Mission and Involvement in Parish Ministry

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THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF THE CHURCH AND THE AUSTRALIAN PROVINCE’S INVOLVEMENT IN PARISH MINISTRY

The topic, though self-explanatory, calls for certain justifying clarifications. To bring the issue to a sharper focus, one wonders why, when our counterparts in most other countries like Indonesia, India, or the African and Latin American nations, would not have any hesitation to be involved in parish ministry, we here in the Australian Province along with others formerly described as “home provinces,” waver or are uncertain about the justifiability of involving ourselves in parish ministry? This has to do with the understanding of the nature of the church as well as that of mission, in the past and today. This paper is an attempt to present the history of the understanding of mission and the church, which in turn can help us to see how pastoral ministry is integral to the discharging of our missionary service in the Australian Province.

Part I. Nature of Mission & Church

1. Impact of Colonialism on Mission

In the past, at the time of the founding generation of our Society, the church was considered to be absolute, parallel to the state (Robert Bellarmine), identified with the Kingdom on earth. It had everything: a hierarchical structure, salvation, knowledge, civilization and mission. Mission was one of its notes/qualities, controlled by one wing of its administrative setup, the “Propaganda Fide” and fulfilled by missionaries sent out to peoples of distant lands frequently considered to be heathens or savages, to proclaim the gospel to them and to plant the church among them to save them (and to civilize them). Nearly all the missionaries belonged to religious congregations to whom the Propaganda parceled off certain territories in those distant lands, generally known as mission lands. Geography, thus, was the defining element of mission. Mission was exercised exclusively in those mission countries as opposed to the home-lands generally identified with

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the European/Western nations. There was a coincidence of mission lands and colonies on the one hand and the home countries and the colonizing nations. This was only to be expected since this type of mission had its beginning with the colonizing forays of the European nations. Interestingly, Christians in the mission lands had no missionary obligation, which was the exclusive monopoly of the European races! This is the background of the modern concept of mission ad gentes.¹

If mission ad gentes was tied in with colonialism it was only natural that the colonial ideology of displacement and expansion filtered through theology to influence mission. Colonialism in essence was displacing the local governments and expanding the respective empires. Correspondingly mission aimed at displacing other religions and expanding the church. Inherent to colonialism was the attitude of superiority. While European missionaries made extraordinary sacrifices in their effort to proclaim the gospel in distant lands, the missionary project was guided by the outlook of cultural and racial superiority. Mission derived considerable impetus from the western power and prestige, and it spearheaded the spread of western knowledge, culture and values. Colonial structures and initiatives were considered indispensable for effective missionary enterprise. Missionaries looked to their home governments for political protection, even as they depended on the home country for support and sustenance. However, we should not forget that missionaries of the times, though under the influence of current ideology, were sincere in their commitment and spirituality, just as we are today.

Colonial Missiology suffered not only from the inherent justification for expansion and dislodging others, but also from the compulsion to supremacy, for colonialism itself is the idea of one nation supressing another nation and dominating it. Translated into religious terms it asserts that there is only one true religion into which all peoples are to be incorporated.

Our Constitution #105 to a great extent is influenced by this understanding of mission (though qualified also by the later developments). Such a perception of mission prevails even today both in the church at large and among a good number of SVDs, which is why we shall see necessitates the justification for our involvement in parish ministry in Australia and other similar places.

¹ Though rooted in the biblical goimlethne referring to other nations in contrast to the Jews, historically it has come to mean non-Christians in the former colonies.

2. Church is for Mission (Vatican II)

One of the major contributions of Vatican II was the retrieval of the missionary nature of the church ingrained in the bible. In fact the identity of the church and its mission is the very fulcrum on which the conciliar theology spins. In the words of Johannes Schütte, the Co-President of the Mission Commission, “the church and mission were the real themes of the whole Council. The Council was about bringing back mission into the heart of the church, into the inner core of its living and task. Mission is the inner nature of the church, its pulsating growth.”

