

Training for the Third Wave of Mission:

A Catholic Perspective

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What we hope to do is to:

- Do a brief review of what “Mission in the 3rd Wave” means.
- Recognize its potential and challenges.
- Share how Catholic tradition informs a way forward for the 3rd Wave.
- Initiate dialogue about new formation process some Catholic practitioners new formation process some Catholic practitioners are putting forth to address some of the challenges for Mission in the 3rd Wave.

For centuries, mission was the work of a chosen few. With the emphasis on the laity in the Second Vatican Council, and the Decree on Mission Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*) in 1965 which stated that “the pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature,” mission was determined to be something that all Christians are called to by virtue of their baptism.¹

And now, since the 1980’s, short-term mission trips and parish or diocesan twinning relationships, whereby Christians in parishes and congregations directly engage with peoples and countries from another part of the world, have increasingly been a part of the U.S. Christian mission landscape. This has been true for Catholics as well as Protestants.

In his keynote address at the Maryknoll Centennial Theological Symposium in Chicago in October, 2011 Fr. Robert Schreiter established a continuity of this new form of short-term mission and partnerships with earlier forms of mission. He described how, over the course of history, the extent and shape of mission has always been greatly influenced by the infrastructural capacity of exchange (as he defines “globalization”) surrounding it and argued that mission, at least in the West, has been shaped by three distinct waves of globalization.²

The first wave, in the 1500’s was the Portuguese and Spanish exploration of distant lands, as the development of better ships and of instruments for determining a ship’s position were improved. Mission accompanied the explorers and traders. The second wave occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries after the

1 *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes)*, 1965.

2 *The Future of Mission Ad Gentes in a Global Context*, Robert Schreiter, Maryknoll Centennial Theological Symposium in Chicago in October, 2011. Schreiter defines globalization as “any qualitative leaps in the possibility of commercial trade or other forms of exchange that opens up a social group to the wider world.”

emergence of liberal democracies in the Age of Mobilization and arose with the invention of the steam engine which revolutionized sea and land travel, and the invention of the telegraph. The shape of this mission was national mission-sending societies each with its distinctively national flavor. Enhanced by the engagement of laity after the Second Vatican Council, mission of the second wave continues today.

Schreiter argued that the third wave of globalization in recent years, with the advent of the Internet, instant e-mail communication, cell phones reaching even the most remote villages, has resulted in an unimaginable compression of time and space. In this context, multitudes of Catholics from many dioceses, parishes, schools and universities in our country have taken up the challenge to engage in mission, now directly with parishes, dioceses, schools, universities, and other entities all over the globe.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF MISSION IN THE THIRD WAVE

First, it is helpful to be aware of the two distinct forms of Mission in the Third Wave. In the *short-term mission model*, missionaries travel in small groups, to a place outside of their usual socio-cultural and geographical context, often to an economically challenged place, (a “crossing of borders” of some kind) for a *one-time, short duration trip*. The purposes of these short-term mission trips vary, but generally the main purpose is to 1) do some kind of “service” work, 2) expose people to different socio-economic conditions and/or cultures (and, for some, to expose how U.S. policies affect the local people), and/or 3) to build a kind of “connectedness” with people of other places/cultures/socio-economic groups.

The *partnership model* (also known as twinning or “sister parish/sister diocese”) involves one community maintaining an on-going long-term relationship (often for decades) with another community of a different socio-cultural context. The main purpose of these partnerships is similar to those noted for short-term mission. These partnerships often involve group visits to the partnering community for usually 1-2 weeks. With an ongoing connection, members of the U.S. community often make multiple visits to their partnering parishes (sometimes dozens) and can form deep and trusting friendships. These partnerships can also involve reciprocal visits, whereby people from the outside community travel to the U.S. community for visits.

By definition, the time spent in the community is very short in comparison to earlier forms of mission. For the short-term mission model, it may be difficult to really get to know the people well, although that issue is somewhat mitigated in the partnership model with multiple visits, ongoing e-mails and phone calls between visits.

