Landas 30:1 (2016) 97–102

THEOLOGY WHOSE HEART IS MISSION*

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Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, invites us to share his dream. He dreams, he says, of a "missionary option,"[1] that is, a Church that moves from the "conservation mode" to the "missionary mode." "Mere administration," he says, "can [no] longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be permanently in a state of mission."[2] "We need to move 'from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry.'" "Missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity."[3]

1. Theology as *Fides Quaerens Linguam*

To think about mission is to think about the global Church. In this context, it is said that one of the major transformations of global

*Delivered on May 11, 2016, at the Commencement Ceremonies of the Loyola School of Theology (Quezon City, Philippines).

[1]Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 27.

[2]Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 25.

[3]Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 15.

Catholicism in recent years is the so-called "demographic change" or "population shift" from the north to the south of the world. At the turn of the millennium, the "center of gravity" of the Catholic Church has shifted from the "global North" (that is, Europe and North America) to the "global South" (that is, Latin America, Africa, and Asia). While in 1900 just 15 percent of the Catholic population lived in the southern hemisphere, by 2000 that figure stood at 67 percent, or two-thirds of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics. By mid-century, the southern share of the Catholic population is projected to be 75 percent. In other words, by 2050, three out of every four Catholics will be living in the global South.

Part of what this means is that the direction and orientation of the Catholic Church will, or should, increasingly be set by bishops, theologians, missionaries, and lay leaders from the global South. But for this to take place, I believe the shift in numbers needs to be accompanied by a corresponding commitment to serious theological research and reflection. For what good is it if we have more Catholics in the South but the Christian faith is not lived more meaningfully and more consequentially?

It is therefore extremely important that in the global South there be reliable institutes of research and reflection and world-class centers of study and teaching in theology and missiology. Just as, in the last millennium, centers of theological reflection emerged in the global North (Louvain, Paris, Milan), so also in this present millennium do similar centers of theological reflection need to be developed in the global South (Manila? Jakarta? Bangalore?).

LST, the Loyola School of Theology, should see itself as one such institute and center in the global South. As such, LST must be both rooted in the classical tradition of theology and responsive to the missionary exigencies of the concrete context. In this sense, theology at LST must be both *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) and *fides quaerens linguam* (faith seeking expression). Among the many nuances of theology as *fides quaerens linguam*, the following three seem to be important:

1) First of all, *fides quaerens linguam* stresses the missionary dimension of theology. It underlines the fact that faith in Jesus Christ is not, in the first place, a body of truths that we need to understand, but an experience of the Good News that we need to proclaim to others. This is faith seeking to be proclaimed—a *fides quaerens proclamationem*. Naturally, proclamation presupposes understanding, for we cannot properly proclaim what we do not understand. But it can also be said that we come to understand the faith better, and more fully, in our very act of sharing it with others.

2) Secondly, *fides quaerens linguam* underlines the need for theology to be inculturated in the language and culture of a people. Today, we no longer speak simply of the possibility but, indeed, of the necessity of inculturation. As Pope John Paul II once put it, "a faith that does not become culture is a faith which is not fully accepted, not wholly believed, and not faithfully lived."[4] So, this is faith seeking to be expressed in the culture of a people—a *fides quaerens inculturationem*. Here, too, true inculturation requires an authentic understanding of the faith, just as a profound understanding of the faith can only be the fruit of genuine inculturation.

3) And thirdly, *fides quaerens linguam* signals the plurality of contexts in which theology needs to be done today, for, by saying *fides quaerens linguam*, one immediately adverts to the fact that in times past it used to be *fides quaerens intellectum*, or that in other places today, it may be *fides quaerens justitiam* (as in Latin America) or *fides quaerens pacem* (as in Africa) or *fides quaerens vitam* (as in Asia). This, then, is faith seeking to dialogue with other local Churches, other Christian communities, and other religions—a *fides quaerens conversationem*. Also, here, a genuinely fruitful dialogue necessitates a true understanding of the faith, while an enriched understanding of the faith results from respectful dialogue with others.

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[4]John Paul II, *Address to the Italian National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment* 2 (Jan. 16, 1982); John Paul II, "Letter Instituting the Pontifical Council for Culture" (May 20, 1982), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* LXXIV (1982): 683–688.