The very opening sentence of the Mission decree Ad Gentes links the church and its mission to God: “Divinely sent to the nations to be ‘a universal sacrament of salvation,’ the church driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity, and obeying the mandate of her Founder, strives ever to proclaim the Gospel to all people” (AG 1). Two points are to be emphasized: church and its mission originates from God, it is neither ecclesiological, nor even Christological in origin. Secondly the very purpose of the church is to serve as a sacrament to the world, thus bringing out its extravertedness and other-centeredness. It is not existing for itself, rather its identity is ecstatic, i.e., its centre of being is the world, the church inside out. It is an instrument of God’s mission to the world.

Ad Gentes spells out further the source of this mission: “The pilgrim church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (AG 2). “This decree,” the text continues, “however, flows from the ‘fount-like love’ of God the Father who, being the ‘principle without principle’ from whom the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, freely creating us on account…” The self-effusive love of God is the source and explanation of the church’s being and mission. The fountain-like overflowing love of God effects not only mission within God (the proceeding of the Son and the Spirit from God and the return of the Spirit and the Son to the Father, the descending and ascending movements within the Trinity, as explained by Thomas Aquinas), but also the mission outside of God, beginning with creation and the rest of the salvation history. The ever-sharing nature of love makes God a missionary God, externally manifested through creation. Hence Vatican II described creation as revelation in deed (DV 2-3). The call of Abraham, the Exodus, the covenants, the sending of the prophets, are but different moments of this divine sharing, culminating in the sending of the Son, who “walked the ways of a
true Incarnation that He might make people sharers in the nature of God" (AG 3). What took place in him (we will speak more of this later) had to be continued to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

To accomplish this Christ sent from the Father His Holy Spirit, who was to carry on inwardly his saving work and prompt the church to spread out. On the day of Pentecost, He came down upon the disciples, to remain with them forever (Jn 14:16) (AG 4).

From the beginning of his ministry, Lord Jesus forms a group of disciples, "whom he wanted, making them twelve, to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim and to cast out the demons" (Mk 3:14-15). He made them sharers in his mission and sent them out with the same mission, at the end of his own ministry: "As the Father has sent me so do I send you" (Jn 20:21). Born out of the mission of the Son and the Spirit, the church is missionary by its very nature. Mission is the raison d'être of the church's existence. The Church is the theological and juridical continuation of the mission of the Son and there is a necessity of mission constitutive to its very call, even as creation can be said to be a necessity of the divine nature of fountain-like love. Hence some speak of mission as in the nature of fire: there is no fire if it does not burn, nor is there church if it is not involved in mission. If the church exists for mission, and not mission for church, then, wherever the church is, there the mission is. It cannot be restricted to any geographical territory.

Biblically, the call is always for mission. Abraham is called to be the father of a nation (Gen 12:1-3); Moses is called to lead the people out of slavery (Ex 3:10); each of the prophets is called to announce God's message, the disciples are called to be with him and to be sent out. Andrew having accepted discipleship, in turn calls his brother Simon. Similarly Philip calls Nathanael; the Samaritan woman having found Jesus shares her experience with the rest of the villagers; the early Christians, scattered due to the persecution, spoke to the Greeks in Antioch and gave rise to the first gentile community (Acts 11:19ff). Christian baptism as a sharing in the baptism of the Lord (Rom 6:3-4), is a sharing in his mission. Karl Rahner in one of his writings pointed out how "In the future Christians will be mystics, or they will not be anything." I would add further, this mysticism leads precisely to mission, in so far as the divine mystery as we experience it in the bible is ec-stacy, ex-istence, trans-scendence: all referring to the nature of sharing, going out of oneself to meet others.

From what has been said it is obvious how mission is not an optional or peripheral activity of the church but the sole objective of the church and of every Christian. Hence as Fr. Timothy Norton has pointed out in his report to the 2008 Provincial Chapter, "in AUS we SVD are integral and important members of the Australian church and continue to discern together the focus of our mission as church."

3. Fresh Perspectives in Mission

The last section leads us to the conclusion how the AUS cannot be different from other Provinces elsewhere as far as commitment to the church's mission is concerned. In this section through an examination of the nature of mission we will see how parish ministry is important and how it offers us the opportunity to discharge the mission in the Australian/New Zealand context.

