

**CHURCH TEACHING ON MISSION:
Ad Gentes, Evangelii Nuntiandi, Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation
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Introduction

This paper will summarize the church's official teaching in the Roman Magisterium on the theology and conduct of its evangelizing mission. Rather than summarize each *document*, however, which would be quite tedious and repetitious, I will rather present the several aspects of each document that present new aspects to the Magisterium's teaching on mission. The original request for this paper suggested that I look only at *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) and *Redemptoris Missio* (RM). It seems to me, however, that a more rounded picture of contemporary church teaching on mission needs to start with Vatican II's Decree on Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes* and needs also to include the document issued shortly after RM by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP). This last document, issued in 1991, is now eighteen years old. Since then two other documents have been issued by the Roman Magisterium that are important for the church's mission—*Dominus Iesus* in 2000 and *Doctrinal Notes on Some Aspects of Evangelization* in 2007, both issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These, however, are more cautionary in tone and do not present any new or constructive teaching as such. I will refer to them towards the end of the paper, but only briefly.

It might be helpful to read or refer to the major documents I am reflecting on here. They are all available in Latin, English, Spanish, German and Italian on the Vatican Website (vatican.va). I will be referring to the English text on that website, with slight modifications to make the language more inclusive.

Ad Gentes (1965)

Ad Gentes, Vatican II's Decree on Missionary Activity is a document that almost didn't get written. Before the Council began the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith under the leadership of Cardinal Gregorio Agagianian was given the task to draft a document on the church's mission, but the result was more a summary and some revision of Canon Law as it applied to the missions rather than a theological reflection on the basis and conduct of mission. This first draft never got to the Council floor. It was a casualty of the virtual revolt of many bishops at the council against, in the famous words of Bishop Emil de Smedt of Bruges, Belgium, the "hierarchical, clerical and juridical" tone of the drafts that had been presented at the first session. A second draft was made, but it too was sidelined because of a ruling that called for many of the schemata to be reduced to a number of propositions. When the fifteen or so propositions were presented on the Council floor, however, they were virtually shouted down by the bishops, who called for a "full schema" that was theologically grounded. Under the leadership of SVD Superior General Johannes Schütte and with the main authorship of theologians of the caliber of Yves Congar, Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner, a draft of the present document was presented at the last session and, after a number of last minute

revisions, was unanimously approved by the Council Fathers on the last day of the Council.¹

Ad Gentes, if not the “magna charta” of mission as it was described by Fr. Schütte, is nevertheless a remarkable document. I will focus here on only a few of its many important teachings, but these few are where the document has contributed most to the Magisterium’s teaching on mission in the last half century.

The Church Rooted in the *Missio Dei*

The first aspect of *Ad Gentes*’ teaching that I would like to highlight is in paragraph 2. Here the text speaks of the ultimate foundation for the church’s missionary activity: its participation in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such participation through Baptism in the very life of the Trinity, therefore, makes the church “missionary by its very nature.” Here is this most important text in full: “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.”

This is a radical statement on several accounts. First, it emphasizes the fact that mission is not just *one* thing the church does. It is rather constitutive of its very being. To be a Christian, in other words, is to be caught up in the very life of God, which is a life of reaching out and saving presence in the world. The entire church is missionary. Mission is not just something that specialists—missionaries—do. It is something that all Christians are called to. This theology, ultimately written by Congar and quite strongly fought over by the drafting commission, moves mission away from something just directed by the Roman Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, and places it squarely in the daily life of the church as such, and so the responsibility of every local bishop (something the Decree emphasized again and again). In his important commentary in the *Unam Sanctam* series Congar points to the Catholic roots of this theological foundation in the scholastics and the seventeenth century French School of Spirituality. He also acknowledges the influence of contemporary Protestant thinking on mission as participation in God’s mission, the *Missio Dei*.² Mission, ultimately, is not something done because of a command, even the “great commission” of Mt 28:19-20. Mission is, in its deepest identity, a privilege and a grace. The Decree is not always consistent on this, but it is the logical conclusion from the church’s essential missionary identity.

