MISSION—AN EPIPHANY OF LOVE AND SERVICE

Introduction

Vatican II’s mission decree Ad Gentes (AG), having outlined the basic theology of mission, building it firmly on the very being of God, and having defined what is mission work proper, concludes the section by stating: “Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than a manifestation or epiphany of God’s will, and the fulfillment of that will in the world and in world history” (AG 9). This will is presented in the opening paragraph of the section as “that fountain of love or charity within God the Father” (AG 2). The next chapter that describes mission work as such begins by stating again: “Sent by Christ to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all people and nations...” (AG 10).

Accordingly, the Council’s greatest contribution was not primarily the retrieval of the missionary nature of the church, but the insight that God by nature is “the fountain-like love” and the church’s mission is the continuation of this love, reaching out through the Son and the Spirit. This was the result of the very conciliar process of ressourcement from the bible and the Fathers of the church. In this concluding chapter of the volume I wish to develop this theme of divine love and to emphasize how the church’s mission today, basically, is a manifestation of this love actualized in service and that must assume priority over all other motives.

The New Context

Before we go into the new nuances in mission today it is imperative that we begin with some observations regarding the situations that are different from the times of Vatican II. In this we are only following the spirit of the Council that was convened by its architect, John XXIII, to make the church ever suited to proclaim the Word to the contemporary world.1

In contrast to the Europe/west-centered church of Vatican II\(^2\) with the priority of sending personnel and resources to the “missions,”\(^3\) today we experience the presence of Christianity along with the followers of other religious traditions anywhere in the world, due to the globalization process and mass migration. The multi-religious situation, even with a spirit of renewal and self-assertion, has become a reality everywhere. On the one hand no specific region today can be described as non-Christian, as Vatican II understood it, and on the other the former mission-sending regions are depleted of their personnel and financial resources, not to mention of their very Christian faith.

The post-colonial revival of the religious traditions of the world, accompanied by a respect for religious pluralism, may be interpreted as a sign of the times. This, along with the socio-economic and political now of the world, indicates the inadequacy of *Ad Gentes*’ approach to mission as “proclaiming the gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ” (“certain territories”) (AG 6). We need to retrieve the spirit of the bible that can be appropriated as good news for all the peoples of the world and we need an ecumenism that does not exclude any people. True, the church cannot bury its identity as a call to serve as the light and salt to the world (Mt 5:13-15); rather, as we shall see soon, it is an invitation to return to the kingdom-centered ministry of Jesus.

Another significant change in the world scene, starting already from the last days of Vatican II, is the growing phenomenon of secularization, affecting the regions considered to be “Christian,” the most. The gradual loss of a sense of the Transcendence manifested in different symptoms such as the declining interest in religion and church attendance and the abandoning of religious practices, along with the chase after pleasures, can be described as the most acute concern for the Christian community.

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\(^2\) Most of the Bishops at the Council came from the Western world, as also the themes and problems that the Council grappled with were of a western nature. The soteriological character of other religions, the encounter of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions, the significance of dialogue as the characteristic mode of the church’s existence, the value of harmony and complementarity and similar themes did not figure in the Council or were treated only superficially.

\(^3\) “Missions” is the term usually given to those “particular undertakings by which the heralds of the gospel are sent out by the Church and go forth into the whole world to carry out the task of preaching the gospel and planting the Church among people or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. ...commonly exercised in certain territories recognized by the Holy See” (AG 6).

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A major aspect of the contemporary world, that can be seen as a positive sign of the times, is the “rise of the little ones of the world” by which I mean the rising awareness of people at the periphery of human society, of their human dignity and human rights, along with the unrest fuelled by the determination to regain the same.\textsuperscript{4} Considering the kingdom-driven mission of Jesus as we have it in the gospels, probably this is the greatest challenge for the church’s mission today.