3.1 The Kingdom Ministry of Jesus

As SVD we are invited to be initiated into the mystery of the Lord Jesus, the mystery of the Kingdom (Mk 4:11) so that we can follow him closely by inserting ourselves into his mission. This impels us to enter ever more deeply into the mission practice of Jesus.

Though Israel from the Babylonian exile was restored to its own land under Cyrus (2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4), it continued to experience suffering under foreign overlords, a punishment for the continued sins of Israel. Hence the promise of forgiveness spoken by the exilic prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel continued to ignite the mind of Israel, making the post-exilic prophets speak of liberation as still to be completed. They described this liberation employing the language of the return from exile, the new exodus and the coming of God's reign (Joel 4:1-21; Ob 1:21; Hag 2:1-9; Zech 9:9-11, etc.). It is against the background of this messianic expectation that Jesus begins his ministry by announcing the arrival of the Kingdom (Mk 1:14), as the high point of Israel's history and its climax.

Jesus was gripped by a strong sense of vocation by God whom he experienced as "Abba," implying a specific role as the Son. In this sense his mission was manifesting the Father (Jn 12:45, 14:9). Through all that he did and said, Jesus not only manifested God but also showed how God's reign was breaking in and through him and through his ministry.

We all are aware how the Lucan inaugural proclamation of Jesus (4:16-19) is considered to be a sort of manifesto of Jesus. It is linked with the great Jubilee year that is described in Leviticus 25:10-17 in

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2 We can speak of a necessity of creation flowing from the nature of love that God freely chose as God's nature from all eternity.

so far as the text Jesus quoted, Isaiah 61:1-2, was the synagogue reading for the celebration of the Jubilee. By quoting Isaiah Jesus claims that the Jubilee, the acceptable year of the Lord, has come in him. Jubilee was good news above all to the poor who had lost their land or who had become slaves. Jesus’ ministry was a systematic manifestation of the poor experiencing the arrival of the year of the Lord (the Lord’s reign). Later when John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus asking if he is indeed the Messiah, Jesus responds by drawing their attention to the fact of the poor experiencing the arrival of the good news (Lk 7:22-23).

Warren Carter has drawn our attention to the fact that even the Matthean beatitudes are a description as to how the poor must experience the blessings of the arrival of the Kingdom. The first part of the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-6) refers to the righteousness and the oppressive situations of distress. God’s reign will reverse that situation as shown in the second part (vs 7-10). The first part describes the distress that results from the powerful elite, causing the poor to mourn and hunger for righteousness, to be meek, i.e., voiceless and helpless. The remaining four beatitudes are concerned with human actions to reverse the situation of the poor, through actions of compassion, mercy, justice and disinterested service.

Even the Johannine gospel, though less frequently compared to the Synoptics, uses the terminology of the Kingdom. It brings out the Kingdom-ministry of Jesus, by presenting Jesus as Life, Light and Truth as opposed to lie, darkness and death, the counter forces that obstruct the divine reign, and are the expressions of the prevalence of the non-Kingdom. The Johannine gospel has frequently been spiritualized, especially in the light of Jn 3:16: “God so loved the world ... whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” However, this verse is to be read along with the following verses, more particularly v. 20: “For all who do evil hate the light, and do not come to the light, lest their deeds be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been wrought in God.” The text speaks about engagement with the world which is an engagement of choosing deeds of light over those of evil. It is a question of how one responds to people and structures that are dark, evil and bringing death to the world.

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3.2 The Teaching of the Church

Though the definition of mission as given in Ad Gentes no. 6 is very much traditional, basing itself on the ideas of proclamation, church planting and salvation, Vatican II’s understanding of mission is to be gleaned from other documents as well, since these ideas are spread across the different documents of the Council. The Council widened the scope of mission from the traditional narrow approach of proclaiming and planting. Already at the concluding part of the theological section of Ad Gentes, mission is described as an Epiphany or manifestation of God’s love and working it out in the world (no. 9). AG 22 speaks of the need for adaptation and accommodation (inculturation, in present terminology) in mission. In the context of Christian witness, AG 11 invites Catholics to learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations on Earth.

