



TEXAS MISSION COUNCIL

The Future of Mission

Keynote for the Texas Mission Conference

February 17-19, 2017

***Note:** The transcript here contains material in addition to that given at the conference.*

Opening prayer: Bring us together, Lord, in heart and soul and mind, to consider the privilege you have handed to us, that of continuing your mission today, and into the future. May our thoughts and insights today guide us to bringing our lives into greater harmony with the Creator's will and plan, as the Reign of God enters into our world, collectively and personally, in ever radically new and deep ways. Breach the border walls surrounding our egos and transform our lives, as we likewise cross over into the cultures and communities that await the fullness of the Good News. This we ask, in the warmth and force of your Spirit, and in your name. Amen.

1. Introduction

We are asked today to look at something that is not here, yet. "The Future of Mission" is a concept, and apart from that concept in our imaginations, it does not exist. There is only the present moment, as our Buddhist friends would say.

Some elements of the present can reasonably lead us to expect mission to require certain attitudes among us today, in order to live our mission, which continues the mission of Christ, in a way that takes into account the questions and challenges of our societies today, believers and non-believers alike.

In this task of identifying the present attitudes and beliefs about the form that the mission of Christ takes today, we follow a long tradition, identified by David Bosch and, before him, Hans Küng, of establishing paradigms of mission for each age in the history of the Church.

2. **Paradigms** are the theoretical framework in which we understand our object of study, and come to us as a tool to understand our object from the field of scientific history, especially as used by Thomas Kuhn in his book on paradigm shifts in the world of science, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, first published in 1962.

The clearest example of a paradigm shift in scientific history is the Copernican Revolution. Every schoolchild today looks at the sky in a particular way we all share, thanks to Nicolaus Copernicus, who, beginning in 1508, proposed that the planets have the Sun as the fixed point to which their motions are to be referred; that Earth is a planet which, besides orbiting the Sun annually, also turns once daily on its own axis; and that very slow, long-term changes in the direction of this axis account for the precession of the equinoxes. This representation of the heavens is usually called the heliocentric, or "Sun-centred," system—derived from the Greek *helios*, meaning "Sun."

It took a good while for this theory to be accepted by scientists in other parts of the world, which is interesting. It turns out that we let go of favorite theories and explanations, which we may have learned from childhood, from people we looked up to and cherished, with great difficulty, even when the new fundamental theory, in this case about the universe, is completely logical and solves a lot of problems that older theories couldn't clear up. We are human beings, and emotional reactions often outweigh logical responses, especially when the new theory requires an entirely different, revolutionary way to look at reality.

3. Something very similar is occurring today, and began for Catholics with the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965. A new paradigm required us to begin to look at our faith community, and especially our mission as a community as well as individuals, in an entirely new way that was difficult for many people to accept, even though, as in the case of the Copernican Revolution, the new paradigm cleared up a lot of problems and pointed us in the right direction regarding the true nature of our object of faith—Christ himself, and the Creator who sent both Christ and the Spirit forth from his being, in love. In a sense, we decided to discard an earth-centered model of the universe for a sun-centered model, or paradigm, taking the Church for our planetary home, and Christ for the fixed point of our system of Christian churches and communities, that can be said to “revolve” around this fixed, lifegiving and power point.

Hans Küng, on applying Thomas Kuhn’s work to Church history, identified six paradigm shifts in the history of the Church, and David Bosch went further, identifying a model of mission for each shift in our understanding of the nature of the Church.

4. David Bosch’s book, *Transforming Mission*, has been a helpful tool for understanding mission in every age of our nearly 2,000-year-old Church. Mission refers to Christ’s mission—the Church does not have any mission apart from this one—and this one mission takes certain fundamental forms, as St. John Paul II pointed out in *Redemptoris Missio*. I am avoiding saying that this one mission takes “many” forms, although you could adjust your criteria to argue that this is so (hospitals, drug-treatment programs, catechesis, ...etc.). What was so valuable about Bosch’s contribution to our understanding of mission was that he argued that the one mission of Christ, remaining in effect through all the years, actually takes few forms, and paradigmatically fundamental forms, that respond to the larger challenges and issues of each age and society, and not just merely a day-to-day response to small, national groups in particular historical trends. That is, we can speak of “paradigms” of mission that predominate our view of how to continue the mission of Christ in every major time period. In the West, for example, Bosch, following Hans Küng, identifies six: the “Apocalyptic” paradigm, the Patristic, the Medieval, the Reformed, the Enlightenment and the Ecumenical, in which we are presently operating.

Without going into detail on each of these paradigm shifts, suffice it to say for now that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift, in the Catholic Church, from a medieval model of mission to an ecumenical model of mission, according to David Bosch.

5. When a new way of mission enters into our shared experience of history, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we see that something much more fundamental takes place than a mere change of strategies or priorities. Our very understanding of the Church’s nature, its unchanging, permanent essence, if you like, is discarded, and a new understanding of this nature enters, just as the unchanging reality of a planetary system is seen in a new way, adopting a new fundamental model for understanding this reality. The proposition to look at the Church as, on the one hand, a static pyramid in the midst of the dark, churning sea of the world, providing a stable reference point for ethics and truth, a shelter in times of social revolutions and disturbing scientific theories, is set aside for another proposition, a new paradigm, which in fact was simultaneously adopted by theologians and leaders in both the Protestant and Catholic camps, that of the People of God charged and empowered to continue the mission of Christ, at the service of the world and at the side of the poor, responsive to the call of the Spirit to live out this

one mission in ways that respond to the general needs and questions of our times, and to the hopes and joys, as well. In other words, out of our new perception of the Church as missionary, sent forth, by its very nature, we have a profoundly new understanding of mission itself, one that grows in clarity as we live it in our lives, collectively and individually.

