Christian Mission and Religious Pluralism

Foundations of Christian Faith

Edited by Damien Casey, Gerard Hall and Anne Hunt

Gerard Hall SM
Abstract: In order to appreciate the purpose and focus of Christian mission in today’s pluralistic world, it is helpful to understand diverse expressions of mission in Christian history. Key symbols of mission – apostles, witnesses, martyrs, converts, monks, crusaders, puritans, colonizers and evangelizes – are surveyed. Today’s focus on the relationship between mission and “reign of God” calls on the Church to engage with other cultures, struggle for human liberation, work for reconciliation and peace among peoples, and enter into dialogue with other faith-traditions.

Introduction

To be a Christian is to witness to the good news of salvation that has come to us through Jesus Christ. This sense of mission at the heart of the Gospel is attributed to Jesus' own words to the disciples following the Resurrection: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). In various ways, these words have inspired Christian approaches to mission for the past two thousand years.

Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Church: Apostles, Witnesses, Martyrs

The initial expansion of the Church throughout the Roman Empire was spear-headed by a certain Paul of Tarsus, a new convert to the Christian faith. Paul the Apostle, as he would become known, had been a zealous Pharisee who is reputed to have persecuted the small Jewish sect of Christians. Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus transformed his life and, it could be said, he in turn transformed the Christian movement. Paul's epic missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean world including Greece, Asia-Minor and Rome, where he was imprisoned and executed in 62 CE, are all told in the Book of Acts and in Paul's own letters to the various churches he, other apostles and co-workers founded.

Paul is specifically known as "the Apostle to the Gentiles". He and the early missionaries saw their task as spreading the "good news" of God's offer
of salvation to the large array of non-Jewish people who inhabited the Roman Empire. This unprecedented move was not welcomed by everyone. Could a follower of Jesus be a Gentile? What about circumcision and other Jewish laws? A Council was called in Jerusalem around 50 CE in which these matters were settled in favour of the broad interpretation. Non-Jewish converts were welcomed into the fledgling Christian movement. To be a Christian was to belong to this new community, the body of Christ and temple of the Spirit, in which there would be no division on gender, racial or ethnic lines: "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" since "all are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

Although the missionary strategy of the first Christians consisted in the establishment of small community churches, it is difficult to identify any uniform structure. To be a Christian was to be part of a movement rather than a follower of a new religion: Jewish Christians, for example, continued to see themselves as faithful Jews for whom Jesus was the Messiah. Christians were simply witnesses to the truth of Jesus' resurrection – and who waited in hope for his return. Meanwhile, Christian communities established basic structures of leadership under the guidance of presbyters and episcopoi (bishops), emphasized a variety of charisms and ministries, and continued to witness to the saving Lordship of Jesus Christ. In the early centuries, Christians often found themselves persecuted for their faith leading to an underground Church and the common experience of martyrs who gave the ultimate testimony with their lives.

Many of the early Christians, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were Greek-speaking. Greek soon became the major language of the liturgy and catechesis. The celebration of the Eucharist, in which Jesus' death and

---

1 The bishop of Rome, identified with Peter the Apostle and his successors, had a position of prominence in terms of Church leadership. This came to be identified as the "Petrine Office" which, in the course of history, has been diversely interpreted and disputed. For Catholics, this person is identified as the Pope; other Christian denominations may accept the primacy of the Roman See but disagree as to its precise role.
resurrection were re-enacted, became the centre-point of Christian life: to be a witnessing community was to be a community in worship. The influence of Greek thought is also linked to another missionary strategy, namely, the importance given to the intellectual articulation of Christian faith and its genuine inculturation in situations quite diverse from the world of Israel. With the delay in Jesus' return, Christians began to see the Church as the kingdom of God on earth without, however, denying the presence and power of God in other traditions. Christians celebrated their belief in Jesus who was not only Lord to them but saviour of all humanity and, indeed, creator and redeemer of the entire cosmos.