**Creation, God’s Reaching Out in Love**

The whole bible is a narration of the manifestation of divine love, beginning with creation (Gen 1-2). Creation, as Iosif L. Bosch has shown, is God’s “coming out to the other—is an image of the erotic divine creative impulse.”\textsuperscript{5} Obviously it is an act of divine self reaching out. Iosif Bosch continues: “The text refers to the act of creation itself, in which God by natural and ecstatic love (\textit{eros}) gives place to the other.”\textsuperscript{6}

The image of the Spirit brooding over the waters (Gen 1:2) further brings out this idea of love. Feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson, quoting St. Augustine, invites our attention to this brooding-over, saying it is the way birds brood over their eggs, “where that warmth of the mother’s body in some way also supports the forming of the chicks through a kind of influence of her own kind of love.”\textsuperscript{7} “The notion of a warm maternal bird fostering and cherishing the growth of her young, actually engendering them into existence by the loving power of her own body, provides an apt animal metaphor for the creative work of the Spirit of God, Giver of life.”\textsuperscript{8} Quoting several texts from the Wisdom literature, Elizabeth Johnson goes on to say, “Biblical wisdom literature’s language about Sophia celebrates the one God’s gracious goodness

\textsuperscript{4} The rise of the various subaltern theologies such as the Dalit Theology in India, the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines, the Minjung Theology in Korea, the Buraka Theology in Japan, the Asian Feminist Theology and others, are all expressions of this rising consciousness of the little ones.


\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{7} Augustine, \textit{The Literal Meaning of Genesis} 1:36. Augustine in \textit{De Trinitate} dwells on the goodness of God (1.31), God as love (4.1), and God’s mission of sending the Son and the Spirit (2.5). Cf. Elizabeth A. Johnson, \textit{Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love} (London: Bloomsbury Publ., 2014), 140.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
Wisdom’s act is not a one-time event, insists Elizabeth Johnson, rather the “bounteous love more mobile than any motion, the mystery of the Creator Spirit, utterly transcendent, dwells at the heart of the evolving world in its living and dying, empowering its advance.... The poetic images of the Bible offer a way for thought and feeling to grasp the expansive presence of God in the world as infinite, life-giving love.”

In so far as the nature of love is reaching out, we can approach the same mystery of creation as well as the rest of the biblical narrative as a process of divine self reaching out, as an unfolding of the very divine being. It is God’s going out of God’s self, in love. It can be described as God’s ecstasy, ex stare—stepping out of oneself. Diarmuid O’Murchu rightly describes creation as the divine dance, a spontaneous and graceful movement. What is to be underlined is that God’s reaching out to the world in creation is not a second moment or an attribute of the divine being but just an expression of God’s very being, Love. As Catherine La Cugna has argued, “God’s To-Be is To-Be-in-Relationship.”

The whole biblical discourse can be encapsulated in one phrase: extensio Dei (extendere = to reach out), divine self reaching out.

The bible continues the story of the divine love in the process of the making of the covenants as well as the sending of the judges, prophets, and ultimately God’s Word Incarnate, Jesus the Messiah. Likewise, the whole Exodus event, leading to the formation of Israel as a nation chosen for a special service (Ex 19:6; Isa 42:6, 49:6), begins as God’s response to the affliction of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt and to their cry (Ex 3:7,9).

Commenting on the revelation of God’s name “I am” (Ex 3:14), Walter Kasper writes:

I am with you in your distress and I will accompany you on your way. I hear your cries and I answer your pleas. Correspondingly, the revelation of God’s name is immediately connected with the ratification of God’s covenant with the patriarchs and with the classic formulation of the covenant: “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God” (Ex...
6:7). In the revelation of his name, God thus enunciates his innermost reality: God’s being is present for his people and with his people.\textsuperscript{13}

Kasper further shows how God’s name is associated with the Hebrew root \*{hasah} which means to love passionately, rather than \*{hay\textasciitilde}a (to be), as many authors regard it.\textsuperscript{14} “God’s being is Being-for-his-people; God’s being as Pro-Existence is the wonderful mystery of his existence,” explains Ulrich Wilckens.\textsuperscript{15}

This love is the core of the basic \*{shema} of the Israelites that Jesus quoted (Mk 12:29-31 and par) combining Deut 6:4 and Lev 19:18. The two key words of the \*{shema} are \*{ahavah} (love, affection) and \*{hesed} (long-acting love), both of which, thus, are associated with love.\textsuperscript{16} The Lord through the prophet Isaiah assures Israel: “Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be moved, yet my unfailing love—\*{hesed}—for you will not be shaken” (Isa 54:10).