A second rather radical implication of AG 2 follows from the first. This is that mission has now been defined not as a *territorial* concept, but as a basic attitude of the church wherever it is. Crossing boundaries, moving beyond itself is at the center of the church’s identity. While pastoral care is certainly central as well to the church’s life, it must not eclipse the church’s reaching out, making a difference in the world around it. Mission, then, is not about going places, but serving people—down the street or across oceans, in other cultures or one’s own. While, again, the document is not totally consistent in this regard, and gradually speaks more of

¹For a more detailed account of *Ad Gentes*’ remarkable history, see Part I, Section I of Stephen Bevans, SVD and Jeffrey Gros, FSC, *Evangelization and Human Freedom: Ad Gentes and Dignitatis Humanae* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009).

²Yves Congar, “Principes doctrinaux,” in Johannes Schütte, ed., *Vatican II: L’activité Missionnaire de L’Église*. *Unam Sanctam* 67 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 186.

“younger churches” or “mission churches” implying that “missions” are in “mission countries,” the seeds had been sown. This tension in the document represents the great tension in the drafting committee. Yves Congar wrote in his journal about the opposition of the “missiologists” (experts in mission law) to the “theologians.”³

Towards Inculturation

Ad Gentes does not use the word “inculturation.” This is a word that only begins to appear regularly in theological and missiological literature in the 1970s, and is only first used in a Roman magisterial document in John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendi* in 1979. Nevertheless, the document contains passages which certainly anticipate the discussion on inculturation in the next decade. Perhaps the most powerful expression of the need to appreciate culture and employ it in evangelization appears in paragraph 11:

In order that they may be able to bear more fruitful witness to Christ, let them be joined to those peoples by esteem and love; let them acknowledge themselves to be members of the group of people among whom they live; let them share in cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows. At the same time, however, let them look to the: profound changes which are taking place among nations, and let them exert themselves to keep modern persons, intent as they are on the science and technology of today’s world from becoming a stranger to things divine; rather, let them awaken in them a yearning for that truth and charity which God has revealed. Even as Christ Himself searched the hearts of women and men, and led them to divine light, so also His disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should show the people among whom they live, and should converse with them, that they themselves may learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth. But at the same time, let them try to furbish these treasures, set them free, and bring them under the dominion of God their Savior.

This is truly a remarkable passage, and one that has hardly been improved upon in teachings on inculturation in subsequent documents. The “they” at the beginning of the

³Yves Congar, *Mon Journal du Concile* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2002), March 24, 1965 (Volume II, 348).

passage refers to either people indigenous to a particular place or to missionaries sent to witness to the gospel. Christians are called to be real participants in the cultural and political life of the nations in which they live, and are called to be people of “sincere and patient dialogue” in order to discover the treasures that God has so generously lavished on the world’s cultures. But, as papal documents had pointed out even before this one, Christians are to integrate such treasures into Christian expression with a critical sense. Still, the document is completely positive, calling for cultures to be “furbished” by setting them free to be fully what they are—which will happen as they come under the rule of Christ and of God.

A similar passage anticipating inculturation appears in paragraph 22. The passage is too long to quote, but I will try to summarize it here, with ample quotations from the text. Once again, it is a remarkable teaching, particularly in the light of the disparagement of culture that so often (but not always) took place in the exercise of Christian mission. As late as 1960, a response to a paper that tried to propose the development of an “African Theology” was responded to by a paper by a Belgian missionary entitled “First, A Real Theology” (meaning, of course, a European theology!).⁴

The passage appears in the context of Chapter III of the Decree, entitled “Particular Churches.” This chapter contains another breakthrough teaching of AG, which is that no matter how “young” or fragile a church is, it is still a *church* in the proper sense, and must be treated as such. Specifically, the passage deals with the importance of developing a philosophy and especially a theology in each particular church which, though connected with the wider Christian tradition, nevertheless is a product of a borrowing “from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be.” By submitting God’s revelation to a “new scrutiny,” a new understanding of Christianity can be developed, relevant for that culture or context. “Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith may seek for understanding, with due regard for the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples; it will be seen in what ways their customs, views on life, and social order, can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation.”

