

TOWARD THE MISSIONARY CHURCH OF 2025
The Past and the Future

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Introduction

This first of two presentations will look at the results of the 2001 Seminar, where participants reflected together on the past, present, and future of the missionary Church. Such periods of reflection are good, first of all, for gathering what is emerging as common wisdom about the past. It helps build a kind of resource of what has been done well, and what perhaps should not be repeated. These periods of reflection are good, too, for getting a sense of where people find themselves in the present, providing a shared point of departure for looking into the future, and for indicating what values and ideas ought to be carried forward. They help provide a continuity between the best of the present and what we hope to experience in the future.

This presentation will be in two parts. The first part will survey some of the salient ideas which emerged in that seminar. Anyone who has read through the results of the seminar as published in the July-August issue of the *SEDOS Bulletin* will know that there are too many ideas to treat here. I have singled out seven of them as particularly important for the future which we are trying to prepare for here. These seven have particular relevance for the work of the missionary Church in the next two decades, the focus of our reflections in these days. There are others, to be sure, which could be examined. But these seven offer an important basis for the next steps we hope to take in mission.

The second part of this presentation moves to looking at what was absent in the reflections from 2001, and should be preoccupying our attention. I have singled out one area which struck me especially, and which, to my mind, needs our attention now. My hope is that you will find this opportunity to reflect on this area helpful in your own work in guiding your institute.

Values and Ideas to Carry with Us

Many values and ideas were expressed in the seminar last year, nearly all of which could bear additional reflection. I have chosen seven of them because I believe these have special for the immediate future. They are given here in no special order (save for the first one, which I think is the most important).

1. Authenticity in Our Gospel Witness

The first--and I believe most important--value expressed in the seminar is *the authenticity in our Gospel witness*. Certainly our witness to the Gospel in what we say and what we do is the prime reason for being in mission at all. The Gospel is at the center of who we are as a missionary Church. Cardinal Van Thuân's address to us at this seminar makes this point more eloquently than I am able to do.

The Gospel must not only be presented; those who present it must be authentic in their witness to its message. The holiness of our own lives, the commitment we have to those who are addressed in our words and deeds, and our passion for the Kingdom of God and its justice must be in clear evidence. The Gospel must be seen in our transparency of life and how we care for all that is around us: other people, the culture, the earth itself.

In a way, of course, all of this goes without saying. Yet it needs to be said because we need constantly to be reminded of it. The quest for our own relationship to God is a life-time undertaking for all of us. But there is another reason why we need to say this at this point in history. Throughout the last decade we have seen a rapid growth of the importance of religion itself in our world. The utter secularization of the world, which had been predicted early in the twentieth century, has not materialized in the way in which it had been envisaged. Rather than the world going through the same diminishment of the importance of religion which Europe has undergone, some sociologists are now proposing that Europe may well turn out to be a special case. Rather than leading the way for other nations into the future, it will remain a *Sonderweg*, a

particular path which is trodden only by those societies which have large numbers of European immigrants. In much of the rest of the world there has been a resurgence of religion.

There are two faces to this resurgence. On the one hand, we see the rapid growth of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity. If the rate of growth continues at the same pace it has for the past thirty years, its numbers may surpass non-Pentecostal forms of Protestant and Orthodox Christianity combined within a few more decades. This form of Christianity is flourishing especially among the poor of the world, both in rural areas but especially in urban centers. It is now being found in the nascent middle class in cities around the world as well. Pentecostal and charismatic Christians are in all the historic churches, but flourish especially in independent churches today. Authenticity of witness is central to Pentecostal and charismatic faith. Our witness--be it in this form of faith or the more conventional forms we now utilize--must be as authentic.

The other face of religion presents itself as a means of resistance to modernization, either in fundamentalism, or even as a legitimation for violence. That religion has become intertwined with issues of ethnicity and with resistance to modernization--not to mention its use to legitimate greed and vengeance, the more traditional incitements to violence--is now more clearly seen than ever. At the same time, we still understand only partially why religion and violence get linked together so easily and so often.

Authentic witness for us as Christians in the face of fundamentalism and of violence requires that we preach and what we do mirrors for the peace, the *shalom* of God. Our deeds must match our words. It is through our witness, and our efforts at pre-empting violence and promoting peace which will be the only effective antidote to this toxic combination of religion and violence.

2. Contemplation

An important suggestion made in the several of the groups was the importance of contemplative prayer. This strikes me as particularly apropos in a number of ways. First of all, missionaries

are typically activists, doers. We bring great energy to what we do. That all this activity must be balanced by a quiet, prayerful turning to God is salutary advice for us. It shows others another important face to our God.