Another major difference with the first two waves of mission in the Catholic approach to mission, is that whereas the earlier waves involved a more unified and structured engagement, the Third Wave relationships often arise “organically” at the grassroots, which is to say, they may occur as a result of a personal connection between one person from one country or culture to one person or entity of another country, who then invite others in their parish to engage with the distant community. There is often no connection to a larger institutional entity which might be attentive to larger, regional concerns (e.g., a parish, without connection to the diocese, etc.)

POTENTIAL FOR GOOD

The potential for good in this Third Wave of Mission is immense. Participation in God’s mission to bring about good and build the sense of solidarity is more accessible to the followers of Christ than at any time in the history of the Church. It is a new moment fraught with possibility!

For one thing, the Third Wave of Mission engages far larger numbers of missionaries than in the previous two waves. Whereas, about 6,000 Catholics per year were engaged directly in mission of the second wave in 2005 (and note that that has dropped to 3400 by 2009)³, Robert Priest reported that over 1.6 million U.S. adults and 2 million youth went on short term mission trips in 2005---probably at least a fourth of them Catholics. That is a factor of well over 100 times more Catholics participating in mission in the Third Wave of Mission. With regard to partnerships, a safe estimate is that 2,000 of the 19,000 U.S. Catholic parishes are engaged in parish partnerships, and the number continues to grow as other parishes become familiar with the idea and make their own connections. Moreover, in both types of this Third Wave of Mission, the experience of face-to-face engagement with people of other countries is often shared widely with other parish or school

3 *U.S. Catholic Mission Handbook: Mission Inventory 2008-2009*, U.S. Catholic Mission Association, 2010.

community members. The awareness and experience of mission has become very familiar to many Catholics. “Mission” is now something that many Catholics “in the pews” routinely do. This is very new for us Catholics.

In an increasingly secular, fragmented and struggling world, mission is a very relevant and meaningful engagement, and a hopeful expression of their faith.

The Third Wave of Mission has great potential for the building up of a more human, more connected, more equitable and a more just and peaceful world, that is, *seeking the reign of God*.

POTENTIAL FOR HARM, AND CHALLENGES

However, just as with the earlier waves, mission occurs within its cultural context. The earlier waves of mission largely occurred in the context of colonization whereby the expansion of the Church resulted in terrible harm to local peoples and cultures. This legacy requires that we ask of mission in the Third Wave, are similar dispositions still operative? We observe that well-intended people, born into a can-do and problem-solving cultural context themselves, many having grown up a uniform culture of white privilege, sometimes enter into another culture in situations of experiences of desperate poverty with a “hero” mindset, to “help those poor people,” “fixing” and “doing” often without seriously knowing or consulting with the local people. [Or they consult, but are unaware that the cultural context calls for the locals to affirm when they really don’t agree with the missionaries’ plans.] This points to an unwitting paternalistic attitude similar to those found in the first two waves. The language of “first world” vs. “third world” and “developing” vs. “developed” betray these unwitting attitudes. In his book *Toxic Charity*, Robert Lupton, documents the dependency created by so many of these well-intended short-mission trips.⁴

Ever since the third wave has emerged spontaneously and organically in Catholic parishes in the 1980’s, there has been virtually no institutional oversight. The U. S. Bishops have mentioned parish twinning in their 1997 document *Called*

4 Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those they Help (and How to Reverse It)*, New York: HarperOne, 2011.

to *Global Solidarity*⁵ and call parishes to engage in ways that are not paternalistic and do not create dependency. But many of those engaged in parish twinning or short-term mission are not even aware of this document. They engage with little oversight from their pastors, but that point is moot, since the pastors themselves have had little formation in the task and challenges of global mission.

This situation is far from the kind of dignity and oneness of the Reign of God that mission calls us to.

RECOVERING CATHOLIC CONTEXT

A few years ago, a small group of Catholic missionaries who have been engaged in preparing and accompanying Catholics in the Third Wave of Mission came together to reflect on the potential and challenges of the emerging Third Wave of Mission that was exploding around us. We concluded that given the technology and possibility for travel, and the organic nature of the movement, it was not going away and we simply could not ignore it. Moreover we recognized the potential as described above. We decided what was called for was some formation in sound practices. We recognized that within our own tradition—a body of documents referred to as modern Catholic Social Teaching and post-Vatican II missiology---there were a wealth of principles that could be gleaned and made accessible to those leading and engaging in the Third Wave of Mission which could help to shape healthy mission relationships.