If this is done carefully, the passage continues, there will be no danger of “selling out” the gospel or falling into a “false particularism.” Rather, there will be a new richness added to the unity of the church throughout the world.

Missionary Qualities

Chapter IV, entitled simply “Missionaries,” is hailed by many commentators as the best chapter in the entire Decree.⁵ The chapter is clear that being a missionary is a vocation, a particular calling from God to people who have “a suitable natural temperament,” and are “fit as regards talent and other qualities.” As suitable as these women and men are, however, the chapter lays out the kind of training and formation that missionaries need. The list of qualities

⁴The story is related in Benezet Bujo, *Christianity in Its Social Setting* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, —), —.

⁵See for example the commentary of William R. Burrows in Timothy E. O’Connell, *Vatican II and Its Documents: An American Reappraisal* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1986) 180-196.

and skills in which they are to be trained is a long one. They are to be people of perseverance, generosity and courage—even willing to lay down their lives for the faith if necessary. They should be adaptable, prayerful, and have a knowledge of the history of the peoples to whom they are sent as well as an understanding of current issues in those particular situations. Every effort should be made to learn the local language or languages. They should be trained both in theology and missiology. Significantly, the training they receive should be given in the lands where they will work, and such training is recommended not only for foreign missionaries, but for indigenous members of particular countries and cultures who will work there as well. Simply because one is a native of a particular context, in other words, does not insure that one already has the skills to work effectively in that context.

All of this, of course, is very ideal. It may even paint an overly romantic picture of the missionary life. It does, however, provide a standard to which missionary congregations and agencies should try to measure up. Certainly in the past there have been horror stories of women and men who have been placed in cross-cultural situations with no training whatsoever, not even in language. Such situations were certainly more common in the days before the Council, and it is particularly to these that the Decree addresses. From my own experience and knowledge, much more can always be done, especially in the area of language study and ministerial supervision in the first months and years of a person's ministry.

Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975)

As we will see in the paper that follows this one—on the history of the church's mission—Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* was written at a time when the very idea of mission was being seriously questioned. AG and Vatican II in general had opened up fresh perspectives on mission (in fact, I think it can be appreciated more today than in the troubled times in which it was written). But some of these fresh perspectives also raised profound questions. If, as the document on the church had taught, women and men could be saved outside the church and without any explicit faith in Christ (see *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 16), and if every church does mission in the context in which it exists, why should missionaries be sent abroad to convert people to Christ? If cultures are already good and holy, why should missionaries disturb them with western ideas and western religious forms? It was in this context that Paul VI convoked the 1974 Synod of Bishops with the theme "Evangelization in the Modern World." It was from the deliberations of the Synod and Paul VI's careful listening to the bishops of the Two Thirds World that Paul developed his ideas for his apostolic exhortation.⁶

Interestingly, perhaps as a reflection of the rather strong aversion for the word "mission" that had emerged in the churches and in theology ad (ironically!) *missiology*, the pope uses the word "evangelization." However, the meaning of the terms is the same, and I believe that they can be used interchangeably. As we will see below, the pope does widen the idea of mission to include aspects other than simply witnessing to the faith in word and deed,

⁶For a fuller explanation of the background of the apostolic exhortation, see Stephen Bevans, "Witnessing to the Gospel in Modern Australia," *The Australian E-Journal of Theology*, 6 (2006).

but he still understands such witness to be at the heart of the evangelizing process.

The Church's Mission Continues the Mission of Jesus

The first significant teaching of EN comes in the very first chapter. Like AG, the apostolic exhortation will emphasize the essential missionary nature of the church. Unlike the Council document, however, he does not begin with the grand doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, the pope begins with Jesus' mission of preaching and witnessing to the Reign of God. "As an evangelizer, Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the kingdom of God; and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes 'the rest,' which is 'given in addition.' Only the kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative" (EN 8). Jesus both *taught* about God's Reign in parables and words of wisdom, and *demonstrated* its reality by his works of healing and exorcism (EN 11-12), and those who accepted his message as good news formed "a community which is in its turn evangelizing" (EN 13). This is why "evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize . . ."