Second, I have become more and more convinced of the importance of contemplative prayer for those who labor under very strenuous and stressful conditions. My own sense of this comes from working with those involved in reconciliation, especially social reconciliation. The challenges which stand before us in reconciliation, in peacemaking, in dealing with refugees and displaced persons--to mention only some of the stressful areas to which we are called--require that we come to know that mission is not so much our work and our achievement, as it is God working through us. It is God who reconciles, who heals, who makes peace. We are but agents of God, carrying out that divine work. In order to be able to do that work faithfully and authentically, we must have that kind of bond with God which permits us to be sensitive agents in this work. That happens not because we seek out God, but because we allow God to come to us. Contemplation is about learning to wait on God, about become deeply sensitive to the slightest movement of God in our lives. Given the enormity of the challenges which lie now in front of us as missionaries, living a contemplative existence will be important not only for the quality of what we do, but also perhaps for our very survival under stressful situations.

3. Prophecy

Prophecy was mentioned several times in the seminar as well, as something to be nurtured in a missionary Church. We have just come through a period when prophecy abounded in a missionary Church, from the time of the Second Vatican Council through the commitment to an option for the poor, to work for the liberation of the oppressed. For some, the price of their prophetic words and actions was death. As some have noted, it seems as though now the voice of prophecy has been muted or stilled. They are efforts afoot in the Church to turn away, or in

another direction. Yet situations of poverty, exclusion, oppression, and violence continue. In some sectors they have gotten worse. What shall we do?

We must remind ourselves that we do not anoint prophets. It is God who does so, and sometimes the most unlikely people. Although there appear to be fewer prophets today, others point to the fact that Christian communities in Latin America and Africa show a vitality assures us that the Spirit has not abandoned us. We are not left without witnesses.

Our task, as always, is to try to recognize the prophetic figures in our midst, and to support and nurture them. We need too to follow them when they lead us to a Gospel response to the conditions which cry out for justice, mercy, and peace.

4. Dialogue

Dialogue, a theme which emerged strongly in mission since the Second Vatican Council, remains a salient part of mission today. It has taken on additional significance in this period of the resurgence of religion in the world today, already mentioned above. Dialogue, which among other things works for a greater understanding between and among religious traditions, is an important means of preventing the linking of religion and violence. When religions have good and friendly working relations, they are much more able to speak in consort against the use of religion to legitimate violence. This realization has led, for example, to the formation of an interfaith council of Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina for the first time. They met more than a dozen times in 2001 in order to solidify bonds which they hope will help ensure peace in that country in the future.

Dialogue will continue to be important in witnessing to the Gospel in Asia. If the Church wishes to make a special effort to ensure that Asians have a chance to hear the Gospel in this coming century, then that cannot be done without dialogue. Asians have reminded the rest of us time and again that direct proclamation is experienced by many Asians as aggressive and reminiscent of Western imperialism--thus linking the message of the Gospel fatally to

Westernization as the only means to becoming a Christian. For Asians to hear the Gospel, Asian pathways must be trodden for that to happen.

Third, dialogue as a mode of relationship and communication in itself will become ever more important in the twenty-first century. As populations are jostled about by migration and closer contact with ethnic and cultural difference, it is only through speaking and listening to each other that any hope of a harmonious society might be hoped for. Part of the missionary dimension of the Church must be promoting this kind of dialogue as well, and practicing it itself with those who are other and different around them.

5. Dealing with Plurality and Diversity

Dealing with plurality and diversity has been part of the missionary task for some time. The quest for a better life has driven many people from the villages in the countryside to urban centers in their own countries, as well as into migration to other places. The result are populations now in close proximity with one another who in other circumstances would be separated. The quest for one's own social space is increasingly countered with being faced every day with difference.

It is especially in the urban centers of the world that this question of plurality and diversity is played out. But one finds it also in the refugee camps and the centers for displaced persons where people have been driven by armed conflict. There people living at the edge of survival must cope also with difference.

Finally, there is the matter of diversity and plurality within our own religious institutes. As numbers dwindle in the North and continue to expand in the South, a whole range of issues beset us, and most institutes are only beginning to deal with them. They will create very different missionary institutes by 2025.

Much of the effort of the past fifteen years has been to try to understand and come to terms with difference at close range. Efforts to do this will need to continue, since living with genuine

difference in a free and civil society are things still only partially understood. Greater effectiveness in intercultural communication, in the resolution of conflicts which arise, and in the fostering of greater cooperation and collaboration among communities which are different is still a very long way from being realized.