6. Rather strikingly, Thomas Kuhn's book, that inaugurated our modern enthusiasm for the concept of paradigm, offers an insight into the conditions and cause of a paradigm shift in scientific history that may sound very familiar to members of faith-based communities like our own. The shift occurs, Kuhn states, not when a huge amount of data is accumulated, as you might expect, and someone figures out a better way to explain it all. The shift to a new model takes place when a scientist is "inspired" to propose a new theoretical framework, he says. The use of a profoundly spiritual term is startling—suggesting that objective analysis of the phenomenon of paradigm shift has its limitations.
7. Each paradigm had its emblematic biblical reference, I think Bosch has shown convincingly. For the Apocalyptic paradigm of mission, we find the phrase, "I am coming very quickly" (Rev 22:12a), succinctly encapsulating the urgency of announcing the salvific Good News to the ends of the earth before an imminent Second Coming. For the following paradigm shift to a Patristic theoretical model of mission, we find a more mystical quotation, "We have seen his glory" (Jn 1:14c), which is the basis for a more centripetal, rather than centrifugal, model of mission, centered on the liturgical assembly of the faithful, and attracting people to this visible manifestation of God's saving work.
8. The arrival of Christianity to the level of the official religion of the Roman Empire ushered in another change in paradigm which lasted well over a thousand years—the Medieval paradigm of mission as consisting of the joint task of Church and State, and the phrase from one of Jesus' parables describes well the emphasis on the efficacy of the sacrament rather than the formation of the person coming into the Church by Baptism, and nurturing his or her faith through attendance at the other sacramental rituals, "compel them to come in" (Lk 14:23c), which legitimizes even the use of force to make people into both Christians, legally, as well as citizens of the State by the same gesture.
9. Our present transition to an Ecumenical paradigm of mission is, I think, best described and reflected in chapter ten of the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter enters the house, and the whole cultural ambience perceived initially as strange and dangerous to him, of Cornelius, the Gentile.

Ecological Responsibility

10. I felt myself to be in a strange, and somewhat threatening ambience myself, when I first started attending the meetings of the Board of Director of Eco-El Paso, an umbrella organization of green businesses and ecological groups that coordinated joint activities and resources promoting environmentally-responsible construction, renewable energy and sustainable living in

general for our arid region. What am I doing here?, I sometimes asked myself, as accredited ongoing education workshops and sustainable-city grants were talked about and planned for.

11. But this is mission today, crossing the frontiers in society, and just as the Spirit provided clarity for Peter after, and not before, crossing the threshold into the family home of Cornelius, so I found clarity emerging, eventually, about my own role and contribution, about what I had to say and what I had to do, as trust and respect grew among us, and I actively supported the group's activities and planning process.

We live in a time of reckoning with the results of our reckless exploitation of the planet, in which we are invited to discard a violent way of living, the "throwaway culture" that Pope Francis wrote about, to a more dialogical, holistic and sustainable manner of living.

12. Specifically, humanity is beginning to find renewable and clean sources of energy in order to mitigate the effects of pollution on the planet's atmosphere, with the warming of our climate and severe changes to weather patterns, as well as the destructive effects on the biosphere. This is now part of Church teaching on social justice:

"There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of **renewable energy**." (No. 26. *Laudato Si'*)

Example:

Statement before El Paso Mayor and City Council at "Public Comment" session during the meeting held on Tuesday, September 29th, in City Hall (1):

Good morning, Mayor Lesser, and City Council Members.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my opinion to you today. I am deeply concerned over the targeting of solar energy users by the El Paso Electric Company's proposed rate increase measures. Solar energy users, like the Columban Mission Center—of which I am the director—and many churches and buildings belonging to a variety of faith communities in our city, far from being supported in their difficult, and at times costly decision, to change from fossil fuels to renewable energy, are in fact being singled out for punishment, it seems, for their attempts to foster a better relationship with our planet by reducing carbon output and modeling alternative energy sources to the wider community.

Pope Francis in his recent visit to our nation clarified that the mission of the Catholic Church, along with other Christian communities and all leaders concerned about the common good, includes a call to respect the planet and to foster dialogue in the search for new models and policies in society that address both poverty and ecological damage, both realities seen as the direct result of a throwaway culture.

The proposal in question affects both realities in a negative way, and thus presents a logic that is difficult to comprehend, much less ethically accept.

First, it does not use the principal of promoting the common good of our society, and takes the conversion to solar energy out of the hands of the more economically deprived sectors of our city, making it prohibitively expensive for many who struggle to make ends meet as it is.

Secondly, the proposal also fails to recognize the serious nature of our present environmental crisis, and our responsibility to our children and future generations of El Paso residents for the state of our natural home that we will hand on to them.

There is also the matter of the amount of water that needs to be used in each of the two options. Almost no water is involved in the maintenance of solar panels, while the amount of water needed to generate electricity presents a huge challenge to our desert region, already anticipating shortfalls due to drought and changing weather patterns.

Instead of implementing this proposal, and thus charging more of the people who will be using less electricity from the utility, it would be more sensible to follow the example of our water utility, and use a graded scale according to the amount of electricity used by its customers. Those who use more electricity, pay more. Those who use more electricity happen to be those who can afford it, I think it can be said. Such a policy would employ the principal of the common good of our society more faithfully in this manner rather than hindering it.

I ask you then, in the interest of your commitment to serve the common good, do not approve this proposal by our public utility. Instead, let us work together to implement a new policy that makes electricity available in a more equitable way, without damaging our planet nor attacking the very pioneers in renewable energy among us that lead the way to a renewed relationship with Creation.

Thank you.

Rev. Robert E. Mosher, ssc,

We managed to pressure our electric company into withdrawing the proposal to raise rates on solar panel users, but we expect further tensions in the future, until such time as the utility opens its doors to more partners in dialogue, in order to serve the common good before looking to maximize profits.