**Christianity after Constantine: Converts, Monks, Crusaders**

When Constantine, emperor of Rome, became Christian in 312 CE, the very understanding of what it was to be Christian changed profoundly. No longer were Christians the persecuted minority; they were now a significant social and political force. All kinds of pressure, subtle and otherwise, influenced entire populations to convert to what can now be properly called Christianity – an established religion in its own right. Certainly, this enabled Christians to celebrate their faith in Jesus in an open and optimistic fashion, without fear of persecution, for the first time.

The spread of Christianity in the period from Constantine in the fourth century to the Reformation in the fifteenth was nonetheless an uneven affair – as it will always be when Church and State are too closely aligned. Different kinds of missionary strategy are associated with this period. The first is the articulation of Christian faith in various creeds and the increasing imposition of Christian rules. The ideal, of course, was not the simple promotion of personal faith and individual spirituality; to be Christian is to be converted to an established Christendom – not just a religion, but an entire civilization epitomized in Medieval Europe.

There were those, nonetheless, who took their leave of worldly society and politics. The Christian monastery became the key Christianising agent; the
monk, symbol of Christian conversion. It was through the monasteries,\textsuperscript{2} centres of intellectual and cultural life as well as Christian faith, that European civilization was converted from diverse pagan practices and mystery cults to a relatively homogenous culture based on Christian values and principles. The success of monasticism, however, brought its own problems. The monasteries became centres of wealth and privilege at a time when the poverty of ordinary people was on the increase. This led to the establishment of new religious orders, known as mendicant friars,\textsuperscript{3} who renounced ownership of property, begged for their sustenance, and preached the Gospel by walking from town to town. These "wandering friars" shared life more closely with the ordinary people and were a significant agent of Church reform and a catalyst for more sensitive missionary strategies.

With the increasing spread of Islam into southern Europe, another face of Christendom emerged in the crusader. Church language sometimes promoted this form of Christianity: to be a Christian is to be a soldier for Christ; the Church is the Church militant; one's sacred duty is to conquer the whole world for Christ. For those who espoused this approach, Christianity is seen not only as the best religion, but as the only true religion: all other religions, including Islam and Judaism, are denounced as pagan, false. Lest we think that Christian intolerance was a universal phenomenon in this time, significant exceptions are to be found. Some Christian scholars and mystics develop treatises that are much more open to the power and presence of God's Spirit in other religious traditions.\textsuperscript{4} As well, the history of Christian-Jewish-Muslim relations in Spain – until the unfortunate Spanish Inquisition of the fifteenth

\textsuperscript{2} For example, Augustinians, Benedictines and Cistercians.

\textsuperscript{3} For example, Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites.

\textsuperscript{4} For example, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa.
Gerard Hall: Christian Mission and Religious Pluralism

century – is a monument to the creation of interfaith harmony and a culture of tolerance.5

Reformation and The New World: Puritans, Colonists, Evangelizers

Already in the eleventh century, Christianity had experienced the Great Schism which divided the churches of East and West. The sixteenth century was to witness a further split in the western church also largely according to geographical lines – with England and northern Europe becoming Protestant; and Ireland and southern Europe remaining Catholic. Whatever religious grounds there were for the Reformation – and there were many – it is evident that politics played a significant role. However, the Reformation was not the only event to have impact on the Church's missionary activity. The arrival of Columbus in the Americas in 1492 had two immediate effects: it opened up entirely new civilizations for colonization and conversion; and it was to provide a safe haven for Puritans and other Christian minority groups escaping religious persecution in Europe.

While foreign missionary work preceded both the Reformation and the colonization of the New World,6 the post-Reformation period is a remarkable story of Christian expansion throughout the Americas, parts of Asia and, later on, Africa and Oceania. Nor was this always a positive story. As the saying goes, "Bible and sword were too often hand in hand". Indeed, the colonists, who were often slave-traders as well, were working for king and empire rather than church and religion. Nonetheless, there was also a sense in which European colonizers understood their mission as part of Christianity’s newly


6 For example, the Franciscans worked in China from 1289 until their expulsion in 1368. The Eastern Church had missionaries in China as early as the seventh century. Indian Christianity dates back several centuries before this. See S. Bevans and R. Schroeder, Constants in Context (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1994).
defined role as the world religion and civilizing power. Christian missionaries, for their part, understood their mission as evangelizers building up a kind of spiritual Christian empire by dispelling ignorance, baptizing infidels, and thus saving the world for Christ. The evangelizer is the post-Reformation model of the true Christian.