This idea of dialogue is further strengthened by the Conciliar Declaration on Other Religions (NA), by stating how all humans have a common origin and common destiny (no. 1). NA further stated how Catholics through dialogue and collaboration “acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral good found” among other religions. The Pastoral Constitution, Church in the Modern World (GS), brought the poor to the centre of the church’s missionary service, by stating: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.” This was the beginning of the modern theology of liberation as well as the theological discourse of the work for the dignity of the human person. GS 12 bases this dignity on the fact of humans having been created in God’s image, thus meriting being the crown of creation, with universal rights and duties. GS 20 elaborates the concept of social justice based on the equality of all humans, and the fundamental rights of every individual without any discrimination. Earthly progress is part of the concern of the Kingdom of God (GS 39). GS further asserted how all these are the foundation for the relationship between the church and the world, and the dialogue between them (no. 40). In fact the church serves as a leaven for the transformation of the human society into God’s family (Kingdom). GS became a point of departure for the prophetic mission of the church in the modern world. Along with the Conciliar Declaration on Human Freedom (DH), GS opened a new era in the church’s mission in the world.
All this prepared the way for Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, to state unambiguously how mission cannot be limited to one or other element (like proclamation or planting the church), without the danger of impoverishing or even distorting the rich meaning of it. Pope Paul VI went on to say that only the Kingdom is absolute, and it makes everything else relative (EN 8) and for the church evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new (EN 18). It is in the light of these ecclesial documents that we have to read the clarifications of our understanding of mission by the successive General Chapters since the 13th one. General chapters from the 9th in 1967/68 to the 12th in 1982 focused on the renewal of the Society through updating the Constitutions.

3.3 SVD Mission since the 13th General Chapter

The main task of the 13th General Chapter (GC) 1988 was the examination of three important areas of the Society’s life and practice, namely, mission, spirituality and formation. The document on mission is fundamental as it is from that the spirituality and formation flow, for the Society shares the church’s existence for mission, for God’s own being is sharing, as we have seen above.

The General Chapter drew our attention to the amplified and deepened understanding of mission given by the Council as well as the fact how mission is the very *raison d'être* of the church and of baptism, and not following from any mandate as it was presumed earlier. Mission refers to the world in which God realizes God’s reign and the plan of salvation. Church is the universal sacrament of that salvation and Kingdom offered by God to all peoples. All important, “Mission is, thus, neither bound to the one period in which the church must be established, nor geographically limited to particular territories.”

The Chapter went on to dwell on the themes of: our relation to the local churches, our attitude of dialogue, our acceptance of the principle of inculturation, the growing phenomenon of secularization and the dimension of integral liberation in evangelization. The Kingdom, thus, is at the centre of the Chapter’s understanding of mission, the church is regarded as the sacrament of the Kingdom and, while speaking about our spirituality, the chapter portrayed our community life as a witness to the presence, already now, of the Reign of God which is the goal of our missionary journey (FW, 46). The Chapter did reassert our commitment to primary evangelization (#102), going back to our founding spirit, however, it enlarged that vision by taking us to the frontiers of the non-Kingdom situations of the contemporary world (FW, 10-11), by our commitment to inter-religious dialogue, inculturation and integral liberation. We cannot fail to notice the Chapter’s insistence on the world-wide dimension of mission and our identification with frontier situations in the local churches which is part of our internationality. The new dimension is the characteristics that flow from the Kingdom perspective namely, interreligious dialogue that brings us to the margins of the Christian world, inculturation to the margins of dominant cultures and integral liberation to the margins of power-structures. The frontier is no more between faith and non-faith but that of the presence and non-presence of the Kingdom. Our priority is not to extend the church as much as to promote God’s mission of realizing God’s reign which includes also giving rise to ecclesial communities where they are not existing. Even as in Jesus’ ministry, the proclamation of the Kingdom is accompanied by the formation of a community (Mk 1:16-20; 3:14-15) as the sacrament of the Kingdom, in mission today there is no dichotomy between evangelization and human well-being. Hence in the section on Justice and Peace the Chapter asserted: We first need to conscientize ourselves so that we can recognize our commitment to justice and solidarity with the poor as the horizontal and visible dimension of evangelization (FW, 34). The 12th General Chapter had already stressed the need for the promotion of Justice and Peace in solidarity with the poor and oppressed in the light of #112.