About a millennium ago, as the eleventh century gave way to the twelfth, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) defined theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*. Today, when the second millennium has given way to the third, and as we celebrate the fiftieth year of the Loyola School of Theology, may it be said that LST is giving a new shape to theology. One description of it is *fides quaerens linguam*. But it could go by other names. What is important is that, true to the specific vocation of the Church in the Philippines, it is a theology whose heart is mission.

2. Mission Theology from Asia

A mission theology that originates from Asia is, of course, still to be fully elaborated. But some of its features can already be discerned. And these features are based on the assumption that, despite the increase of the Catholic population in Asia, Christianity will, in all likelihood, remain a minority religion in the continent. And it is as a minority that the Church will have to carry out the mission entrusted to it by the Lord. Thus, the mission carried out by the Church as a "little flock" in Asia will probably have to be characterized by the following features:

1) First, *powerlessness*. Much of Asia, as we know, is characterized by the historical experience of colonization, a socio-economic condition of poverty, and a religious situation where Christianity is a minority. So, mission in Asia cannot be, or ought not to be, carried out from a position of power or superiority. Rather, evangelization in Asia must be mission from a position of powerlessness and humility. In Asia, the missionary must not preach the Gospel from a position where he or she looks down on the people. Rather, he or she must pass over to the people and be genuinely one with them in their condition of oppression and poverty, discrimination and loss of identity, suffering and sin. He or she will not stand over against the people from a position of superiority, but stand by them in genuine solidarity.

The missionary in Asia and the Asian missionary will not seek power—economic, political, cultural, technological, or even media power. The only power he or she will need is the power of the Word and of the Spirit. And that power is the power of love, which is

manifested in self-giving. The ultimate reason for humility in mission is that mission is God's and not ours. Put differently, the Kingdom of God is an eschatological reality. And, even if we are called and sent to work for it, we do not know how, when, and in what form God's Kingdom will emerge in the world.

2) Second, *contemplation*. Another distinctive characteristic of Asia is its religiosity and contemplative spirit, and the priority given to being over doing. And so, mission in Asia will not be, or ought not to be, evangelization in terms of doing things for the people but in terms of being with the people and enabling them to do things themselves. The missionary's mission method will be marked not so much by frenetic activity as by contemplative presence among God's people. He or she will not be tempted to explain away the mystery of God by words and discursive language, but will try to lead people into the very mystery of God through signs and symbols in respectful dialogue. He or she will give priority to being missionary over doing missionary things.

The origin of mission is the Triune God. Our participation in mission is, therefore, an encounter with mystery—the mystery of the Triune God who calls all of humanity to share in his life and glory, the mystery of God's salvific plan for the world, the mystery of the presence and action of Christ and the Spirit in the world. Thus, the very first challenge in mission is to seek out, discern, and strengthen the presence of Christ and the action of the Spirit in the world. But it will be impossible to discern if we do not approach mission in contemplation. For to contemplate is precisely to look, to listen, to learn, to discern, to respond.

3) Third, *stewardship*. Once I was talking with an African colleague who decried the fact that missionaries in the past preached the Gospel as if they owned the faith. In this context, still another characteristic of Asia is that the Christian faith has come to it as something imported or even imposed from outside. And despite the enormous efforts at inculturation, the Christian faith in much of Asia has not really become its own as yet. Thus, the missionary in Asia will not, or ought not to, share the faith as if he or she owned it, dictating thereby the terms by which it must be understood, lived, and celebrated. His or

her approach to mission will be to share the faith as a gift received from God through others, conscious of himself or herself as merely its steward or servant and never its owner or master.

Mission is entering into the Triune God's ongoing dialogue with peoples. But in doing so, the missionary should be careful not to interpose himself or herself as an intermediary in this ongoing dialogue but should rather seek to promote and facilitate it. He or she should guard against imposing his or her own agenda but should rather discover God's agenda in this ongoing dialogue. The missionary, therefore, will respect the freedom of God who is present and active among the people, and respect as well the freedom of the people who are responding in their own unique way.

3. Conclusion

And so, powerlessness, contemplation, stewardship—these, I believe, are the features that should characterize mission in Asia or the Asian missionary in other places. But these, too, I believe, are characteristics which need to accompany the mission of announcing God's mercy. Mercy, I believe, is best witnessed to in mission characterized by powerlessness, contemplation, and stewardship.

As *Misericordiae Vultus*, the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, puts it:

> The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel …. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception …. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.[5]

Once again, my sincere congratulations to the graduates of 2016. May God bless you all. Thank you.

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[5]Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* (2015), 12.