The fundamental principle of all Catholic Social Teaching is that of the *dignity of the human person* and its call for deep *respect*. This can be summed up in an often-used quote by Max Warren: “Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are standing on is holy, else we may find we are treading on men’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.” Deriving from that deep respect is both the idea of *mutuality* and the importance for each person to have the opportunity to express their voice---hence the call to *participation* in community. In addition, with the papacy of Pope John Paul II, the expression *global solidarity* emerged as a strong part of Catholic Social Teaching, calling all people to support one another’s struggle for justice for the long term, regardless

5 *Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes*, U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, 1997.

of nationality, race or ethnicity. The Latin American Bishops at their meeting in Medellin in 1968, with the help of Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, responded to the gospel call to take the “*option for the poor*” and to do *social analysis* as a way to identify the sources of poverty and injustice. And like the Hebrew prophets Isaiah and Amos, they were not afraid to *prophetically challenge powerful structures* as sources of that oppression. At the invitation of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the U. S. Catholic and many other Christian Churches assumed a *model of accompaniment, solidarity and mutual evangelization* as Christian witness. This idea of mutual evangelization can be summed up in the quote by the Australian aboriginal woman Lily Walker: “If you come here to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us begin.”

These principles derived from Catholic Social Teaching provide a solid foundation for shaping the Third Wave of Mission, but they are not well known among many Catholics involved in Third Wave Mission, beyond a vague, general sense of trying to “do good.” Therefore, this group of Catholics decided to try to establish a Third Wave of Mission Institute which could develop and deliver the formation needed for this growing movement.

At the current time, eight 45-minute modules are being developed in the following areas:

1. Overview of the Missioning Process [preparation; insertion/reflection; re-entry integration]
2. Mission History and Theology [including scriptural roots; also noting colonial context]
3. Relationships at the Center of Mission [focus on openness, presence, transformation leading to ongoing commitment to social justice and solidarity]
4. Intercultural competencies [respect plus address questions of power; communication]
5. Mission Spirituality [humility, walking with]
6. Inter-religious and ecumenical Dialogue [methods of better listening and dialogue]
7. Partnership Principles [accompaniment; mutual planning/decision-making; sustainable human development, avoiding dependency]
8. Tools for Re-entry and Integration [keeping experience alive, remaining faithful for long term efforts of solidarity]

As we develop and implement our Third Wave modules, we would expect that participants would grow out of pre-Vatican II heroic models of mission where

visitors and missionaries came from the Global North to supposedly “fix” and “save” those in the Global South. We would now expect our participants to mature into more humble Christians who are more willing to learn from and be re-evangelized by our sisters and brothers of other cultures near and far. Why not seek the reign of God as mutual partners in faith?

We imagine our participants becoming aware of social analysis to understand the deeper causes of solutions of poverty and oppression. We presume they would respectfully dialogue with the people that they visit, and develop long-term friendships of solidarity with them. Ultimately we anticipate that our participants would connect with their local diocesan social justice offices and join advocacy organizations like Bread for the World so as to eliminate the causes of hunger and poverty for the long term. For example, there are many in my archdiocese of Cincinnati who have made immersion trips and are involved in parish twinning relationships who are now visiting their congresspersons on a wide range of issues like immigration and food-aid reform.

At the current time, our plan is to make these modules accessible on the Internet for leaders and participants. As they become known and more formation is sought, more could be provided.

CONCLUSION

The Third Wave of Mission has both immense potential, as well as serious concerns and challenges. With adequate formation we believe these challenges can be overcome, and the immense potential for good of the Third Wave of Mission can be unleashed. Our hope is that through the learning and utilization of this formation, Mission of the Third Wave will achieve its potential. We hope that it will engage U. S. Catholics with the global church in a way that will lead to a more just and compassionate world--a world where every individual's gifts and talents are valued, where each achieves his or her God-given potential and creates a caring global community where all cultures are respected and valued.

We invite the reaction and input of participants of this American Society of Missiology. Possibly the Holy Spirit will urge us to some form some type of on-going Third Wave network among ourselves for our mutual development as we seek God's reign together.