Conflicts are not to be sought out in our emerging paradigm of mission, but they will certainly be unavoidable, in some cases. The Gospel presents a challenge to all cultures and societies, until such time as the Reign of God arrives in all its fullness, and such challenge will not always be met peacefully. Mission today, as it promotes the Good News of reconciliation with all of Creation, will necessarily be lived by those aware of the need for God's help in the form of courage and clarity, of hope and abilities to work in partnership with a diversity of people from a variety of backgrounds.

Interestingly, I am finding a welcoming attitude on the part of many non-believers to what our Church has to offer. When we have organized workshops for the public, I find myself offering, in a context of familiarity and friendship, where trust has been established in our conversations, two themes for presentation and discussion in the workshops, and the response has been enthusiastic.

On the one hand, I bring up the common challenge all of us involved in promoting sustainable lifestyles today—what keeps us going? Where do we get our own emotional energy, our peace and joy and hope, in order to keep insisting on a new lifestyle and perspective towards our natural home in the

face of skepticism and even open confrontation, along with a deliberate disregard for the importance of the proposition? I raise this question, and then I offer some thoughts on developing a “spirituality of sustainability”.

Speaking in terms of “spirituality” finds a ready receptiveness in many people today, who prefer this to other more “religious” terms that might be experienced as binding them to an institution or a rigid way of life out of sync with current trends, often understandingly rejecting any association with organizations whose leaders have allowed the abuse of children to take place over decades, or with one-issue movements that angrily insist on judging as enemies and criminals everyone outside them. “Spirituality” seems to be a path of mission today in a way that finds open doors and welcoming attitudes, and that allows us to speak appealingly about staying close to a transcendent Source of hope and energy and peace, in the midst of a difficult and conflictive situation that resists proposals for new lifestyles and more open institutions.

Secondly, we can also speak with some experience and focus on the ethical implications of purchasing environmentally-responsible products such as solar panels, wind turbines and geo-thermal units. Which companies should we purchase from—not just in terms of affordability, and quality of products, but in terms of the treatment of employees, and the other activities associated with the company. Do they pay just wages, and respect the right of their workers to organize themselves? Are the working conditions safe, and the hours respectful of their workers’ needs for recreation, family time and rest? Are there differences between the wages of men and women? Are they family friendly, providing daycare, maternity and childcare leave?

And, what other products do the companies offering ecologically responsible items for sale put on the market, or provide for governments and corporations? Do they produce military hardware? Where does this hardware go? Are dictatorships or other repressive regimes supported by their products? Personally, I will always have questions about the Mercedes-Benz company, after being pushed around by the water cannons of vehicles bearing their brand name in Chile in the 1980s.

Members of faith communities are used to asking these kind of questions, and can contribute to the ethos of ecological groups by their research and experience, both in terms of the kind of spirituality that sustains the sustainable lifestyle in the midst of a consumerist society, and the kind of moral questions to be asked of companies that produce all kinds of materials, both environmentally friendly and socially destructive. Our Christian way of life, in particular, requires of us a witness to Gospel values that will impact those around us and arouse their curiosity and desire to know more, allowing God to touch the hearts of those we engage in conversations and support in concerted actions promoting the values and vision that we have in common.

Option for the Poor

Refugees and migrants have arrived in El Paso and Juarez for many years, especially since the U.S. government encouraged Mexican citizens to help out with the planting and harvesting of farm fields

during World War II, given the shortage of men and women, sent to join the military forces and to work in factories dedicated to the war effort. The “Brazeros” program lasted until the 1960s, and although seasonal farm workers are not covered under the labor relations act and therefore are not covered by the provisions of minimum wage and social security, still they come to help put food on our tables, in many cases paying taxes but receiving few, if any benefits from our government.

In 2014, we in the Borderlands experience a flood of refugees and migrants, most of them processed and released into the public by our Department of Homeland Security forces, although many families were also separated in order to fill beds at the ICE processing centers with the fathers, or mothers and older children, and thus fulfill the contracts with private security firms and prison security companies. Thanks to Ruben García, the founding director of the Annunciation House shelter, opening its doors to the undocumented since the 1970s, a dozen churches, community centers and our own Columban Mission Center handled the flow, facilitating the contact with family members and friends in other parts of the U.S. in order to have bus or plane tickets reserved for the arrivals, and to feed, house, clothe and accompany them, with teams of ad hoc volunteers working to bring two hot meals a day to each shelter, along with cots and sheets, blankets and donated clothing. The guests also were able to shower in hot water for the first time since leaving their homes, in the majority of cases in Central American nations.

Mission today requires a presence among the estimated 64 million refugees in the world today, in fulfillment of our mandate to announce Good News to the poor, and to welcome the stranger. Cross-cultural missionaries such as my own congregation of St. Columban, in particular are involved in their host countries in these efforts, both in the U.S. and abroad, helping to organize the work of solidarity among the Bolivians who arrive in Chile, the Filipinos who work in Taiwan, the Nigerians who seek asylum in the United Kingdom, etc.

The presence of refugees in our mission center gave volunteers an intense experience of solidarity that was tremendously enriching for their faith lives, while bringing us all into contact with people for whom God was called upon frequently during their odysseys, people who evangelize their host communities by the witnessing to their own faith, something that Paul VI pointed out in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

Dialogue that Begins with Listening

Key to the future of mission in its cross-cultural dimension is the openness to learn—from the presence of the Holy Spirit in the cultural life of the group or people we enter among, from the outside, already manifesting the salvific work of God in their own collective search to reconnect with the source of peace, joy and liberation. We enter into a world of meaning and art new to us with the trepidation and openness born of a sense of partnership with God, and intimacy with God, both fearful and hopeful, often with a sense of violating long-held prejudices and warnings from our own culture—all present in the arrival of Peter at the threshold of Cornelius, described by Luke the Evangelist in the 10th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

I love this chapter. It is a detailed rendering of an experience of mission that resonates well with our present paradigm of mission, I have thought for nearly 20 years, now. In this chapter we have the

experience of Peter in prayer that is disconcerting and leaves him confused and pensive, after which an invitation to travel to the house of a person considered impure and foreign arrives. He immediately goes with the messenger to this house, and he knows that entering this house will place him in a state of impurity that he will have to ritually cleanse himself of, when he returns to his own religious milieu. He states as much:

“You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?”