This section of EN is very rich and very dense—it is certainly my own favorite chapter in the document. Almost everything is worth quoting. Rather than that, however, let me highlight three things Paul VI insists on in talking about the fact that the church "is linked to evangelization in her very being (EN 15).

First, the pope insists that the church needs to be evangelized itself before it takes on the task of evangelization. It must constantly listen to the Word of God; it must constantly be on the road of conversion (Ibid.). This does not mean that the church must wait before it "gets its act together" before it moves out on mission. If this were the case it would never go! But it does mean, to use the great phrase of South African missiologist David J. Bosch, that its work of evangelization needs always to be carried out in a kind of "bold humility"⁷—bold in preaching the gospel, but humble in its realization that it too needs the repentance to which the gospel calls humanity.

Second, Paul VI insists on the strong link between Jesus' witness to the Reign of God and the church. There is real continuity between Jesus' mission and the mission of the church, "the normal, desired, most immediate and most visible fruit" (Ibid.) of Jesus' work. In a time when the watchword was often "Jesus yes, the church no," the pope insists on the fact that evangelization is an ecclesial task through and through. Evangelization is "not accomplished without her, and still less against her" (EN 16).

Third, the fact that the church is so essentially missionary means that *everyone* in the church is called to participate in the church's mission: "the work of each individual member is important for the whole" (EN 15). Like AG, EN does not want to reduce missionary work to only certain people in the church—members of missionary congregations or the hierarchy. This is a call especially to lay involvement in mission.

Evangelization a Multi-faceted Reality

⁷David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 489.

One of the most important teachings of the apostolic exhortation is the expansion of the church's understanding of mission to include a variety of activities other than direct proclamation of the gospel, working for conversion and planting the church. AG certainly hints at this richness in the meaning of mission, but EN moves a step farther. There had been a tendency in the past to reduce evangelization to direct proclamation of Christ to those who do not yet know him. However, says the pope, "any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it. It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization unless one tries to keep in view all its essential elements."

The pope then goes on to emphasize that while preaching Christ is important—indeed, there is no evangelization at all if this does not happen (EN 22)—there are several other "essential elements." First, there is the witness of a vibrant Christian community, without which the church can have no credibility. In a famous line, the pope quotes a speech he had recently delivered: today people listen "more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if [they do] listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (see EN 41). Second, the pope stresses the importance of the evangelization of cultures, "not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots" (EN 20).

Evangelization and Liberation

Evangelization includes a commitment to full human development and especially to social justice. Only four years before, the Synod of Bishops spoke about working for justice as a "constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel," and Paul VI includes this in his expanded vision of evangelization (see EN 29). But the pope—although somewhat cautiously—carries this further, in the light of contemporary discussions of justice, particularly in Latin America. In paragraph 29, the word "liberation" (in the sense of the "theology of liberation" is used for the first time in a Roman magisterial document: "evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development- a message especially energetic today about liberation" (Ibid.).

EN's teaching on liberation and evangelization is quite balanced, and there are two things in which it insists. First, evangelization is not to be *reduced* to political or economic well being. The spiritual dimension of the gospel is actually the source of humanity's deepest liberation. Second, violence is never to be sanctioned, because it knows that knows that "violence always provokes violence and irresistibly engenders new forms of oppression and enslavement which are often harder to bear than those from which they claimed to bring freedom" (EN 37).

One could say much more about this "magna carta" of mission documents, but these three points will suffice. EN's program is continued and expanded in the document that commemorates AG's twenty-fifth anniversary and its own fifteenth: John Paul II's massive 1990

encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*.

***Redemptoris Missio* (1990)**

Although it was not officially published until January, 1991, Pope John Paul's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* is dated December 7, 1990, on the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of AG and the fifteenth anniversary of EN. The encyclical returns to the use of "mission," although he use "evangelization" interchangeably with it, and speaks of it in a very broad and multifaceted way. *Redemptoris Missio* is the closest the Roman Magisterium has ever gotten to articulating a comprehensive and systematic reflection on mission, and while it may not be quite as inspiring as EN it represents a major step forward in the church's official teaching on what has come to be called its "evangelizing mission." A summary of the entire document would far exceed our purposes here, and so we will focus on three important aspects of RM's teaching: its Christocentric focus, its expansion of the understanding of mission, and its inclusion of interreligious dialogue as constitutive of the church's mission.