This dynamism of divine love is expressed in the universe, in life on earth, so complexly with different patterns, with certain interdependence, shaping a mind-boggling spectrum that Charles Darwin described as the “grandeur” of life,\textsuperscript{17} and all following laws laid down by the author of the universe. Biblically speaking, this elaborately constructed web of life, each part so different from the others, is the manifestation of the divine reaching out, divine love that acts even in every step of the self-organizing systems like a cell that interacts with the environment. The divine self-transcendence bestows even on single-celled organisms an innate ability to transcend themselves, which I would describe as the root of evolution. Jesus’ words, “not a sparrow is forgotten before God” and “even the hairs of your head are all numbered” (Lk 12:7) can be read in relation to this reality.\textsuperscript{18}

What is so vital for our times, tending to a loss of the sense of the Transcendence, is the urgent need to become aware of the mystifying presence of the divine in and around us, inviting us to respond through a sort of prophetic contemplation that is not only awe-inspired but also

\textsuperscript{14} Kasper, \textit{Mercy}, 231.
\textsuperscript{16} Lois Tverberg, \textit{Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 51ff.
\textsuperscript{17} Charles Darwin, \textit{The Origin of Species} (New York: Signet Classics, 2003), 459.
committed to the dignity of life in every form, but above all, to human life. Denis Edwards rightly insists that physicist Stephen Hawking’s well-known question: What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe, cannot be answered without reference to this “immanent energy of love.”

The Mission of Jesus

The divine self reaching out in history is continued in the Incarnation of God’s word in Jesus of Nazareth, as pointed out in Dei Verbum 2. John the Evangelist brings out the link between the Old Testament understanding of creation and the New Testament. The Word, through whom everything is created and enlightened, becomes human. According to the Johannine Prologue the creative activity is the first phase of the Word (1:1-5) and through Incarnation, the second phase of the activity of the Word, we come to know the nature of the divine (1:18, see also 12:46 and 14:8). Dean Fleming elaborating the mission of God from the Johannine perspective writes: “Jesus’ whole mission is a concrete expression of the loving character of God. For John, Jesus’ words and works, his witness and his acts of service, his dwelling among us and his dying for us, are all seamlessly woven together as manifestation of divine love.”

Francis J. Moloney, developing the theme of love in the gospel of John has drawn our attention to how at the heart of John’s account of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples, narrated in five chapters, taking

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20 Edwards, Partaking of God, 78.
21 Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, 1965, No. 2: “In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col 1:15, 1 Tim 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”
a quarter of the entire gospel, is love: as it is acted out (13:1-38), as it is spoken of (15:12-17) and as it is prayed for (17:1-26). This, in turn, prepares for the final “glorification” of the Father by manifesting the extent of his love (3:16-17) through Jesus’ self-surrendering death on the cross and thus accomplishing his task (19:30).

Elizabeth Johnson has invited our attention to the Incarnate Word who, through his parables such as that of the lost coin, the lost sheep, hiring the servants at different hours of the day, and many others, taught that “the compassionate love of God is extravagant, transgressing all cultural religious expectations of fairness in order to gather in every lost, hurt or rebellious sufferer.”

The teachings of Jesus are centered on love. In his sermon on the mount Jesus reminds us how he has come to fulfill the Law (Mt 5:17) and later, asked by one of his listeners as to which was the greatest law, Jesus replies: “you shall love the Lord with all your heart... This is the first. The second is like this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-40).