Although “greatly puzzled” by his recent vision, Peter is beginning to sense the significance of the experience for his response to this invitation—for, in other words, his entrance into a mission situation. Previous taboos about visiting foreigners are discarded by this act of crossing the threshold, or border, of this house.

The mention of the house is itself, a think, a deep source of associated dimensions. A house provides security and shelter for the group that lives there. The group is always, in some sense, a family, often living with a shared ancestry, and in all cases with a shared cultural world of meaning and perspective, and basic values—allowing for individual expressions of thought and feeling, talents and personality.

By entering the house of a non-Jew, Peter enters a world of shared meaning, values and symbols that is unknown to him. Peter does not give a speech when he enters. He has no plans. He does not know what to do, what his role is, if any, and much less what he might say. So, his first words are, “Why have you sent for me?” Why am I here? He enters the house of Cornelius with the attitude of learning, of openness to discovery, and of conviction that it has everything to do with the religious vision he has recently experienced. But he waits, patiently.

Who knows how long the speech of Cornelius takes? Luke gives us no clue, although it is reasonable to think that that the sacred author means to show that the whole incident took place in the course of a few hours, at the most. But it is unstructured time. No one is concerned about meals, or darkness, or any of the markers of a day present in all cultures. Time is not relevant, here—it takes the time that it takes. And that’s one of the wonderful things about this event, as written about by Luke: it’s so applicable to the experience of cross-cultural mission in our own age, in the sense of allowing us to sense that maybe a long time is needed to listen to the “speech” of the Corneliuses we may be invited to approach today.

It may take time to study and understand the language, and the nuances of the language, together with shared references to experiences understood and valued by the speaker, or speakers. Anthropologists believe that any study of a people is valuable to the extent that it is the fruit of a lengthy presence among that people—a few years, at least, would back up the observations and theories put forward by the scientist, who would later write on it. Cross-cultural missionaries say the same thing—the longer you live among a people, the more you get to know and appreciate them and their culture. Most of us despair of ever getting to a 100% identification with the people—a taxi driver in Santiago once asked me, when I told him in our conversation how long I had been in the country of Chile, “20 years in Chile, and you still talk like that?” It takes most of us a long time to really “get” a

language, with all its nuances, and we may never get to speak like a member of the people we live among, just because of personal abilities and limitations.

Language, too, is more than speech. It is all the varied manners of expression, individual and communitarian. It involves musical expression, artistic expression, philosophical expression, and, most significantly, religious or spiritual expression. It involves the voice of a people's history, as well, the lessons collectively learned from the past, and all the overlapping of this voice in the edifices and architecture, the urban design and the food and the clothing, the styles of life and the structures of organizations, ...so many ways that the Corneliuses of any place, of any cultural group, express their longings and their experiences of the transcendent, of the spiritual, of God.

Peter goes in, to listen, and to learn. This was the one of the first experiences of mission, Luke tells us, and it is the future of mission for us, starting now. It takes a long time. It is sustained by our personal experience of God, and a desire to find out what our experience of God really means, and how it is relevant to the cross-cultural situation.

Peter goes in, and experiences both the honeymoon period of culture shock, and the roller-coaster of emotional dives and climbs over the time he carefully "listens" to Cornelius. You can see that he is, at first, pretty pumped about what he's going to hear from Cornelius, because he knows that the clarity about his own experience of God will be forthcoming. He trusts in God enough to expect that. He also expects some clarity about what he might say in response, or at least, he's not worried about it.

Perhaps a pause to reflect on the nature of this story would be helpful at this point, so that we don't speculate excessively about the details of the incident that lies behind this written description. Exegesis has opened large new doors of meaning into texts like this, which are inspired by the Holy Spirit, we believe, and thus are the Word of God, at the same time that we appreciate the author's intention and audience, the situation of his audience, the literary style and genre and other factors that scientific analysis helps us to integrate into our reading of this chapter.

Luke is recognized as a skilled writer, with elegant Greek, and is thought to use his sources of information about Jesus and the apostles creatively. He's not "making stuff up", of course. But, like all the other writers of books in both the Old and the New Testaments, he uses his skills in a way that addresses the concerns and situation of his listeners, his intended audience, while transmitting what the Holy Spirit inspires him to say about this collection of sayings and incidents in his own words and images and literary forms.

One of the favorite techniques of Luke's that we see repeated in both his works, is that of presenting two figures, who help each other out, as community is created as a result, and the meaning of events is decided upon as a community. We see this early on in Luke's Gospel, when Mary and Zechariah are both visited by angels, with contrasting results, Mary's celebrated response a counterpoint to Zechariah's silence, and we see it again in the Emmaus experience of two disciples accompanied by the Risen Lord. Here, as well, and in the following four chapters of Acts, we see Peter helping Cornelius, and, in the process, Cornelius helping Peter, understand their experiences of God, which then eventually leads to Peter and Paul speaking aloud of their experiences, and coming to an agreement, persuading the leaders of the early Church to not trouble the Gentiles with the unnecessary burden of becoming Jewish—with circumcision for males, and all—before entering the community of the faithful.

No one really doubts that actual events are described, but they are presented in such a way as to emphasize the community process of interpretation of the experience of God, as the mission of Christ is taken up by his community, in the Spirit, in ways that are illuminated and agreed upon by debate and consensus, given a meaning and content that makes sense to believers, and motivates those charged with sharing the Good News to towns and cities and countries throughout the known world. An urgency to this mission comes from the widespread expectation of the immanent second coming of the Lord, which makes travel to the ends of the earth a necessary task, to be completed as soon as possible. It is a saving message that missionaries bring with them, and in order for as many nations and people to be saved as possible, before history ends with judgement, the Good News must be preached to all.