What is now coming into ever greater evidence is that, alongside this pursuit of recognition and valuing of difference, we must at the same time foster ways of belonging which lead to greater social cohesion in our societies. This especially now the case since we may be moving into more uncertain and unstable times. The cultivation of recognition and difference works best in stable, secure situations where reaching out to the other does not entail grave risk. But in the anxieties about immigration which mark much of Europe today, and after the destabilizing events of September 11, 2001, difference as something to be recognized and valued can be quickly forgotten or even suppressed. Modes of unity against what are perceived to be threats against the social order are likely to prevail. We must therefore be thinking about ways of dealing with plurality and diversity, on the one hand, and a non-coercive social cohesion during uncertain times on the other. Models for doing the latter are only beginning to emerge. We must plumb the resources of our own faith to aid in this important endeavor.

6. The Globalization of Solidarity

Globalization will remain very much on the missionary agenda in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Its profoundly disruptive effect on the lives of the poor around the world, and the hollowed-out character it can give to the lives of the non-poor are themes already well known to us. Its potential in terms of communication was also noted frequently in the reflections in last year's seminar.

Those watching the process of globalization are predicting that one of the challenges of the coming decades will be to create a more humane form of globalization. What is meant here is not the creating a human face which will hide the negative aspects of globalization, but rather an

extending to a greater share of the world's population the positive aspects of globalization, and a drastic reduction of its negative effects on the world's poor who now experience exclusion and further degradation of their lives.

I believe that Pope John Paul II has struck a careful balance in his reading of the ambivalences of globalization. In his writings and allocutions, he has been calling for a globalization of solidarity, that is, a globalization in which no one is left behind or excluded. In a globalization of solidarity, the poor are not deserted and workers are not disenfranchised. Rather the dignity of each human person is respected, and the quality of life for all is enhanced. Globalization is a wrenching phenomenon in which the economy and social patterns are being shifted, perhaps comparable to the Industrial Revolution in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. It may result in a new social order which will be able to support the growth in human population on a planet already moving into ecological crisis because of the size of that population. But that can only happen if the moral and the justice dimensions of human life are honored in the process. Proclaiming God's justice is a necessary and important part of humanizing globalization and its effects in the immediate future. Solidarity as a concept has become part and parcel of Catholic Social Teaching. Interestingly, Catholic Social Teaching made its appearance in response to the Industrial Revolution; what might come from the development of Catholic Social Teaching in response to the globalization in the twenty-first century?

7. Healing and Reconciliation

On at least two other occasions in recent years, I have had the opportunity at SEDOS gatherings to suggest that the work of reconciliation might become one of the principal paradigms for mission in the twenty-first century. The possibility of the reconciliation of divided and devastated societies may be one of the most vivid expressions of God's Good News for the world today.

Reconciliation as a form of mission is best expressed in Ephesians 2:12-19, where the text speaks of breaking down the walls which divide us, putting an end to hostility and our becoming citizens in the divine household. Reconciliation is not just about picking up the pieces after violent conflict or the depredations of globalization. It is about the moral reconstruction of society so that the deeds of the past cannot happen again in the future. To achieve that, the truth must be sought out from the tangle of untruths and outright lies that accompany violence and oppression. Then justice must be pursued, especially to restructure those dimensions of society which fostered and supported wrongdoing.

The healing of wounds inflicted upon individuals and upon the body of society is the goal of reconciliation. Here again, the message of the death and resurrection of Christ, and the forms of action which follow upon it, give eloquent testimony to what Christian faith can bring to a divided and fractured world. Reconciliation as a paradigm for mission speaks very much to our current time, and will likely continued to be needed into the coming decades of the twenty-first century.

These, then, are seven values and ideas from the discussion last year which will continue to speak to being missionary in the years immediately ahead of us. As you can see, they also touch upon quite a number of other values and ideas which were mentioned in the course of the seminar. I hope that they can be part of a continued reflection as we try to move from dream to reality, from vision to action.

Leadership for 2025

I want to turn now to the second part of this presentation. Here the focus is on what was not discussed at the seminar last year regarding the future missionary Church, and therefore needs our attention now. I have chosen one theme which I would like to address. That theme is: what will be the nature and quality of leadership in missionary institutes in 2025. There were some oblique references to leadership in the reports from the seminar (I was not at the seminar itself),

and perhaps the way the seminar was designed and how the questions were structured did not allow for this important theme to emerge. Whatever the case, this is a theme which is very much part of what kind of missionary church we hope will come about in 2025.

