http://interculturalconsultation.com/> or contact Sr. Kathryn Pierce, IHM at (313) 341-4841.

Common Ground: A Conversation Among Religious Believers and Humanists on Values and Ethics. This collaborative conference between religious believers of different faiths and atheists is a dialogue of mutual respect and cooperation around shared values and ethics. It is an opportunity to build bridges of understanding and to break down the barriers of fear, born of ignorance, skepticism, and indifference.



November 8 – 10, 2013 at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge, Scotland. Sponsored by the UK and US Provinces of the Xaverian Missionaries. For more information contact:

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In this month of October, that is dedicated in a special way to missions, let us bear in mind the many missionaries, men and women, who in order to bring the Gospel have overcome obstacles of every kind, they have truly given their lives... This, however, is for us all; each one of us in our own daily lives can testify to Christ by the power of God, the power of faith. The faith we have is miniscule, but it is strong! With this power to testify to Jesus Christ, to be Christians with our life, with our witness!

- Pope Francis
Angelus, October 6, 2013



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