In Jesus God acts, revealing to humans the depth of his love. Gerald O’Collins points out how Jesus exercised the divine compassion, behaving and speaking in a way that forces us to the conclusion: “Jesus identified himself with the divine concern to forgive and save sinful human beings. Just as he understood his word and God’s word to be identical, so he understood his presence and God’s salvation to be identical.” For O’Collins the ministry of Jesus was “aimed above all to provoke a response to the loving and demanding presence of God.” That ministry earned Jesus the nickname “a glutton and a drunkard,” and “a friend of tax collectors” (Lk 7:35).

The Synoptic gospels, in particular, portray Jesus’ self-consciousness as the presence and communication of the divine reign, the realization of God’s love and he enacts it with unique authority (Mk 1:14; Mt 4:17; Lk 4:16-21). The many miracles are signs of the powerful actualization of the compassionate love of God. Biblically speaking, God is to be understood through God’s Word in creation and in the ministry of the Incarnate Word, which was a process of gathering and transformation, and this Jesus described as God’s reign.

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24  Ibid., 136.
27  Ibid.
Even the death and resurrection are also to be situated in the context of the divine love, rather than the atonement angle. God’s passionate love that does not tolerate the manipulation of religion by the religious leaders of the time, without allowing space and time for human beings, was active in the ministry of Jesus and the religious leaders tried to eliminate him by crucifixion. However, God raised him and affirmed him to be the Christ (Acts 2:22-24). Walter Kasper described the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross as “the unsurpassable self-definition of God.”

Denis Edwards commenting on the various words used in the New Testament to communicate what God does for humans in Jesus Christ, words like salvation, redemption, reconciliation, sanctification and similar ones, writes: “It seems that for the New Testament authors, this rich variety was necessary because no one image or concept was sufficient to express what is finally beyond all our words: God’s love poured out for us in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and the giving of the Spirit.” God’s love is the coherent account of the meaning of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

Jesus’ mission is to be understood primarily as the very expression of the nature of God. Therefore, at the end of his ministry, in the fourth gospel, he exclaims: “those who have seen me have seen the Father” (Jn 14:9; 12:45). His ministry has to be seen not only as that of the sent one, but more so as the mission of the Son, with the awareness of his loving intimacy with God. In this context we can appreciate Edward Schillebeeckx’s comment on Jesus’ Abba experience as the “source and secret of his being, message and manner of life.” The Johannine farewell discourse embracing chapters 14 through 16 is an articulation of the relationship between Jesus and the Father as well as between Jesus and the disciples, a relationship of perfect love and unity like the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-10).

Message of Love

Following the biblical thought the Council has initiated the process of the retrieval of the divine love as the fulcrum of mission theory and practice for our times. In this the Council anticipated what Christopher

29 Edwards, Partaking of God, 37.
30 Ibid., 38.
Wright, the author of the massive volume, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*,32 points out: “Biblical mission and biblical hermeneutics seemed to morph into each other in unexpected but fascinating ways.” Wright shows further how “[m]ission is what the Bible is all about; we could as meaningfully talk of the missional basis of the Bible as the Biblical basis of mission.”33 That mission is the diffusion of the divine love.

Just before the establishment of the covenant with Israel (Ex 20-24), Israel is told how it is made God’s treasured people, so that “you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). Ross Blackburn has argued how the revelation of the biblical law in Exodus 19-24 is an expression of the generosity of God, implying that the divine righteousness is to be reflected in the lives of the people, who shall be holy (Ex 22:27). This in fact underlines the very formation of a specific people.34 The nation of the Israelites is made so that it serves the rest of the world through their priestly and kingly service. The creation of the new community, the church, is the continuation of the same mission, with its call to be the salt, light and leaven to the world (Mt 5:13-15). The First Letter of Peter, having told the Christian community how it is to lead a holy life based on love, almost verbatim repeats Ex 19:9, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

In the bible the way God sees is, “not with the eyes but with the heart—the heart in the biblical physiology being the seat of understanding rather than of feeling.”35 The four gospels tell us how Jesus was a spelling out of this heart of God. Though we may never come to know about the physical appearance of Jesus, we cannot miss the window to God’s heart in Jesus that made people exclaim, “we never saw anything like this” (Mk 2:12). This language of the divine heart is outlined in the Sermon on the Mount: the ability to mourn with the mourning, to be the voice of the voiceless, to be in solidarity with those who hunger and

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33 Ibid., 29. As far as Vatican II is concerned its very first insight was that mission is not an appendage of the church, but the very expression of its nature, derived from its origin, God’s self reaching out. Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II: The Real Achievement* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 44-45. Mission is the hermeneutical key to understand the Council.
thirst for justice, to act disinterestedly (i.e. without selfish motives), to be compassionate, to make peace with justice.