In some measure, the post-Reformation split among the various Christian denominations was actually a catalyst for missionary activity since they saw one another as competitors. It was at this time the Jesuits were founded to spear-head the Catholic Counter-Reformation. They soon set their sights on opening missionary lands, notably in China, Japan and India as well as North and South America. If the Protestants were slower to move – partly because the original colonizers were the Catholic countries of Spain and Portugal – the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a flourish of both Protestant and Catholic missionary societies. By then, newer colonizing countries had entered the fray including France, England, Germany, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. By then, the centre of missionary activity had largely moved from the Americas to Africa and Oceania.

The post-Reformation missionary movement achieved much success – if, by success, one is counting numbers of baptized, churches built, communities founded. Even today, Christianity counts for more than one in three human beings on the planet. However, it needs to be stated that this success also came at a price which included the marginalization of indigenous cultures and an often superficial acceptance of Christian values among the millions of converts who embraced the Christian faith. Moreover, Christian success in colonized countries of the south stands in stark contrast to its failure to achieve any comparable result throughout Asia⁷ and the Arabic-Islamic world. To this one could add that the competitive, combative behaviour of Christians from different denominations – including the newer evangelical

—

⁷ The one exception is the Philippines whose complex colonial history made it much more susceptible to Christianity.
Pentecostal groups— is hardly a positive missionary strategy in view of the Gospel's call for unity, peace and harmony.

**Towards a Theology of Mission**

The model of mission that operated for the major period of Christian history since Constantine was based on the dual goal of "saving souls" and "implanting the Church". These two ideas were brought together in a narrow interpretation of St Cyprian's earlier teaching: "outside the Church there is no salvation" (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Linked to this was a pessimistic understanding of the human person needing to be freed from personal and original sin. These ideas are often attributed to the writings of St Augustine (345 - 430), himself a convert, who battled against two prevailing heresies: the Pelagians who taught that one could "save oneself without the need of grace"; and the Donatists who taught that "only the perfect could be saved". Augustine, who was not developing a missionary theology as such, taught both the necessity of grace and the reality of the Church and its sacraments as genuine means of salvation. Unfortunately, Augustine's more universal theology of divine grace was largely ignored in the subsequent tradition.

Christian mission, then, came to be identified with extending the church throughout the world in the interests of people's salvation. Salvation itself was defined mainly in terms of one's eternal destiny. Other dimensions of mission such as engagement with other cultures, dialogue with other religions, and the social, political and economic transformation of this world were relegated to areas of secondary importance. With the advent of colonialism, evangelization was closely aligned with the transportation of European culture, church structure, theology and liturgical forms to foreign lands. There were notable exceptions to this European church-centred

---


9 Augustine's *Vestige Dei* doctrine is a good example of his appreciation of the presence and power of God throughout all creation.
approach to mission such as the early Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci and Alexander de Rhodes who strived to find ways of inculturating the Gospel on Asian soil.\textsuperscript{10} The Church's many educational and health initiatives, even if marked by very European traits, also show awareness of an approach to Christian mission that highlighted human development.

It was, however, only in the twentieth century that the narrower vision of Christian mission was seriously challenged. Two world wars, post-colonial independence movements and the advance of science, technology and secularization began to undermine past assumptions. In the wake of such atrocities as the holocaust, Europeans began to question their right to claim any form of superiority over other cultures. Indigenous peoples and followers of other traditions began to assert their right to exist on equal terms. As well, European churches were losing adherents such that the division between "Christian" and "non-Christian" peoples seemed arbitrary at best. The whole notion of a European church-centred theology of mission came into disrepute.

**Mission as Reign of God**

The new approach to Christian mission is inspired by scholarship into the historical Jesus.\textsuperscript{11} Without questioning the central place of the Church in Christian theology, it is the "reign of God" which is at the centre of Jesus' own life and mission.\textsuperscript{12} The mission of the Church is nothing more and nothing less than the continuation of Jesus' own mission of proclaiming God’s reign for our world. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "the Church is effectively and


\textsuperscript{11} See Gerard Hall, "Jesus' Parables and Miracles", in M. Ryan (ed.), *Reading the Bible* (Tuggerah, NSW: Social Science Press, 2003), 176-195.