The Chapter tried to give expression to our renewed missionary charism through the theme of “Passing over,” i.e., to pass over in dialogue, to pass over to the poor, and to pass over to other cultures and thereby participate in the passing over of Jesus Christ, manifested in his incarnation, ministry and the paschal mystery.

If the 13th GC tried to describe the central SVD identity and experience through the theme of Passing over, the successive Chapters have tried to re-focus this identity through the phrase, Prophetic Dialogue. The 14th GC, 1994 focused its attention on the theme of Communion.

The 15th GC, 2000 tried to widen the horizons of our understanding of mission so that we can recommit ourselves to mission. In the section describing the context of mission today, the Chapter noted how the church has become truly worldwide, even if in some places Christians form a tiny minority. In almost every part of the world local churches have been established as part of the worldwide communion. This assertion has greater significance for us in the context

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*Following the Word (FW), August 1988*, 10.
of our reflection. The theological section recapitulates most of the themes of the 13th Chapter on Mission. The new dimension of the 15th GC, I would suggest, is bringing our commitment to give rise to new communities under the category of dialogue with “faith-seekers” and describing our mission in terms of “The Fourfold Prophetic Dialogue,” i.e., dialogue with faith-seekers, with the poor, with cultures and with the followers of the religious traditions of the world. Though the Chapter did say that together with our dialogue partners we hope to hear the voice of the Spirit of God calling us forward, and in this way our dialogue can be called prophetic (GC 2000 #54), there is a certain lack of clarity with regard to the meaning of the phrase.

The Chapter also described what was previously considered as our priorities, essential dimensions, etc., as our characteristic dimensions, which are to form the mark of every SVD. They are: Bible Apostolate, Mission Animation, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, and Communication. However, they do not displace our fundamental commitment to the fourfold prophetic dialogue; rather they are in the context of this fourfold commitment.

The 16th GC, 2006, in the words of Father General Tony Pernia, was more of an experience than documents, as it was a celebration of SVD life and mission. The Chapter reasserted once again our internationality and our commitment to prophetic dialogue. The Chapter reaffirmed the value of our internationality as “a heritage received from our Founder and a blessing from the Lord.” Through that we contribute something important to mission — namely, the witness we give to the universality and openness to diversity of God’s kingdom, which is the real source of hope for a world torn by cultural, ethnic and racial conflicts and violence.

If in 2000 prophetic dialogue expressed our call to mission, the 16th GC used it as the lens to focus some aspects of our life as Divine Word Missionaries. Prophetic dialogue served the 15th GC to describe our mission (Constitution 100s), the 16th GC made use of it to read with the same perspective the rest of the Constitutions as well, i.e., Spirituality, Community, Leadership, Finances and Formation (#200-600).

The 16th GC emphasized also how our mission is Jesus’ mission, a mission that we share with all other people. Therefore we do not base our missionary identity on being different from others; we base it on being faithful — faithful witnesses to the joy of our faith in the Resurrection. In this way we commit our lives in hope to witnessing to the Reign of God through prophetic dialogue marked by our characteristic dimensions. This observation, I would suggest, is very important in our context. GC 2006 had a greater insistence on the quality of our existence. GC 2006 #6 reminds us how our international and multicultural SVD communities give an especially important and living witness to the inclusiveness and diversity of the Reign of God. This has huge significance for us in Australia especially through our internal and inclusive presence in parishes. The role of internationality and inclusiveness is repeated in GC 2006 #18:

In the context of today’s world, plagued with ethnocentricity and xenophobia, we acknowledge the charm of internationality as a heritage received from our founding generation and a blessing from the Lord.

