Mission Ad Gentes. Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
Reflections from Robert Schreiter, CPPS, to the Maryknoll Missionaries

During the last years there has been quite a lot that has been written about Mission in general and about Mission ad Gentes, in particular. As I prepared for this plenary Council, I read the Acts of the Centenary Symposium of the Maryknoll Missionaries held in the US in 2011. I have completed the mission vision with other readings!

I found the Maryknoll experiences in the more than 40 countries in which they work interesting and as a member of the Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life, I felt very much at home with most of the convictions the different speakers shared with them. We can identify with a good part of them. That is why I would like to summarise and share some of the things that struck me in the conference of Robert Schreiter, CPPS: "The Future of Mission Ad Gentes in a Global Context".

Schreiter proceeds in three parts:

I. Larger history of the Mission in the Church;
II. Closer reading of ad Gentes Mission in the last 200 years, its successes and failures;
III. Some guesses about the future

I. Mission ad Gentes in the Larger History of the Church.
Schreiter lays out the claim that contrary to what many of us think, Mt 28,19-20 "Go out and make disciples of all nations" - has not been the driving passage for mission. There have been long periods of little or "no concerted and organized missionary activity" (p. 37). As evangelisation did occur in a vacuum but utilised the material infrastructure, it was difficult to function otherwise. Paul used the Roman empire infrastructure. Trade routes did help the missionaries a lot.

A stronger biblical motivation for mission seems to have been the injunction of Lk 14,23. In the parable of the wedding feast, the servants are sent out to bring the invited INTO the feast. A lot of evangelisation has always been to bring people to the Church, to save souls from hell, etc. Till the 15th century, missio designated the "sending" .... "of the Son and the Holy spirit by the Father into the world" (p. 38). From the 15th century "mission" was applied to the efforts of conversion. It was first among the Portuguese adventures that the groups sent out by the king were called missions - a term applied to military, trade, and religious groups alike. The Catholic Church's more coordinated and concerted efforts at 'going out to the nations' - mission ad gentes as have come to know it today (p. 39) comes from roughly 1450.

Globalization and the Rise of Mission ad Gentes
Schreiter associates the rise of mission ad Gentes with three waves prompted by globalisation. There is a qualitative leap at each phase.

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2 Page numbers refer to Schreiter’s article.
a. First wave. From the Portuguese and Spanish Explorations of the world onwards, then the British, the Dutch and the French and others. It is the time of the great mission outward from Europe of people like St Francis Xavier. They accompanied the explorers and traders and were mainly of the medicanat orders and the newly founded Jesuits. Mission was often at the command or request of the monarch. The popes granted privileges of patronage (padroado) over the new missions in Africa to the kings. 1622 saw the establishment of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide - now Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples) by Pope Urban VII.

The Missions Etrangères de Paris were founded at time (1663).

b. Second wave. Beginning of 19th century till the outbreak of the First World War 1914 - the Age of Mobilization" (p. 40). It is during this time that many Missionary Institutes were founded: Spiritans, Society of African Missions, Comboni Missionaries, Missionaries of Africa (1868); Maryknoll Missionaries (1911). It is the period of the anti trans-Atlantic slave trade campaign of Cardinal Lavigerie and finally its official abolition. It is also the time of dramatic changes in Europe: the French Revolution (and the Enlightenment), with the accompanying political instability and the rise of liberal democracies in place some great imperial powers like Germany, Austria and Russia. Then the First World War. Several challenges faced the Church (social, political and economic) and many new religious orders tried to respond to them. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith was founded in France in 1822 "to mobilize laity in support of foreign mission (p. 41). There were also advances in technologies of travel and communication with the invention of the steam engine at the beginning of the 19th century which made travel easier and less expensive.

Three decades later the telegraph and telephone compressed space dramatically for the first time, as communication that had taken months before could now be achieved in seconds (pp. 41-42). Catholic Societies mobilised young men and women for mission overseas! Many followed national mission societies lines - Divine Word Missionaries (German), Scheutist (Flemish), Maryknoll (America), etc., but opened up later on to other nations.