Any reflection on mission today in the spirit of the Bible and of the Council can be guided by Archbishop Dennis Hart’s advice: “Evangelization is not imposing our ideas, our beliefs on others, but showing the joy of God’s love.” Love is presence and evangelization requires the presence of the Christian community in every culture (Mt 28:19-20). Pope Francis reminds us: “Help the Church to grow through a life of attraction: without the preoccupation of proselytization.” The existence of the community is precisely for “apostolic initiative,” as Pope Paul VI reminded the church (EN 24).

This task of apostolic initiative, evangelization, begins with the Christian quality of the community that can be qualified as presence (shekina = divine presence). This is enshrined in the very self-perception of the church of its identity as “the sacrament” of the kingdom, “of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind” (LG 1) and becoming on earth “the initial budding forth of that kingdom” (LG 5). This reflects the early church’s awareness of itself as a call to serve the world as its animating force: “What the soul is to the body Christians are to the world.”

Since the time of Tertullian (c. 160-220) the Christian understanding of God is expressed through the concept of the trinity, borrowing the Greek categories of substance and persona. However, in the bible, as we saw, God manifests Godself through the category of presence expressed through images such as God walking in the garden along with the humans, or God acting through God’s wisdom, God’s word and God’s spirit, showing how the Transcendent is very much immanent to creation, culminating in God’s Word becoming flesh. This divine presence has to become real in the church, and in every Christian, through a sort of “deep incarnation” (Niels Gregersen), i.e., every Christian becomes a presence of the divine through his/her practice of divine love and mercy.

Through its exercise of love and service the church becomes a sort of “soft-power” for the transformation of modern culture to make it more other-centered even as it did in the early centuries when it exercised a formative influence on European culture and civilization. “Without this Christian impulse, neither the cultural and social history of Europe nor

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36 Dennis Hart, “Pentecostal Letter to Youth”: Kairos 25 (8 June 2014) 22.
38 Letter to Diognetus, 6.
the history of humanity can be understood,” argues Walter Kasper. Kasper goes on to say that the most serious criticism that can be leveled against the church today is the accusation that oftentimes only a few deeds follow its words of love and service. This, in turn, invites the church to come down from its high moral stand to feel with the people of our times. What Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said in the context of the overwhelming approval of gay and lesbian marriages in the Irish referendum, that it was an invitation to the church for a “reality check,” is true for the whole church.

As missiologist Mary Motte, belonging to the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, reminds us, “The awareness of God’s sustaining love and creative power leads us to a missionary spirituality that is basically contemplative. By this I mean a spirituality that regards everything from the view that God’s love is a creating love, embracing all persons and all creation. This is God’s plan for creation; namely, that all be saved (cf. Titus 2:11).” The basic Catholic perspective is to visualize the world as charged with the grandeur of God, “Grace is everywhere.”

This contemplative spirituality, though a gift, is a task as well. The Christian presence is a compassionate presence in the spirit of following Jesus who began his ministry by quoting Isa 61:1-2 (Lk 4:18-19). Jesus as the Incarnation of the divine reaching out, reached out to the poor of his times; and we in turn have to bring the good news of God’s liberation, God’s reign to the poor of our times by offering space for persons and groups that are different from society’s “expectations.” People believing and worshipping differently than us, people with different eating, sexual, cultural feeling and tendencies have to find acceptance from us even as Jesus accepted the woman caught in adultery.