Christocentric Focus

At a press conference given soon after the publication of the encyclical, Josef Cardinal Tomko, then the Prefect of the Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples, explained that one of the chief reasons for the pope's writing RM was to correct a Christology being developed by some theologians that tended to obscure Christian belief that Jesus was indeed the unique and universal savior of humanity.⁸ Although he didn't mention names, it is pretty clear that he had in mind a number of Indian and other Asian theologians, and probably also the U. S. American theologian Paul Knitter.

While the pope holds fast to the church's traditional teaching, clearly articulated at Vatican II, that people have the possibility to be saved outside of explicit faith in Christ (see RM 10), his position also reflects the Council's teaching that, nevertheless, all grace comes through Christ, and Christ alone. "No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ's one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey toward God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his" (RM 5).

The pope's insistence on the centrality of Christ runs through every section of RM, and is definitely the major theological theme of the encyclical. The first chapter deals with this teaching directly, emphasizing the fact that explicit faith in Christ is what gives women and men the fullness of life. All people have a right to the truth and life that the gospel offers, although the gospel is always addressed to human beings in their freedom, never imposed upon them (RM 7-8). Chapter II reflects on the centrality of the Reign of God in Jesus ministry, and says clearly that the church is not an end in itself—perhaps the clearest statement of this fact in a

⁸Josef Cardinal Tomko, "Proclaiming Christ the World's Only Savior," *L'Osservatore Romano* (April 15, 1991): 4.

magisterial document up to this time (see RM 18), but that does not mean that the Reign of God is separate from Jesus or the church. In fact, the pope insists, the Reign of God is not a concept, a doctrine or a program; it is a *person*, the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Ibid.). Chapter III is on the Holy Spirit, and again, while the Spirit is understood as the “principal agent of evangelization” (see the title of the chapter), the pope insists that the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, and not some vague, general form of God’s presence (see RM 29). Each of these three chapters oppose any generalizing or watering down of the specificity of Christ: mission is about proclaiming the person and work of Christ, not helping people recognize God’s mysterious presence as Logos, or in “Kingdom values,” or in the pervasive presence of the Spirit.

“*Why mission?*” the pope asks. “Because to us, as to St. Paul, ‘this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ’ (Eph 3:8). . . .” (RM 11).

Expanding the Idea of Mission

There are two ways in which John Paul expands the notion of mission in the encyclical. The first way is to distinguish three “situations” of the church’s missionary activity. The second is to speak of mission as a “single but complex reality,” composed of several elements.

The first “situation” of the church’s missionary activity is mission *ad gentes*, or the direct witnessing and proclamation of Christ in situations where he is not known, or where the church is not strong enough to proclaim the gospel in a fully inculturated way (RM 33). This is mission, the pope says, in the proper sense of the word. However, the pope also speaks about pastoral work among the established churches and what he had been calling the “new evangelization” in churches “where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel” (Ibid.). These latter are churches where the gospel has been established for a long time—like the churches of Europe or North and South America—or even churches who have only recently received the gospel—churches, for example, in urban areas of Africa or Asia.

Even though mission *ad gentes* does retain its validity as mission in the proper sense, the pope expands the notion to include particular areas like the rapidly growing urban areas of the world, particularly those in Asia, Africa and Latin America. He also points to the world’s youth, which in many countries make up half the population, and to large numbers of the world’s migrants and the conditions of poverty which often makes migration necessary (RM 37). Referring to Paul’s speech on Athens’s Areopagus, where Paul dared to present the gospel in terms that Greeks would understand, the pope also speaks about the world’s new Areopagi which call for a creative way of presenting the gospel. He singles out areas like the world of communications, the need to develop the rights of women and children, the culture of science, the situations that need liberation from any and all oppression, ecological responsibility, and the need for peacemaking (Ibid.). This is clearly an expansion of mission *ad gentes* far beyond how even the pope defined it earlier in the encyclical.