\textsuperscript{12} See Peter Phan, "Proclamation of the Reign of God as Mission of the Church" in *Theology@McAuley*. 2.
concretely at the service of the kingdom" (*Redemptoris Missio* 20). In this view, the Church is not the goal of mission, but its instrument.

Stated differently, it is God's mission (*missio Dei*) not the Church's mission (*missio ecclesiae*) that is paramount. This has important ramifications for the way we think about the Church. Rather than a "sending Church" (the missionaries) and a "receiving Church" (those to be missioned), we now begin to understand that the whole Church is missionary – and in need of evangelization. This approach is promoted by Vatican II’s missionary document: “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”.¹³

When we make the reign of God and *missio Dei* the foci of Christian mission, both the theology and praxis of missionary activity are transformed. Rather than focusing narrowly on implanting the Church and saving souls, there is new emphasis on: the person and ministry of Jesus; the active role of the Holy Spirit; openness of the kingdom to all, especially the poor and marginal; and human liberation as an integral dimension of salvation. Moreover, the Church is no longer exclusively identified in institutional terms; she is also servant, herald, sacrament, change-agent, community of disciples. The *missio Dei* includes the *missio ecclesiae*, but cannot be reduced to it since the redeeming, healing, saving, liberating presence of God extends throughout the whole world and the entire cosmos.

**Key Aspects of Contemporary Mission**

A contemporary theology, then, acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of Christian mission which includes: the reign of God; evangelization; inculturation; struggle for human liberation; reconciliation; option for the poor;

---

¹³ Vatican II 1965 Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes* (1965), n. 2.
the power of the Holy Spirit; and interfaith dialogue.14 Rather than seeing itself as the "community of the saved", the Church acknowledges that she, too, is a pilgrim people standing under the judgment and grace of God. Nonetheless, the Church has a particular missionary responsibility: to proclaim in word and sacrament the definitive arrival of the kingdom in Jesus Christ; to offer herself as a sign that the kingdom of God is already operative in the world today; and to challenge society as a whole to transform itself according to the kingdom values of justice, love and peace.15

This kingdom-centred approach to mission calls the Church to a much deeper dialogical engagement with the world. It is no longer adequate for Christians to transplant their own perspectives onto others without taking into account the way in which God's Spirit is already present in other peoples and cultures. True evangelization is a two-way communication process. Ultimately, witness will be more important than words, as Christians in the early Church knew only too well. In today's pluralistic world, the task of communicating the Gospel is complex. We can no longer be naïve in recognizing the manner in which faith and culture are intermingled. Above all, this challenges the Church to step outside of its very European clothes in the interests of genuine inculturation. Pope John Paul II states that, through such inculturation in different parts of the world, the Church "comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ" (RM 52).

Struggle for justice, human rights, ecological sustainability and reconciliation among peoples are also dimensions of Christian mission because they relate to Jesus' mission of proclaiming God's reign in the world. Where the Church is involved in these activities, it becomes a servant after the model


of Christ who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28). There can be no dualistic opposition between divine salvation and human liberation since Christ embodies both in his own person. Nor is it simply a matter of the Church taking its agenda from the world: inculturation is one side of the equation; the other is prophecy. The Church's missionary task always consists in critiquing non-kingdom values in any society whether capitalist, socialist, monarchist or other. But the Church must also be self-critiquing.

This is why the notion of God's "preferential option of the poor" is so important for Christian mission. Although associated with liberation theology in Latin America, its roots are much deeper. In biblical terms, the poor and those on the margins of society (anawim) are the ones most likely to hear the Word of God and inherit the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3). In other words, there is something much more at stake here than the Church taking special care of the marginalized. Far from being the special 'objects' of the Church's mission, they are the 'subjects' who constantly call the Church to more radical Gospel truth and missionary fidelity.