I would like to enter this discussion by exploring three areas. The first is who will constitute the leadership of our missionary institutes in 2025. Second, what agenda might they be bringing to the leadership they offer to their institutes. And third, are there things we ought to be doing to prepare a cadre of potential leaders for 2025. I hope that this will stimulate some significant discussion on the nature and quality of leadership we might not only hope for, but prepare for as we move into the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Who Will Be Our Leaders?

Who will be the superiors or presidents, who will be the members of our general councils or governing groups in the year 2025? Two things about these leaders are fairly certain. One is that they are probably already in the formation programs or have recently become members of our institutes. And the other is that they are likely to have come from the Southern Hemisphere.

General leadership in religious institutes typically comes from the age range of 45-55 years of age. Extrapolating backward, that means that our future leaders are currently 22 to 32 years old. Thus, our leaders in 2025 are already likely in our institutes, either in formation or in the early years of their ministry. Whether they are in formation or already in ministry, they are undergoing at this time important formative experiences, both within our institutes and in the wider Church and world, which will shape their thinking well into their middle adult years--the time when they will be assuming general leadership. Students of human populations say that what is happening in the world when people come of age shapes the lens through which they view the world. If those experiences have been especially powerful, they these lenses may stay with them through most of the rest of their lives. If this is the case (and I believe that there is good reason to accept this idea), then what has been happening in our institutes, in the Church, and in the wider world

since roughly 1995 and what will happen in the next few years are going to be key to their understanding of themselves and of the world and the Church around them. I will return to this more concretely in the next part of this presentation.

Second, the general leadership in 2025 will likely come, for the most part, from Asia, Africa, or Latin America rather than Europe, North America, or Australia and New Zealand. If it comes from the latter area, then there is a high likelihood that these leaders were born in the South. Today, for example, about 25% of all priesthood candidates in the United States were born outside that country.

The reason for this is quite simply numbers. If you reflect for a moment on the distribution of your current members and candidates in the range of 22-32 years of age, where do they come from? Already for some time, members from the southern regions of our institutes have been serving on our general councils; in a few instances, they are already becoming superiors general or presidents. That is likely to be overwhelmingly the case in 2025.

In sum, then, our future leaders are already among us.

What Will the Leaders in 2025 Bring to Their Ministry of Leadership?

Let us now take up the second question: What will the leaders in 2025 bring to their ministry?

As has already been mentioned, the experiences these future leaders are now undergoing in our institutes, in the Church, and in the wider world are shaping how they will be viewing the world in the coming years. To be sure, these experiences are not utterly determinative, but particularly powerful events and experiences will have a profound effect, either shaping their thinking or, in reaction, pushing them to an opposite pole. I was struck in reading the reports from last year's seminar how much the experience of the Second Vatican Council and the decade of its aftermath have shaped the thinking of the current leadership in our institutes. The struggles for reform, the dividing of the world into the pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II

periods, the struggles with reactionary forces in the Church--all of these are markedly present in the reflections in last year's seminar.

So what can we identify as the current formative influences? I will cite some which strike me in each of the three areas: our institutes, the Church, the wider world. As much as possible I will take into account what this might mean for someone coming from the Southern hemisphere.

Our Institutes. A salient experience for many of the young candidates and members of our institutes is the cultural disparity between their own culture and the "culture" of the institute which they have entered. Formation policies, expectations, and even education can be, from a cultural point of view, dislocating. The culture of the institute may be heavily marked by the culture of its origin in Europe or North America. This is especially the case for institutes which were founded as national missionary institutes. A young member can feel that he or she has had to become Irish or French or Italian to become a member of the institute. The sense of his or her own culture not being understood or respected can arise.

I have done a little experiment with a number of international religious institutes I have worked with over the past number of years, of both men and of women. I ask the question: what is the single most important issue facing your institute as an institute in the immediate future? The members from the Northern hemisphere typically answer: assuring that the charism of our founder or foundress is passed on to the new members adequately. The members from the Southern hemisphere respond: greater intercultural communication. A little further probing on the answers to the first response reveals an anxiety about the newer, Southern membership among those from the North. Do they really understand what we as an institute are about? Do they really grasp our history and those things which have made us who we are?

Underneath the second response, about intercultural communication, is a feeling that the members from the older foundations do not understand us, and are blocking us in one way or another from inculturating the charism in ways which may not be understood or appreciated.

They have experienced so much of what is called “the charism” as really a cultural overlay from Europe.