Transcendence is the movement from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, from self-perspective to divine perspective. The God of the bible transcends all and that is the challenge for the Christian mission today. God’s call to Abraham to leave the Chaldean capital Ur to become a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1-3) is continued in the call of the Christian community. The Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel is right in saying that biblical religion is “the awareness of

39 Kasper, Mercy, 168.
40 Ibid., 169.
43 Ibid.
God’s interest in humans, the awareness of a covenant, of a responsibility that lies on Him as well as on us. Our task is to concur with His interest, to carry out His vision of our task.”

What is unfolded in the ministry of Jesus is this divine transcendence, requiring that we make the divine project of love rather than a passion narrative the cornerstone of our mission theology. Despite human limitations the church has to endeavor to follow Jesus, the path (halakha), in his ministry. The church becomes the embodiment of the love and service shown by Jesus. This can be described as an Incarnational mission. As Ross Langmead has argued, “incarnational mission is not only a powerful metaphor but an essential ingredient in any proper model of Christian mission.”

Incarnational mission is a “Christopraxis” (Ross Langmead), a radical and whole-of-life response in discipleship, making the loving, saving God present to the world, through our radical following of the Lord, in his compassion, concern, forgiveness, healing, feeding, accepting, hospitality, teaching, praying: in short, “to be with him and to be sent out” (Mk 3:14).

Unlike the current popular phrase, Missio Dei, prevalent especially among Protestant circles, Vatican II traced the very existence of the church back to the missionary being of God, making the church missionary by its very nature. While Missio Dei tries to emphasize that mission is God’s and not of the church, Vatican II asserts how mission is the very being of the church. Vatican II goes beyond what some have said that mission has the church, and asserts: church is mission even as God is mission.

This has huge implications for mission today. Mission can no longer be confined to one or the other elements of mission like proclaiming the gospel, or planting the church or saving souls nor can it be limited to any particular place. Mission has but one purpose, as John Paul II wrote: “to serve human beings by manifesting to them the love of God made present in Jesus Christ” (RM 2). That is the raison d’être of the church in so far as it is the continuation of the divine self reaching out. This makes every Christian a missionary, without denying the role of those who make mission their specific charisma.

46 Ad Gentes anchored the missionary nature of the church in the very missionary being of God, by stating that it flows from “that fountain of love” (AG 2).
One of the major consequences of this return to the biblical sources of mission is that mission is not directed to any particular people (Ad Gentes = followers of other religious traditions) but to the entire human race and the cosmos, for God is the “true Mother of life and of all things.” 47 God’s loving presence with human beings remains the primary focus of the election of a specific people like Israel or later the community of the disciples of the Lord, the church. Neither the Sinaitic covenant nor the New Covenant in Jesus Christ cancels the universal covenant. This makes mission much more than opening the taps of salvation for non-Christians, partners in God’s universal covenant, but drawing all back to the love of God through the Christian community’s love and service, the community’s following the path of Jesus Christ. Mission is not primarily rocketing people into heaven as much as the transformation of this world.

Epiphany of Service to the World

The spirit of renewal and ressourcement initiated by Vatican II can prompt us to make a shift in mission from the intellectualistic and dogmatic approach, typical of the Greek mind-set, to that of the biblical narrative, one of love and compassion. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16). The church has to spell out this love in the contemporary context through its service. Pope Francis reminded the bishops that they are to be “men who are guardians of doctrine not in order to measure how far away the world lives from the truth it contains, but in order to attract the world, to enchant it by the beauty of love, to seduce it with the offer of the freedom which is given by the Gospel.” 48

Jesus was not a temple person but declared how God is to be worshipped not in the temple but in the world in spirit and truth (Jn 4:21). God is to be served in the arena of the world where people are. God is inviting us to serve God in the world by caring for men and women in the world, especially those who are suffering in any form. As Karl Rahner, writing in the context of the sacraments, reminds us, “rather than entering a temple which walls off the holy from the godless world outside, man sets up in the open expanse of God’s world a sign proclaiming

that not in Jerusalem alone, but everywhere in spirit and truth, God is adored and experienced.”