In a sense, then, what we are about today, discussing the “future of mission”, is continuing the task of the early Church, of, indeed, the first followers of Jesus after the death and resurrection of Christ. We won’t reach any authoritative conclusions, of course—we are not a synod, or a council of bishops—but we may gain some insight personally, and collectively, as we reflect theologically upon our experiences just as Peter did, as Luke writes about him, confident that the principles of mission are found in the history of mission, in the very experience of crossing over the threshold of Cornelius as we live it today, and into the future.

What have we heard from the Corneliuses of today, and what does this mean for the mission of the future?

The speech of Cornelius can be heard, seen and perceived around us, in the voices and other expressions of those who invite us into their worlds, their homes and their own cultural universes of meaning, over a lengthy period of time. These voices tend to confirm the features of an entirely new model of mission, inaugurated at the Second Vatican Council and, for other Christians, in the establishment of the World Council of Churches out of the missionary conferences of the early 20th century, culminating in the incorporation of the International Missionary Conference into the organic structure of the WCC in the early 1960s, simultaneous with the declaration of our own bishops that the essential nature of the Church is missionary, in their documents.

Peace is longed for, more intensely than in many ages, and real insight into the conditions that are necessary to establish for a lasting peace were expressed by many sources, in the period after World War II. Social justice has emerged as an essential element of mission, since it responds most effectively and fundamentally to this cry for peace. Promotion of the dignity of the human person, from conception to the last stages of life, is another condition for peace, especially where that dignity is most threatened. The longing for an end to poverty, pollution, armed violence, war, the death penalty, abortion, racial, religious and gender discrimination, the marginalization of those who identify as homosexual, a consumerist, throwaway lifestyle, a broken, destructive relationship with our natural home we hear in the voice of Cornelius today, along with his hope that the Christian community that enters his, or her world will bring with them a new revelation that will inspire hope and an experience of involvement and reconnection with a world of respect for all individuals, and with a source of limitless hope and love and liberation from sin and death. We hear that, and then we, like Peter, say, “Now I understand.” We are filled with a clarity of vision about what it is we have to do, while we listen to Cornelius, recognizing that God’s love reaches beyond all borders, and is destined to touch the lives of all who search for it. In the words found in Peter’s mouth in this chapter,

"...God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ..."

Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation

In this very sentence, we find a response by our faith community that is lived out in interfaith dialogue and cooperation, one of the hallmarks of mission today. All people who follow their conscience and bring their lives into harmony with the will of God are acceptable to God, and this obviously includes those who enshrine certain practices and beliefs into a system of religious or spiritual traditions over generations, traditions that offer people ways to approach a source of peace and joy that everyone searches for, beyond what is available from material comforts. All societies and peoples have preserved treasured systems for making an experience of fullness and joy, of reconnection to the source of the transcendent, a longing that finds expression in our own inspired account of the fall of our first parents, which comes from the universal experience of life as always lacking something, when it lacks closeness to God.

The Second Vatican Council gave eloquent expression of this form of mission in several places, but most importantly, Jesus himself encourages his followers to discover, as he did, the faith that exists outside of our own community, which might be even greater than our own faith, or capable of convincing us of the need to change our plans and question some our certainties. If Jesus was sure that God's will was expressed to the patriarchs and matriarchs of his own people, as he was, being a pious Jew, he nevertheless admired the faith of a non-Jewish military officer of Rome, and let himself change his mind about healing the daughter of a wise, persistent woman of Syro-Phoenician origin. In practice, the future of mission will be lived in cooperation with other faith communities in the promotion of both the values we have in common as well as in the defense and promotion of welfare of the other community.

I've had many experiences of interfaith dialogue in my career as a missionary, both in South America and here in the U.S. Perhaps the most dramatic and formative was when our Interfaith Alliance of El Paso and Southern New Mexico responded to the bombing of three Christian churches in the neighboring city of Las Cruces, New Mexico, several years ago. Thanks to the wonders of e-mail, we formulated and put our names to a statement that very same day. I brought a print-out of the statement with me as I raced to an impromptu, outdoor interfaith event to denounce the act that same evening, in Las Cruces, a 40-minute drive away. What happens to one of our communities, happens to all of us—this is our stated principle for association with each other in this organization.

I also had the opportunity to speak at an interfaith event that centered on the theme of ecological responsibility. In part, I stated some principles that people from a wide range of traditions and religions seem to agree with:

Revelation, reconnection and remembrance: all of our faith communities represented here tonight provide these three vital functions for the life and well-being of our society. Revelation is found in the preservation and sharing of truths that have been received by people of our respective traditions over time, referring to realities that need such revelation in order to be appreciated by human beings. The unveiling of the true nature of existence then helps us to experience a reconnection with the source

of peace and joy, and of liberation from the restrictions and forms of slaveries that human beings often fall into, even on a daily basis. And we reconnect with the source of such a peaceful and happy life when this revelation is remembered, in a community-based way, through ritual and song, dance and recitation of sacred texts.

In this way, our current context of concern over climate change brings us closer to one another. It brings our communities closer in a way that shows, when it comes to authentic religious and spiritual communities, there's no way out for any of us, other than through a new relationship of respect for and reconciliation with the planet. None of us are here to assuage guilty consciences without repentance. None of us are here to justify contaminating and consumerist lifestyles. None of us are here to promote fossil fuels that contribute to greenhouse gases and the warming of our planet, or the poor and short-term logic behind fracking or the continued use of disposable bottles. We are all on board with the fundamental awakening of human beings, of the human spirit, to the deeper realities we often do not want to acknowledge, but cannot live without—the spiritual dimension that requires a certain way to live, in community with each other and within the larger community of existence.