The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith issued the ius commissionis allocating mission territories to particular Missionary institutes. The primary responsibility for evangelization laid with the pope, represented by Propaganda Fide and the Missionary institutes were answerable to him and no more to the national monarchs. Among the impetus from the popes for Mission we can mention Benedict XV's apostolic letter Maximum Illud ("Spreading the Catholic faith" 1919) and Pius XI's encyclical letter Rerum Ecclesiae ("Fostering Missionary Zeal" 1926), Pius XII, Evangelii Praecones ("Development of the Missions" 1951), Pius XII, Fidei Donum ("Gift of Faith" 1957) and John XXIII, Princeps Pastorum ("Prince of the Shepherds" 1959).

In spite of this as Mission was often linked with the colonialisation, it began to be challenged (1940s - 1970s) especially as many African countries gained independence. Mission was more and more

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understood no more only in terms of saving souls but in planting the local churches through the formation of a local clergy and setting up structures (schools, hospitals, etc.).

The concept of mission also came into crisis as missionaries were sometimes seen as a colonial remnant of a past that threatened creating a different of future (p. 43). The question of mission ad gentes continued in the 1970s and eased off in the 1980s.

II. The Balance Sheet of the Mission Ad Gentes Societies in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Positive
1. The dramatic growth of Christianity in Africa (p. 44). Credit is due to the Missionaries. From 10 million in 1900, there are now over 350 million Christians in Africa today.
2. The widespread awareness of and commitment to mission that is now found throughout the Church (p. 44). This has been helped by the Declaration on the Missionary Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes [1965]) during Vatican II (1962-1965)\(^6\), the fruit of a new understanding of the Church as expressed in documents like Sacrosanctum Concilium, Dei Verbum, Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes\(^7\). The Trinitarian Source of Mission is acknowledged (missio Dei)\(^8\). The Church’s understanding of Mission goes beyond the professional missionaries. The promoters of the Mission are the local ordinaries and no more the Professional Missionary Institutes. The Abrogation of ius commendationis on 24/02/1969, had an effect on several Missionary Institutes, our Society included\(^9\)!
3. The universal call to holiness of all baptized Christians (p. 44) empowered the laity making them active participants in mission. Thus the importance of lay missionary branches in some Societies (Maryknoll, PIME, etc.). Proportionately South Korea has the highest percentage of lay missionaries.

Setbacks
Not (real) failures but sometimes they are the unintended consequences of some of the successes (p. 45) and some puzzles from the data (p. 45).

1. In 1900, Christians constituted 34 percent of the world's population. In the year 2000, after a century of intense evangelization, Christians constituted a little over 33 percent of the population. .... The fastest growing religion today is Islam (p. 45). There are a more than a billion Muslims. Theological questions arise about the centrality of Christ for salvation!
2. As a result of the grown awareness of the missionary nature of the Church, the role of lifelong foreign missioners has become blurred. It has become more and more difficult to make a case for

\(^6\) It was actually the last document of the Council, drafted in Nemi (SVD’s Ongoing Formation Centre and approved on 7th December 1965 by a vote of 2,394 in favour and 5 against! Apparently it was the document that obtained the highest number of “yes” votes in the Council (either the Council were very happy that it was finally finished or the text was really excellent - or both)!
\(^9\) Cf. the discussions on our “Identity” in the Chapters that followed the Council: 1967 Chapter: “At the service of the local Church”; 1974 Chapter: “What is this service?; 1980 Chapter: “Who are the Missionaries of Africa?
the singularity of the role of mission societies ad gentes. We have worked ourselves out of job (p. 46).

3. The so-called mission territories or mission churches now send out missionaries (p. 46). “Mission is multi-directional, with geographical boundaries almost rendered irrelevant in our times”. The sending-receiving model of mission is no more relevant\textsuperscript{10}. The question now is to whom are we sent? The complexity of mission is acknowledged\textsuperscript{11}. So the big question becomes: Were the mission societies founded specifically for foreign mission ... a form of mission that has outlived its usefulness, precisely because it has fulfilled its purpose? Or will mission societies morph into new or extended forms of mission that completely obscure or eliminate their founding idea of mission ad gentes? (p. 47).