It is, however, the Holy Spirit who inspires and directs the missio Dei throughout the world as well as being "the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission" (RM 21). Since the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit continues to draw people to Christ and so has a special relationship with the Church and her members. Nonetheless, it is the same Holy Spirit who is present and active in individuals, society, history, cultures and religions, animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations of the entire human family (RM 28). The Holy Spirit is the fount of love and wisdom, the inspirer of peace and justice, the catalyst for truth and reconciliation that empowers the church, enlightens all peoples and renews the face of the earth.
Evangelization and Interfaith Dialogue

The missionary Church is called to announce the good news of God's reign in the world in partnership with other Christians, other religions and, indeed, with all people of good will. This new paradigm for mission, expressed in many key documents of the Second Vatican Council, stresses the solidarity of the Church with the whole human family, the call to engage with contemporary culture and the invitation to dialogue with people of diverse faiths. This language of solidarity, engagement and dialogue represents a significant shift in missionary rhetoric. Gone are the military metaphors and the language of exclusion. Instead, Christians are called to enter into relationship with others if they are to be faithful to their missionary calling.

The call to interfaith dialogue is quite explicit in official Church documents beginning with the Vatican Council's *Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*. Here, Christians are called to "enter with prudence and charity into dialogues and collaboration with members of other religions" (NA 2). The motivation for such dialogue is to overcome divisions, foster friendly relations, achieve mutual understanding and to work creatively for peace, liberty, social justice and moral values (NA 3). Another reason for dialogue is given in the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, which encourages foreign missionaries to dialogue with the people among whom they live in order to "learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations" (AG 11). Here is a recognition that Christians have something to learn as well as to teach.

Interfaith dialogue is *not* to be seen as something Christians do in *addition to* evangelization. Rather, interfaith dialogue is one element of the Church's evangelizing mission.\(^{16}\) Other elements are: presence and witness;  

\(^{16}\) This is stated unequivocally by Vatican Commissions and in papal pronouncements: Secretariat for Non-Christians, *Dialogue and Mission* (1984), hereafter DM; Pope John Paul II's Address to the Secretariat (1987) and his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), hereafter RM; the Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue and Evangelization, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), hereafter DP; and the Declaration by the
social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and 
contemplation; proclamation and catechesis. Although proclamation of the 
Gospel remains the culmination of mission, the "totality of mission embraces 
all these elements" (DM 13). In particular, "all (Christians) are called to 
dialogue" not only to learn about the positive value of other traditions but as 
a way of overcoming prejudice, purifying cultures of dehumanizing elements, 
upholding traditional cultural values of indigenous peoples and, indeed, 
purifying their own faith (DP 43 - 49). In other words, dialogue complements 
proclamation since both are authentic elements of the Church's single 
evangelizing mission.

There are significant obstacles to dialogue which should not be 
underestimated. Perhaps the greatest of these is an insufficient grounding in 
one's own faith tradition. Raimon Panikkar, who has long been involved in 
Christian-Hindu-Buddhist dialogue, suggests that the first move in interfaith 
dialogue should not be meeting the other but depthing one's own faith – what 
he calls \textit{intra}-religious dialogue.\textsuperscript{17} Many people today living in secular and 
pluralist societies lack a robust and confident understanding of their own faith 
traditions. Equally, it is necessary to have a basic knowledge and 
understanding of other belief systems if the dialogue is to be fruitful.

Importantly, too, is the recognition that dialogue may occur at various 
levels, which are described as follows:\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{itemize}
\item[a)] The \textit{dialogue of life}, where people strive to live in an open and 
neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems 
and preoccupations.
\item[b)] The \textit{dialogue of action}, in which Christians and others collaborate for 
the integral development and liberation of people.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{17} Raimon Panikkar, \textit{The Intra-Religious Dialogue}, rev. ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 
1999).

\textsuperscript{18} DM 28-35; DP 42.
c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

**Towards a Theology of Religious Pluralism**

Christian theology teaches that Jesus Christ is the one and universal Saviour. It may well be asked if emphasis on the reign of God rather than the Christian Church and the new importance given to dialogue with other traditions do not represent a "watering down" of traditional Christian faith-claims. Such a position has been argued by some who assert that all religions are equal and that Jesus Christ is simply one of many Saviour-figures alongside the Buddha, Muhammad or, for that matter, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. This is *not* the position advocated by mainline Christian theologians, the Vatican or the World Council of Churches.