Result-driven people, the part within many of us that looks for immediate results, may drive us to despair of having much, if any effect on climate change and the ecological crisis in the short run, but our faith communities help people to discover deep reservoirs of patience and persistence, and the wisdom and joy of being found doing the right, responsible thing, even when the effects are unobservable or long-range.

The change that occurs within, in our own attitudes, perspective and decision-making processes, might be the only appreciable events to contemplate, but in itself this also can be a source of profound satisfaction and of reconnection with our planet and its biocommunity.

The sun has set, and the sky grows dark around us, but the light of our traditions and communities is an everlasting light of renewable spiritual energy, fueling our actions and perspectives with courage and confidence and inner peace. May we always live in this light, this unlimited resource, with great respect for one another and appreciative of the contributions of all here to a healthier way of life for the human family, and for our extended family of the universe and for its living inhabitants.

Ecumenism

Peter was not alone. Members of his community accompanied him, and a consensus was later reached by the Church itself on the meaning of the event—that the Holy Spirit descended upon the

Gentiles, too. Chapter ten of Acts is sometimes called the “Pentecost of the Gentiles”, in fact, in contrast to Luke’s description of Pentecost itself, which spoke only of Jews receiving the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of flames descending upon the head of each of them. They were Jews of many different nations and languages, but they were Jews. It was the speaking in tongues in the house of Cornelius that visibly manifested the presence of the Holy Spirit in that new people, and removed any obstacle to celebrating that presence with the sacrament of Baptism. By the way, the justification for the older Churches in the West like our Catholic Church to practice infant baptism, as well as the Orthodox and Eastern Churches, has often been found in this event, since it was understood that the entire household of Cornelius was baptized, including minors not yet capable of a mature decision to enter the Church.

The baptism of adults versus the baptism of adults and children are divergent practices in the Christian world, and this fact reminds me of the remarkable experiences of ecumenical cooperation I experienced in Chile. The unity of Christians is another feature of our present paradigm of mission, and increasingly understood as a necessary condition for effective mission, since the divisions among those who proclaim Christ as savior obviously and scandalously contradict the message of reconciliation and unlimited forgiveness that lie at the heart of the Gospel we offer the world. People see us denouncing and competing with each other, and wonder what could possibly be new or alternative about Christianity. Same old, same old: yet another group that contradicts itself, and offer a false hope in a time of intense desperation over conflicts and violence.

In Chile, we lived over several decades two principle experiences of reconciliation and cooperation among Christians. We experienced the vital importance of confronting social evil, in the form of a brutal dictatorship, in a united and resource-sharing manner, denouncing with one voice the injustices that the government inflicted on the people on a daily basis during the 17 years the regime lasted, and setting up human-rights facilities throughout the country, with generous financial backing from the World Council of Churches and the participation of many of the historical Christian churches and communities in the country, along with many, but not the majority, of Pentecostal Christian communities.

After the dictatorship ended peacefully in 1990, we also experienced a pastoral and doctrinal step towards the visible unity of all Christians into one Church. The sacrament of baptism was thought to be a common theme among most Christian bodies, and a common statement was worked on by theologians from a dozen different Christian traditions, finally signed in the late 1990s. The statement was accompanied by a declaration from the signatory Churches and communities to recognize the legitimacy of the baptisms performed by all the parties, as well as the documents attesting to the baptisms. This alleviated a pastoral issue among us, of what sort of document could be accepted for enrolling a child in a Catholic school, for instance, or for mixed-rite marriages of Christians from different ecclesiastical backgrounds. Now, all our diverse baptismal documents could be accepted, and the ceremony that took place of all the heads of the major denominations in Chile included the interchange of rituals. It was the first time a document like this was formulated and signed by other Churches and Communion, along with the Roman Catholic Church.

The future of mission is the living experience of growing unity among Christians, a unity that forms the basis for a credible and consistent announcement of the Good News of reconciliation. This allows common witness before a divided and violent world of the work of God present among the

followers of Christ, evidence of the Holy Spirit bringing visible unity about among Christians, as Christ himself prayed for at the Last Supper ("Father, may they be one, even as you and I are one."), in surprising, unexpected ways. It is our common openness to learn from God, and to trust in the Spirit, that will open doors to unity in surprising and sometimes sudden ways, as we cross over each other's boundaries, attend each other's gatherings, pray together, address social evils and determine what differences would justify our further separation, as opposed to the differences that merely indicate a legitimate diversity within the one Body of Christ that spiritually unites us.

Again, consistent with the proposition that we enter into mission with trust, and find clarity in the process, and not before, I'd like to offer the example of our own priest in Rancho Anapra, on the western outskirts of Juarez City in Mexico, who found ecumenism in a surprising and opportune way, a door that beckoned and seemed to open before him without calculation or planning, a *Kairos* moment that offered a kind of conversion experience and an identification of previous attitudes that were easily discarded in the face of a reality created by the Spirit of God.

(Father Kevin Mullins, a Columban mission priest from Queensland, Australia, has served in Mexico for 15 years. He writes:)

One of the saddest Counter witnesses to the love of the Gospel of Christ in Mexico is the mutual intolerance which exists between the Christian churches and various Ministries, which make up part of the Mosaic of Christian believers here.

It has been my experience to have been ignored and shunned by some of my Evangelical brothers and sisters, because of being a Catholic Priest. The Catholic Church is routinely condemned by Evangelical Ministers and generally blamed for all manner of ills, and accused of being "The Beast of Rome" along with other even less flattering criticisms!!

In this photograph, from left to right, we see Mr. Leo Tenorio, our full time Evangelist in the Catholic Parish of Corpus Christi in Ranch Anapra, and Pastor Luis Morin of the Rose of Sharon Ministries, with the current Catholic Pastor, Father Kevin Mullins.