**Part II. AUS and Parish Ministry**

Already, between the lines of my presentation of the first part a perceptive reader would not fail to notice how I was trying to show that our Society’s mission and life not only do not prevent us from taking up parish ministry in the Australian Province but in fact they challenge us to insert ourselves in the local churches by catering to their needs, always keeping the realization of the divine reign at the centre, through our four-fold prophetic dialogue and our characteristic dimensions. In this section I wish to elaborate this point some more.

Though Jesus’ ministry was Kingdom-centred, as we said earlier, the message of the Kingdom was accompanied by the formation of a community, as the sign and instrument of the Kingdom (Mt 1:14-20). As the sacrament of the Kingdom, the community of the disciples, the church is to be present everywhere (Acts 1:8 & par). Our Founder was very much influenced by the need for this primary evangelization, though he did not limit the understanding of mission to founding new ecclesial communities alone. The Society has continued his spirit trying to be relevant to the times. In fact it is a challenge for every SVD that while most religious Congregations are aging and shrinking the SVD is ever flourishing and growing. It is a sign that we are constantly guided by the Spirit of the Lord to continue his work of transforming the world into the New Humanity. One of the more suitable and sought-after means of realizing this mission in the Australian Province is our involvement in parish ministry. In fact GC 2000 had this to say about our parish ministry:

We recognize and appreciate their (SVDs involved in parish ministry) work and encourage our provinces and re-

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6 *In Dialogue with the Word 6, 2006, 6.*
gions to make specific efforts to clarify and enhance the missionary profile of the parishes where we work. This would include promoting our fourfold prophetic dialogue and characteristic dimensions, and fostering the process of inculturation (GC 2000 #91).

The Vatican II assertion that the church is for mission implies, naturally, that the Australian (New Zealand) church too is an agent of God’s mission to the land. In this mission we SVDs insert ourselves through our involvement in parishes with our missionary charism as we have described earlier. Our parishes have to be truly missionary parishes through the exercise of the fourfold prophetic dialogue and our characteristic dimensions.

Surely our mission should be the result of our constant fidelity to the legacy of our Founder and the founding generation as well as a response to the challenges of our times, always under the guidance of the Spirit of God. In this Spirit, I would suggest that our selective engagement in parish ministry in Australia/New Zealand is an expression of our mission today, is a step in the journey of self-renewal. This makes us ever relevant to the church’s missionary service, if not, like many other Congregations, we too would be heading towards death and disappearance, having nothing to contribute to the spirit of the times to which the Lord of the mission is beckoning the church. That is the frontier situation that we are called to in this province. Frontier is the space, without the past geographical connotation, where mission encounters the world, mission assumes its authentic face. Today in the context of our Province to a large extent this frontier is the attempt to get rid of all sorts of divisions and discrimination, leading to an inclusive society. Our parishes can become living signs of the inclusiveness and diversity of the reign of God. In Australia and New Zealand the Catholic immigrants are taking a great deal of initiative to make the visibility of the church more conspicuous. We can be instruments supportive to this process and make the Australian/New Zealand church ever more active and articulate. Our international and multicultural presence in parishes becomes a source of inspiration and encouragement for the inclusiveness and diversity of the Kingdom.

GC 2000 reminds us how we are not alone in God’s mission, but participate in it along with the rest of the members of the church, implying our collaboration with others (#48). It is here that our parish involvement becomes all the more significant. We are not just fire-fighters, but catalysts. Our fourfold prophetic dialogue and the special characteristics of mission animation, biblical apostolate, JPIC and communication, must unfold through the parish community in which we participate on a partnership basis. We have to remind ourselves how the entire parish community participates in God’s mission in the church by virtue of their baptism. Hence enabling the laity to take their role in mission is not a pastoral concession that we ordained ministers bestow on them, rather it is their theological right, i.e., accruing from their baptism in the church that is instituted as the continuation of God’s mission to the world. We have already referred to how it was the ordinary Christians that gave rise to the first gentile community (Acts 11:19-21). In this context we must be conscious also of the danger of male-domination in the church. The concept of the Kingdom is one of equality and participation, without inferiority-superiority at any level.