Perhaps the most influential voice in articulating a Christian theology of religious pluralism has been the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner.\(^{19}\) His theory of "anonymous Christianity" teaches that Jesus Christ is anonymously present to members of other traditions in ways that are implicit, concealed, incomplete. The divine offer of salvation occurs only through Christ; yet the mystery of Christ's saving presence is not reducible to the explicit followers of Jesus. Other traditions are in fact anticipatory signs of God's final and definitive self-communication in Jesus Christ. Rahner's universal theology of grace and salvation is based on his theology of the Word and Spirit who both precede and surpass the establishment and extension of the Christian Church. Other

religions, for Rahner, will find their fulfilment in the Christian faith. Meanwhile, they may authentically mediate God's saving presence to their followers.

Another Jesuit theologian, Jacques Dupuis, takes Rahner a step further by arguing that not only are the "unbounded action of the Spirit" and the "non-incarnate presence of the Word" found outside Christianity, but other religions may be recipients of divine grace and revelation in ways that are unique to them.\textsuperscript{20} Like Rahner, Dupuis proposes that all religions are oriented towards the mystery of Jesus Christ who brings salvation history to a climax. However, unlike Rahner, he does not see salvation history as a one-sided process in which Christianity is the fulfilment of all other traditions. Since divine grace and salvation may also exist in other religions in ways outside Christian experience, Christianity may also find its fulfilment through engagement with these traditions. Worth noting is that Dupuis' reflections emerge from his many years as a missionary in India involved in interfaith dialogue.

Raimon Panikkar speaks of the "cosmotheandric mystery" which, although identified by Christians as Jesus Christ, is truly present in while, at the same time, surpassing all religious traditions.\textsuperscript{21} A different perspective is provided by Paul Knitter who focuses on the "divine mystery" uniting people from all religious traditions, irrespective of their different conceptions of the Absolute, when they work together for a better world.\textsuperscript{22} Panikkar and Knitter also make the point that religions not only differ in their beliefs about the divine; they also differ in their understandings of the world, humanity and salvation. Consequently, we need to be careful about creating a theology of


\textsuperscript{22} See Paul Knitter, \textit{Introducing Theologies of Religions} (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2002).
religious pluralism since such a theology will inevitably impose Christian categories on the experiences of others who do not and cannot share our fundamental assumptions. However, together in shared dialogue we can grow in mutual understanding and respect as well as deepening our respective religious commitments. In Christian terms, what is important is that we work together for the building of God's kingdom in the world.

Christian theology will continue to teach that Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's revelation. However, it will also reflect on ways in which the Christian Gospel has been diversely interpreted and lived throughout two millennia. It will recognize in other religious traditions "elements which are true and good" (LG 16), "precious things both religious and human" (GS 92), "elements of truth and grace" (AG 9), "seeds of the Word" (AG 11, 15) and "rays of that truth which illumines all humankind" (NA 2). With Pope John Paul II, it will appreciate that there is but "one Spirit of truth" uniting all religions (RH 6). Beyond this, theologians will continue to explore an understanding of religious pluralism that affirms traditional Christian teaching, while opening itself to a more inclusive appreciation of the wonders that God has done in all the religions of the world.

**Conclusion**

To be Christian is to be missionary. All Christians are called to witness to the truth of Jesus Christ in the footsteps of the first apostles and martyrs. Through the integrity of their lives and the proclamation of the Gospel, they seek to convert others to Christian discipleship. The way of the monk, the courage of the crusader, the conviction of the puritan and the energy of the colonizer provide their own kind of inspiration. In the world of the twenty-first century, Christians are challenged to evangelize with their hearts set on the reign of God of which the Church is called to be a sign and instrument. The new paradigm for mission requires the Church to engage with other cultures, struggle for human liberation, work for reconciliation among peoples and
dialogue with other faith-traditions. These are all essential elements of the Church's single evangelizing mission.

Further Reading