Responding to these two questions is one of the principal internal questions which every religious institute faces in the coming decade. Formation policies in many religious institutes were written to reflect the needs of Northern cultures, with their emphasis on individualism, taking initiative, and promoting creativity. They do not take into account what someone from a more collectivist culture might require.

This is perhaps not the place to go further into detail on this specific question. Suffice it to say that *how* a religious institute responds to this question will shape the experience of the leaders of general government in 2025. The leadership will likely have been influenced by how their home cultures have been responded to by those from the older foundations of the institute. *The Church*. Pope John Paul II will have been the pontiff through all of the leaderships of 2025’s formative years. Future pontiffs will likely be measured against him. They will not gauge the world by means of a pre-Vatican II/post-Vatican II compass. They were all born after the Council closed, and do not remember much of the struggles which ensued in the following decade. Rather, issues in the Church when they were coming of age will be more formative of their worldview.

Because of the experience of the institute and also of the Church, inculturation will have been the passion of their early years: how to bring the Gospel and their own culture more closely together without continuing to bear the burden of old Europe. Theologically, questions of dialogue will have been shaped by their experience of the use of religion to legitimate violence. If they come from an area where Islam and Christianity have been in acute competition during their formative years, this will influence their relationship to that Abrahamic faith. Their view of the theology of liberation, about which they have heard so much from their elders, will share the

concern for the plight of the poor, but they will likely look for a different biblical and theological foundation. Peace and peace-making will probably loom more largely in their consciousness. *The World.* The world as a violent and unsafe place will provide a frame for how they approach the world. The experience of globalization as disruptive of their lives and the lives of their families will be part of that frame. Their experience will thus be markedly different from that of their peers in the North, who will have come of age in a time of economic prosperity. Issues of systemic poverty, governmental corruption, and exclusion will color their view of political governance.

The experience of feminist thinking will shape the lens of many young women in their institutes, since this is something that their cultures will only begin to be providing them. Their peers in the North will more or less take feminism as a given or take it for granted.

If part of their education has been received in the North, either in formation or immediately thereafter, they will have experienced acutely the mixture of the modern and the post-modern sensibility (and possibly pre-modern, if they came from a rural background). They will read that differently from their peers in the North, who have experienced the fragmentation of the post-modern in the midst of abundance. Postmodern in a culture of scarcity has dislocation rather than choice at its core. They will share with their Northern peers a greater interest in finding the unity in things rather than focusing on difference.

It will be important to realize and recall periodically that the leaders of 2025 see the world through a different lens than we do. There will also be some differential between those from the Southern and those from the Northern hemispheres. While we cannot predict with any accuracy what will be the issues two decades hence, we do already have some idea through what kind of lens they will be viewed.

Preparing the Leaders of 2025

What can be done toward training the leaders of 2025? Of course, we do not choose our successors; general chapters do. But steps can be taken toward preparing a cadre of potential leaders who will serve our institutes at provincial, regional, and general levels.

Perhaps the single most important thing we can do is manage as well as we can the transition of leadership from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere. Since the experience of this transition will be the single most important aspect of the lens through which these leaders will view their institute, it is imperative that this be done well. And this is something over which we have some measure of control. It is a matter of working with all sides--North and South--in ensuring a transition which respects and preserves the charism of our founding figures, but also permits its inculturation in changed and different circumstances. It will involve rethinking our patterns of governance, of use of money, our formation programs, and still other things in light of the fact that the majority of our members are coming from the South and are shaped by their early experiences there, yet serve a world Church.

Other things we already know about--the need to be multilingual, international experience, additional education beyond that which is required in formation, experience of different regions of our institute--will continue to be important. Trying too to configure the team which will lead our institutes at the general level to be both representative of our institute and to have the skills necessary to lead in different settings will likewise come into play. Most institutes strive to put their best possible people in general leadership. We all certainly hope that will continue.

To conclude: 2025 seems far away. But there are at least two things we can already do to contribute to our being a faithful and creative missionary Church in that time. We can be clear about what values and ideas from the immediate past need to be preserved and promoted for the missionary Church of the future. And we can begin to take steps to prepare the leadership for that time, since they are likely already with us in our institutes. The work of last year's seminar

has helped us greatly on the first point. It is up to us now to give some consideration to the second.

Questions for Discussion

1. Seven values and ideas were highlighted from last year's seminar as especially important for the missionary Church of 2025. Which among these stand out for you as needing further development and reflection?

2. What challenges does your institute face especially in the training of leaders for 2025? How is your institute treating the transition from North to South?