III. Mission ad Gentes: The Road Ahead
c. Third wave of Globalisation (from 1990s to-day)

The development in air travel has facilitated travel for many people. Thus the migration wave. \textit{One out of every thirty-five persons on the planet is in migration. In terms of communication technologies, the personal computer, the Internet, and the spread of cellular telephony have changed the capacity for communication} (p. 48). There are digital natives (our aspirants, candidates and some young confrères, who are drinking at the "new wells\textsuperscript{12} where people "virtually" gather; there are digital migrants (most of us) and even digital illiterates (some of us)! This has its negative and positive consequences for how mission ad gentes is practised.

1. The \textbf{dramatic compression of space and time} raises the question of what does the \textit{field afar now mean}? (p. 48). Information about what is happening far off is instantly available and the journeys that used to take months, weeks or days are now done in a few hours! The effect is "\textit{Deterritorialization ... elements of culture now float around free of their original locations ... Territory and national culture are thus increasingly not boundary markers for mission and mission society-identity} (p. 48).

2. A \textbf{quantitative aspect of mission commitment has changed}. With the ideal of lifelong employment with a single firm or organization now a thing of the past in neoliberal economies, and with people in the wealthier segments of society living considerably longer than in the past, a commitment to something like lifelong mission ad gentes becomes more and more inconceivable (p. 49). Younsters hesitate to make a lifelong commitment for mission. \textit{The shrinking away of 'faraway' space has come a similar shrinking of 'lifelong' commitment} (p. 49). Shorter-term commitments are what some are looking for or at ease with. This affects the former ad gentes missionary imagination!

3. \textbf{Hybridization}. The compression of time and space, the coming loose of cultural markers from particular territories, and the movement of peoples create 'hybrid situations, wherein nothing remains in a 'pure form' (p. 49). We borrow and adapt, we cross boundaries that would not have been crossed in the past - either because there were too 'distant' or because they represented something completely unknown (p. 50).

\textit{In the case of mission ad gentes, who is this 'other' to whom we are now sent? They are no longer physically distant. They are also not so utterly 'other' from ourselves} (p. 50). Mission ad

\textsuperscript{10} Fifth International Conference and Assembly of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM) (Nairobi, 15-21 July 2013) p. 3.

\textsuperscript{11} John Paul II, \textit{Redemptoris Missio} (1990). I do not think it exact to see this encyclical as reinforcing only proclamation as the premier form of evangelisation, in the face of the growing practice of mission as dialogue, inculturation, and social justice (p. 46).

\textsuperscript{12} IACM, Nairobi 2013, p. 6. Expression from Cardinal Tagle of the Philippines.
gentes has to be imagined differently because of the blurring or the erasing of the boundaries of otherness!

Some Models for a Renewed Mission ad Gentes
Mission ad gentes societies of the 19th and 20th centuries were successful because they were the right forms at the right time - they engaged the historical moment. They were successful because they were able to catch the imagination of the young, who were ready to undertake heroic work and make great sacrifices, even possible death. They were successful because of the faith commitment and the hard and difficult work they required (p. 50). These elements of imagination, faith and hard work are still needed for mission work today! How do we evangelize under the changed circumstances? Some models can make us think and get the imagination going!

1. Mission ad Extra: mission outward from ourselves ... (p. 51) moving away from our familiar environment and culture to a new place to bring the Gospel. Struggling to learn a new language and culture changes and enriches us! By going out we participate in God's missio - reaching out to humanity. We contribute to making others experience the faith as "catholic". It requires that we go out with the right attitude of self-emptying and be ready to learn but not fall into the pit of exoticism where all that is 'out there' is good!

2. Mission ad Altera: mission to 'others' or 'other things' (p.51). Overcoming the territorial dimensions we 'seek out those who are 'other', or who are made 'other'. They will be the goal of mission. It does not require long-distance travel! It might be difficult to sustain in an ad gentes tradition if there is no sense of physical distance!