Service to the world renders a certain secularity to mission. Pope Francis reminds us how the church, as the house of the Father, has to reach out to everyone without exception, “but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked” (EG 48), for “the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel.” This demands a readiness to be “bruised, hurting and dirty,” to be “out on the streets” rather than remaining “at the centre” (EG 49). In his encyclical Laudato Si’ the Pope argues how we have to reach out also to our sister the earth, “because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her” (LS 2). The Pope points out how creation is different from nature, in so far as creation has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance: “...creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion” (LS 76).

The basic principle is the God-given dignity of the human person created in God’s image, into whom God has breathed God’s spirit and with whom God has entered into a covenantal relationship. “Human dignity uniquely personal while grounded and realized in community, is the juncture at which the Christian message meets the world, and the world connects with the church,” observes Christine Firer Hinze. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (GS) describes this inter-connectedness in terms of solidarity (40-45). Solidarity is another name for love. The concluding paragraph of this lengthy document asserts: “Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the people of the modern world ever more generously and

50 Benedict XVI, Address to the Brazilian Bishops in the Cathedral of São Paulo, Brazil (11 May 2007), see EG 48.
52 Gaudium et Spes, a key document of the Council, had its origin on the floor of the Council following Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens’ historic intervention on December 4, 1962 arguing for a central vision for the council that should concern the church’s identity ad intra as well as its service to the world, ad extra. See Abbot, The Documents of Vatican II, 184.
effectively. […] By thus giving witness to the truth, we will share with others the mystery of the heavenly Father’s love” (GS 93).

Jesus was God’s good eye (ayin tovah) (Mt 6:22-23), i.e. looking out for the needs of others, and generous in giving to the poor, as opposed to ayin raah (to be self-centered).53 This invites the church to have a generous heart for the world of our times, rather than to be preoccupied with its own identity. The shine of the church is its concern for society’s vulnerable. “The more we read Jesus’ words in their Hebraic setting, the more we discover that if we want to follow Jesus as his first Jewish disciples did, we need to learn to have a very ‘good eye.’”54

The practice of love in service to fellow human beings is the exercise of mission. Love and communion presupposes otherness: otherness of persons, cultures, religions, contexts. If so the mission practice of love cannot be the same everywhere. In some contexts it may imply giving rise to new communities, while in other contexts it may demand a new evangelization, yet in others dialogue between the followers of different religions and cultures, or to make life more humane for those who go through the painful experience of dehumanization. Through all these the Christian community tries to follow the path (halakha) laid down by Jesus, the path of the reign of God. It is proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the words of Pope Francis: “The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for mankind, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might” (EG 188). The church’s call is “to be God’s leaven in the midst of humanity” (EG 114), and in this all Christians participate, as “missionary disciples” (EG 120), with an inclusive attitude that is manifested in the genealogy of Jesus already.

The preceding chapters in this volume have focused on the concrete and contextual expressions of this missionary discipleship of serving humankind by manifesting the love of God made present in Jesus Christ, for the contemporary world.

**Conclusion**

Vatican II was a watershed event for mission, when it described the church as missionary by its very nature, as the continuation and expression of the divine love, divine reaching out. In a post-colonial and postmodern world this sense of reaching out in the spirit of love and service has to assume priority over being sent out. Biblically speaking, revelation and renewal began with creation and renewal is God’s con-

54 Ibid., 79.
stant concern for creation, without any disruption or discontinuity. However, there was always the role of the few for the many, that cli-
maxed in God’s Messiah, Jesus, with his message of the divine reign, “the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:19). The community of his disci-
ples continues that mission through its self-transcendence of reaching out to the neighbor in love and service. The manner in which Jesus re-
sponded to the disciples of John the Baptist, about Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, by referring to what was happening, rather than through a direct affirmation that he was the Messiah (Lk 7:22), suggests also that wherever that activity is continued, the Messiah is made present. That is the call of every Christian: “By manifesting the power of the Father’s infinite mercy” (EG 24), to become God’s presence, Emmanuel (Mt 1:23) and thus to sacramentalize the love of God made present in Jesus Christ.