The encyclical expands the idea of mission even further, or perhaps to align it with the expanded areas mentioned in paragraph 37. Although John Paul does not quite a good summary of a wider sense of mission that appears in a 1984 document entitled “Dialogue and

Mission” (the document speaks of five aspects or elements of mission),⁹ he does acknowledge that mission is indeed a multifaceted reality. In Chapter V, the pope writes about mission as witness, as explicit proclamation of the name of Christ and of the gospel, as the task of forming new communities, as inculturation, interreligious dialogue, working for development, and as works of charity.

In sum, one gets the distinct impression that mission is understood in the encyclical in a way that embraces the entire life of the church. It confirms AG’s contention that the church is indeed “missionary by its very nature,” or EN’s statement that evangelization is the church’s “deepest identity.”

Interreligious Dialogue

We have already mentioned that interreligious dialogue is included in the encyclical as part of its expanded understanding of mission. It will be important, however, to single this aspect out, both because it is something that is relatively new in the church’s teaching on mission because in later years the idea of interreligious dialogue might seem to be called into question.

EN does not really deal with the question of interreligious dialogue. It does speak of the respect that Christians have for other religions, but it does not seem to understand dialogue as part of the evangelization process itself (see EN 53). Nine years later, in 1984, the Pontifical Council for Dialogue did issue an important statement entitled “Mission and Dialogue” in which dialogue was seen as integral to the church’s evangelization efforts. This is the first time, however, that the activity of interreligious dialogue appears as part of mission in a papal encyclical. “Inter-religious dialogue,” the pope writes, “is part of the church’s evangelizing mission” (RM 55).

The pope insists that dialogue with other faiths is perfectly consistent with the church’s obligation to proclaim Christ as universal savior to all peoples. While the aim of dialogue is to discover in other religions that ray of truth that enlightens all peoples (see NA 2), each dialogue partner needs to be a person of full conviction in her or his faith. Even though Christians are called to dialogue, they must always keep in mind the uniqueness of Christ and that “the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, the pope says, dialogue is not some kind of tactic for eventual conversion (RM 56). It is born out of respect for the other religions, and is done out of a sincere desire to get to know and to learn from other religious ways. Even when dialogue is difficult—say, in some Muslim areas—Christians should be open to it, despite its difficulties and despite its risks (RM 57). Dialogue, finally, is not something just for experts or official religious leaders. The pope notes that dialogue is the task of every Christian, and he especially encourages the laity to engage in it (Ibid.).

⁹Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions, *The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (DM), AAS 75 (1984, 816-828; see also *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis* 56 (1984/2), No. 13. The five elements are presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and proclamation and catechesis.

Like EN, one could say much more about this virtual *summa* of mission and missiology. However, given the constraints of this paper, the three areas highlighted certainly provide an adequate overview of what the encyclical teaches.

Dialogue and Proclamation

Reference has already been made to the Secretariat for Non-Christians' 1984 document on dialogue and mission. A few months after the publication of RM, a follow up document to the one issued in 1984 was published by the Pontifical Council for Dialogue (the name of the Secretariat since 1988) and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The document's title, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP), points to the issue which it addresses: the relationship between direct proclamation of the gospel and the imperative, as an integral part of the church's mission, of interreligious dialogue. As Pope John Paul II indicated in RM, there is a mutual relationship between the two aspects of mission, but that relationship had been in danger of being reduced to one or the other in the years immediately preceding RM's publication. Mission, he insisted over and over again in his encyclical, cannot be reduced to dialogue, as if all religions are of equal value. But he also subtly argued that dialogue is not something we can dispense with when we preach the riches of Christ. DP tries to address the vital connection between the two in greater detail.

The document is developed in three parts. There is a first section reflection on dialogue, then a second on proclamation, and finally a third on the relationship between them. The point is made, however, that, if dialogue is treated first, this does not mean that it has priority over proclamation in the document. It is treated first only because the document was first initiated by the Pontifical Council for Dialogue (DP 3). The two, rather, need to be dynamically related to one another, and always exist in tension. The root of this is in God's life and saving activity itself: God offers and works for salvation in the world, and yet God works in dialogue, never forcing, but always persuading (see DP 38).