Pastor Luis has been ministering to his flock in Rancho Anapra for the last 13 years, along with his wife Alondra and 3 children.

Contrary to my experience with some other pastors, Pastor Luis has always been most friendly and tolerant towards other faith traditions. He is a gentleman of deep faith and conviction, basing his life on in a Biblical interpretation which takes seriously Christ's injunction to "love one another."

Hence, I was delighted to meet him one day down at our Parish Church. At first he apologized for the inconvenience of his visit...which I quickly made clear, was no inconvenience! He explained that his Ministry needed some chairs for the folk attending their Praise meetings, which had been drawing crowds of late. Leo and I quickly loaded up 30 chairs and delivered them to him, post haste!

However, we both find ourselves some 9 years later with a need for more chairs to cater for our respective overflow crowds.

Therefore, both of us, the Pastor of a Mexican Evangelical Church and the Pastor of a Catholic Parish, are requesting your fiscal assistance for the purchase of more chairs. In the midst of what can occasionally

be a hateful lack of respectful dialogue, two Christian communities in México are appealing to your sense of Ecumenical generosity at this time.

Peace and Blessings to you all,

Father Kevin Mullins and Pastor José Morin.

Docility

Peter shows an extraordinary openness to learn, as he leaves his home and journeys to the house of Cornelius. This touches, in a challenging way, on one of our weaknesses as a people, I think: the intense desire, even obsession, to control outcomes, and plan for any eventuality. The need to control a world that constantly contradicts our expectations and sense of security, in fact, may be reaching its apotheosis in the events of the past year in this country.

As I mentioned at the introduction, the very title of this conference was a suggestion made to me, and I wonder about it. “Tell us about the future of mission,” the invitation seems to say—and, of course, I think I understood at once the concern behind the request. There is a lot of uncertainty, these days, about what our present paradigm of mission looks like, and we feel a deep need for clarification, and certainty about what to expect.

The need for clarification is not something bad, in itself. The desire to get a clearer picture on how to live, as a follower of Christ trained as a disciple and sent forth as a missionary, is natural, and God responds to this need. But how well do we live with mystery, and do we develop the necessary attitudes of patient analysis and receptivity, including the discarding of preconceived notions, that lead the way to the clarity that God gives?

We are children of the Enlightenment, with all the positive as well as the negative that this label implies. We are enamored of our intellectual ability to probe mysteries in nature and every other dimension of reality, and to solve problems with our capacity for reason. This has led to great progress technologically, but morally and spiritually, this has led to great disasters, as well. Pope Francis points out this tendency clearly, in *Laudato Si'*:

The basic problem goes even deeper: it is the way that humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm. This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation. Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in

technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. It is the false notion that "an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed". [No. 106]

You'll notice that we return to the use of paradigm, or fundamental model with which we view reality, to understand the problem of pollution and destruction of our natural home. In this paragraph, which is now part of our Church's magisterium on social justice, we can, I think, clearly perceive that an overweening confidence in our rational capacity to solve problems can create a dangerous hubris in our collective mind—a hubris evident in our government's policies, corporations' plans and military's actions, often in concert with each other. Typical of this attitude is the well-known and dismal record of the Central Intelligence Agency in interpreting and predicting world events. It is actually illustrative of this point—rationalism leading to an unwarranted level of certainty. We are talking about an intelligence-gathering agency of the national government relying solely on information that is paid for, rewarding people for telling them what they want to know, people who know what kind of information will be rewarded by their 'handlers', and tending to select information that confirms a previously-existing worldview and theory, while ignoring the rest, if it even arrives. The results are consistently epic failures, and not just in terms of anticipating and understanding the Iranian revolution of 1979, for instance, but even more importantly, are used to justify violent interventions in the affairs of other democratic nations, like Chile in 1973, that led to the murder, disappearance, torture and exile of thousands, and the establishment of a dictatorship for 17 years.

My own experience in Chile over the nearly three decades I was there confirms that a paradigm based on the head, rather than the heart, runs headlong into the mission of the Church, which is certainly centered more on love, rather than thought. Thinking has its place, but it is in the service of love, and not over it, that it finds its proper role. The Enlightenment has led to what Leonardo Boff has called the "hegemony of reason", and Pope Francis shows us with precision what this hubris has done to the environment, as well as to the human family, and how that contradicts God's will, as revealed in Christ. His encyclical, in fact, links poverty and pollution as products of the same tendency, and encourages to respond to both "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor".

Obsession to Anticipate the Future

Our theme could be understood to spring from this disorder—the overwhelming passion to predict and know the future, to calculate coming costs, to ensure measures to provide safety and comfort. Other peoples seem more comfortable with life, so as not to be overly concerned about what may lie ahead. Our own mystics and theologians—Thomas Merton comes to mind—have warned us about the pragmatism of U.S. culture, and our "aggressively unreflective" lifestyle.

A woman in Juarez in a small, conversational group I was a part of, shared with us of what a wonderful experience it always is for her to cross over the international bridge a few blocks away from our Columban Mission Center, and return to her Mexican city of Juarez for a day or two. She gets recharged from visits there, and feels a huge sense of relief when she is in her home country. "I don't have to be anywhere at a certain hour, I don't have to get something done before a certain time. It's a wonderful time, just to be there."

The capacity to be fully in the present moment is something that Buddhist traditions have helped us to focus on, in fact—one of the fruits of interfaith dialogue has been the integration of meditative practices into our Christian prayer times.

Challenges to Living Mission Today (and in the Foreseeable Future)

What feelings come up as we contemplate Peter's attitudes of trust and openness? How challenging is this evident freedom to speak and act in unforeseen ways to us as pragmatic, confident U.S. citizens and members of a people known both for pragmatism and initiative?