3. Mission in Altum: in the line of John Paul II's Duc in altum of Tertio Millennio Ineunete (2000). It would entail the Church taking risks in its missionary commitment to seek out the new possibilities (p. 52). Using the new aeropagoi (of Redemptoris Missio), the new social spaces where evangelization might take place. Where are those spaces where missio Dei is happening? We need some imagination. It will be difficult though to form a missionary society around an ever-changing site - be it 'in the deep' or in the 'new aeropagoi'? (p. 52).

4. Mission ad Vulnera: mission to the wounds, engaging with human suffering and brokenness. It would focus itself on locating the breaches and the wounds in the contemporary world (p. 52). Some of these are due to the effects of globalisation and the gaps that have been created between the rich and the poor! Commitments for Justice Peace and integrity of Creation, working for reconciliation in conflict zones, bring healing to the wounded! We recall the wounds of Christ even in his resurrected body. The missioner is less the hero or the martyr and perhaps more the bridge-builder, the one who can imagine a different kind of world where now division and suffering are found (p. 53).

IV An Opinion about R. Schreiter's Models
In response to Schreiter, Antoinette Gutzler, MM, rightly underlines that the Spirit of Jesus precedes us (Redemptoris Missio, n. 28) and consequently invites us to a kenosis. She also adds the model of

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13 Our Constitutions and Laws (2006), Article 6, speaks of the Incarnation of Christ as the model of our mission!
14 IACM, Nairobi 2013, p. 3.
15 Much like the earlier invitation of the 1998 & 2004 chapters to work in "fracture zones".
16 This is an area Schreiter has written extensively on!
mission *inter gentes* ("from among and with the people" - pp. 55-61)\(^{17}\) and how the experience is not one-sided but reciprocal. "We no longer think of doing something "to" Other. it must always be invitational, nonviolent, relational - with the Other"\(^{18}\). The MSOLA 2011 General Chapter added mission *cum gentibus* underlining collaboration and partnership, Inter-Faith Encounter and Dialogue, care for Mother Earth, fighting modern forms of slavery, etc.

What all these terms remind us of is that Mission is a complex reality and according to the context some elements will be highlighted more than others. Steven Bevans and Eleanor Diodge have offered a synthesis of the "six essential components of God’s mission in which the Church is called to share"\(^{19}\). They are *Constants* in God's Mission but the proportions will vary according to the *Context*!

1. **Witness and proclamation** (evangelism);
2. **Liturgy, prayer and contemplation**;
3. Commitment to **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation**;
4. The practice of **interreligious dialogue and Ecumenism**;
5. Efforts of **inculturation**;
6. The ministry of **reconciliation**.

Basically, Mission is about being a disciple of Jesus and his apostle who enters into a context with Good News, dialogues with the milieu, learns from it and is courageous enough, like the prophets, to announce a message that can challenge and call for conversion. Bevans and Schroeder call this "Prophetic Dialogue"\(^{20}\).

**Conclusion**

Addressing the Maryknoll, Schreiter concludes:

*Some of the conditions that have supported mission ad gentes in the past are no longer as evident as they once were. New conditions now impinge upon our work. What is needed is a willingness to examine honestly and faithfully where we now find ourselves and to seek out where God is calling us. It is an act of faith and an act of imagination. If these come together, our response to God’s call to mission will continue to enrich our world, a faithful, imaginative, and at times even prophetic response to the hope that lies within us* (p. 53).

That is what, I believe this Plenary Council should help us to do. We take on board the added element of being sons of Lavigerie and thus heirs of his charism. The times we have spent on care of the confrères shows that for us being brothers to each is also important. As we plan for the future, let it be according to how we feel that God is calling us to respond to the Spirit of his Son today wherever we are, in Africa, in Europe, in the Americas and in Asia.

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\(^{17}\) In the 5th International Conference and Assembly of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM) (Nairobi, 15-21 July 2013), they explored the Challenges and Opportunities of Missio Inter-Gentes!

\(^{18}\) IACM, Nairobi, p. 4.