DP presents a rather extensive theology of religions in the first part of the document. It also lays out nicely the various *forms* that interreligious dialogue can take: the dialogue of life where people simply live together and appreciate each other on a human level; the dialogue of action where members of different religions unite around some particular cause for the betterment of humanity; the dialogue of theological exchange where, especially, experts and church leaders share perspectives and study one another's traditions; and the dialogue of religious experience in which members share the richness of one another's spiritual traditions and personal spirituality and perhaps—as in Assisi in 1986 and 2002—pray in one another's presence (see DP 42). Another interesting reflection about dialogue is the naming of a number of factors that impede dialogue, among which are insufficient grounding in one's own faith, a wrong understanding of notions like conversion, and the political climate in which one lives (see DP 52). Nevertheless, as the document says, "despite the difficulties, the Church's commitment to dialogue remains firm and irreversible" (DP 54).

Focusing on the act of proclamation, DP emphasizes the fact that any proclamation of the gospel is not done in a void. Rather, the Holy Spirit has gone before the one who proclaims.

In fact, people “ may have already been touched by the Spirit and in some way associated unknowingly to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ (cf. GS 22)” (DP 68). Because of this, Christians need to learn how to present the gospel in ways that truly communicate it, illumine people’s experience, and challenge them to respond. They should model themselves on Jesus (see DP 69). Any announcement of the gospel should be confident, and yet respectful and humble, dialogical and inculturated (DP 70). In the same way that it presented obstacles to dialogue, the documents cites certain obstacles to a worthy gospel proclamation. There may be a gap between what one says and what one truly believes and lives out in one’s life; Christians may lack respect for the religious traditions among which they proclaim the gospel; or there might exist “external difficulties,” such as strong historical prejudices of a particular people against Christianity (see DP 73-74).

Paragraph 77 sums up well the close connection between two activities that the third section of the document seeks to explain. For our purposes it is enough to cite the paragraph as a whole:

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue. The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local Church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both.

Conclusion: From DP to the Present

This paper has presented a survey of the main teachings on mission that the church has presented in official Roman documents in the last half century. What has been the main missiological concern of the Roman Magisterium in the two decades since the publication of DP has been the question of interreligious dialogue in relation to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as universal savior. On two occasions, in 2000 with the declaration *Dominus Iesus* and in 2007 with a document entitled “Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization,” the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith emphasized the centrality of Jesus in terms that, at least for some, seemed to neglect the equal centrality of the doctrines of grace outside Christian boundaries and the practice of interreligious dialogue (although, to be fair, these were acknowledged in both documents). Sanctions leveled against prominent theologians like Jacques Dupuis (a principal author of DP) and Roger Haight, and investigations of equally prominent theologians Peter Phan and Michael Amaladoss have only underlined the fact that Rome is nervous about the correct interpretation of its own teachings.

Theologians and missiologists have suggested that the Christological issue underlying the publication of these documents and the initiation of these investigations is the most crucial theological issue of our day. Others point to issues of inculturation as the most significant

theological discussion in contemporary theology, one that is the foundation for these other Christological questions. Still others argue that much more urgent are issues of justice, peacemaking and the care of creation. Whatever one may think, one cannot but be struck by the fact that these are *all* missiological issues, and that church teaching has dealt—at least in some sense—with every one of them in the last five decades. And whatever one may think, one cannot deny that mission is at the center of theological thought and Christian life today.

Discussion questions

Drawing upon church documents, Professor Bevans has presented a developing understanding of Mission.

- *Ad Gentes*: Church is “**missionary by its very nature.**” This is not a territorial concept but a basic attitude of crossing boundaries and moving beyond itself.
- *Evangelii nuntiandi*: Mission (evangelization) is our “**deepest identity.**” The Church must first be evangelized itself so that it can continue Jesus’ mission- and all in the Church are to participate.
- *Redemptoris Missio*: Mission “**embraces the entire life of the Church.**” Christ must be central to our proclamation and witness as we engage in interreligious dialogue.

As you think of the Church in your country, where has it embraced these ideas and how is it challenged by these ideas? Is the Church you know a mission, or does it have a mission?

How does this challenge you personally?