In a society that is becoming increasingly secular and humanistic, with hedonism and materialism, tinged with atheistic scientism, and environmentalism with a tendency to become quasi religions, our presence through parish ministry can be a source of accompaniment for de-churched people in a positive way, in a healing way, bringing them from superficiality to their true selves, from darkness to light, from fragmentation to wholeness. Notwithstanding the disaffection towards the institutional church, there is in the hearts of people a search for meaning and spirituality, an “exploratory sensibility of searching for anchors of meaning.” In this context our parish ministry can be a source for people to be affirmed in their faith not primarily through insistence on doctrines and dogmas, nor even through the increased frequency of sacraments, however important they are, but through a pastoral pedagogy that enables the people to get in touch with the divine and to be in tune with the divine through prayer and service as well as through greater reflection on the Word of God.

In a real sense colonial mission deepened the faith of Christians in home countries through their involvement in prayers and material contribution. Even more can our presence in Australia/New Zealand through our pastoral ministry and mission animation deepen the faith of the Catholics. Collapse of geographical mission can be a blessing in disguise, to deepen the faith of the people, not by foisting on them the help for mission out there, but by challenging the people to the encounter with the other right here, the other being anyone different from us, religiously, culturally, economically, socially, in age, in gender, and so on. Thus parishes become mission-driven and mission shaped. Until recently the great divide in Australia and New Zealand was confined to the differences between Catholics and Prot-

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estants. However, that social landscape has altered drastically. With the rising immigration and asylum seekers, these nations have emerged as multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies. We need not go out to exotic lands to come across followers of other religious traditions; it is a next-door reality.

At no time in the history of the church was there a ban on religious being involved in pastoral ministry. Even to our own days religious have occupied leading roles as pastors in the church, as Bishops and Cardinals, including in Europe and America.

**Conclusion**

The Australian Province’s involvement in pastoral ministry is neither extra-constitutional nor contrary to the tradition of the Society, though this parish ministry cannot be geared to a sheer pastoral maintenance alone. Our pastoral ministry is in and for mission. We live in a kairolological moment of retrieving the missionary spirit of the Christian vocation, even when geographical mission has collapsed, calling us to a transforming presence in the light of the Christian hope for a New Heaven and a New Earth (Rev 1:1).

**ABSTRACTS**


Le sujet, bien qu’attendant de soi, demande certaines clarifications et justifications. Pour éclairer la question, l’auteur se demande pourquoi, alors que dans la plupart des autres pays comme l’Indonésie, l’Inde ou les nations africaines et latino-américaines, nos confrères n’auraient aucune hésitation à s’investir dans le ministère paroissial, nous ici, dans la Province d’Australie comme dans d’autres provinces autrefois dites « d’envoi », hésitons à nous engager dans le ministère paroissial ou même douteons du bien fondé de cet engagement. Cela a rapport avec notre perception de la nature de l’Église ainsi que de la mission, hier et aujourd’hui. Cet article tente de présenter l’histoire de la conception de la mission et de l’Église, qui à son tour peut

nous aider à voir comment le ministère pastoral fait partie intégrante de l’accomplissement de notre service missionnaire dans la Province d’Australie.

El tema se entiende por sí mismo, pero igual pide algunas aclaraciones justificativas. Para enfoque el tópico con más precisión: Uno se cuestiona por qué aquí en la provincia de Australia y otras anteriormente llamadas “provincias de emisión”, dudamos o estamos inseguros sobre la justificación de comprometernos en el ministerio de parroquias, cuando nuestras contrapartes en muchos otros países como Indonesia, India, en Africa o América Latina, no dudan de manera alguna en este compromiso con las parroquias. Esto tiene que ver con la comprensión de la naturaleza de la Iglesia y de la misión, en el pasado y en el presente. Este artículo es un intento de presentar la historia de la comprensión de la misión y de la Iglesia que, a su vez, pueden ayudarnos a ver cómo el ministerio pastoral es parte integral de nuestro servicio misionero en la Provincia de Australia.