In the Boy Scouts, we find the motto: "Be prepared." It is one of many ways we can identify the basic values we share as a people, growing up in U.S. culture: in this case, the virtue of planning ahead is instilled in us from an early age, which can foment not only a wise approach to the challenges of the future, but also a reliance upon our own ability to foresee and identify possible threats to security and well-being in the future, with an obsession to control all possible outcomes, covering every eventuality.

Mission requires a placing of our security in God's hands, and a confidence born of God's own Spirit. It is one of the hallmarks of those sent by God, throughout Salvation History, as described by the inspired writers of both the Old and the New Testaments: a gift of God's Spirit, to strengthen the weak, to give eloquence to the stammering, to convince the powerful, to sustain the messenger.

Peter, as an apostle, or one sent by God, continues in a long line of *seluhim*, of the messengers that both announce God's word, and speak with God's authority as a spokesperson, or vicariously, as an ambassador does. In fact, the entire community gathered at Pentecost receives this gift of the *ruah* of God, which makes the entire People of God a people sent forth to announce a message from God, giving this new community the strength and courage they need to boldly cross all boundaries separating members of the human family from each other, from their natural home, overcoming even the divisions within us, and most importantly the breach between the human family and the Creator.

But this gift for those sent by God makes them bold and challenging in a way that is faithful to the message they announce, without mixing it with personal interests or other messages. It requires an openness to learn, and even to set aside preconceptions, rather than intensive planning and a focus on teaching others. What our role is as those missioned, what we have to do, and what we have to say, is discovered in the context of mission, and perceived with clarity only after listening, and discovery. In a word, we have to appreciate the unknowability of God, who calls us to the situation where clarity follows inquiry, and our roles are revealed in the very history of mission, and experience of encounter and dialogue. And as we see and embrace the role laid out for us, after discarding any plans or ideas before crossing the threshold into a new cultural reality, we see and embrace in a new manner our own understanding of ourselves in relation to God, and live increasingly a spirituality that is cleansed of self-regard and prejudice.

-Fear of Mystery

Peter lets go of the pressing need to understand his vision long enough for God to give him clarity, eventually. Like Mary, he seems to exhibit the capacity to "store these things in the heart", until

such time as the meaning of the event becomes clear, and God provides an answer to some of his fundamental, pressing but unavoidable questions.

This is really difficult for us, as North Americans, and Westerners. The internet has sharpened this desire, I think, to find out about things, and why things happen to us. One of the factors that helps explain the growth of marginal religious movements, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Mormons, I think, is the need for clarification. People who live, or survive, on the fringes of society, in the midst of poverty and hardship, often can't find a satisfactory answer to the question, Why is this happening to me, and to my family, and my community? There is a deep need for answers, especially among those who lack the opportunities for formal education. Marginal religious movements give answers, and very clear ones, which provide a sense not only of relief, but for valuing one's own identity as a member of a group of people who may not have much power or wealth now, but are convinced that they will be first in line in a new reality that will arrive in time.

All marginal movements, both religious and political, both sporting and criminal, seem to have this in common: providing a sense of belonging to a group with a specific role in creating a more just reality—"just" solely in terms of their own group, of course. Even criminal groups feel that they are taking what is theirs by right, somehow, something denied them in the rest of society, although this belief may not be very elaborate or subject to the testing of logic and intellectual coherency.

They satisfy the same needs, which is why they are generally exclusive of each other, even though they belong to different worlds, and should, in theory, be compatible enough to allow membership in two or more at the same time. But you will seldom find a Jehovah's Witness who is also a member of a political party, or a Communist who also belongs to a Pentecostal church. They tend to exclude each other—even Evangelical pastors complain about sports activities as 'taking time from the Gospel' in many Latin American countries—because membership in one offers a complete world of meaning, and an experience of belonging, that includes an explanation for one's poverty and suffering within that encompassing cosmology, meeting a basic need for clarity about the cause of one's marginalization, as well as about the transcendent purpose of one's life.

I will just briefly note how "mission" has been used and manipulated to satisfy this deep need for a transcendent, noble mission in life. Corporations and other business entities have for a long time, now, recognized that the task of formulating a "mission statement" is highly motivating for their workers, in terms of production and enthusiasm for the company's activity. No one is really motivated to give their best by greed—the promise of a sizable income fails to sufficiently animate the workers, it seems. So the company directors found that the exercise of formulating a declaration of this kind compensates for the limitations of monetary gain, borrowing from the inventors, or 'intellectual authors', if you will, of the concept of mission in order to get more productivity, without raising salaries, out of their employees. We may want to demand a certain criteria of approved behavior and operative values from companies in the future, before granting a certificate of authentic mission to such organizations.

"Mission" comes from, originally, Christian activities, specifically the enterprises of the Jesuits in the 16th century that carried them to distant lands, and hostile environments. The nobility of the task provided European languages with a concept that was synonymous with self-sacrifice and heroics and the highest of values, which perdures today: space missions, diplomatic missions, military missions, "Mission Impossible" and "mission statements" all draw from this root meaning of an assigned task

requiring travel and extraordinary personal resources, in order to create a better world or achieve a high ideal. Just a few days ago, the New York Times ran a headline, “Journalists, Battered and Groggy, Find a Renewed Sense of Mission”. It is a way of taking advantage of the deeply human need present in everyone, to some degree, to sacrifice oneself for a noble purpose, and provide a better future for future generations—to go on a mission.

The element of mystery, of the unknown, is part of the mystique of mission—uncomfortable, and yet stimulating in its challenge, for a nation that prides itself on planning and executions of plans despite huge odds, bowing its collective head to a God who, it is convinced, is on their side, and blesses their every venture. “Let God sort them out,” is perhaps the most horrible extension of this belief, which seems to legitimize a lack of ethical concern for the collateral damage inflicted by our military’s weapons.

Mystery properly appreciated would actually establish a health suspicion in our lives that clarity is not achievable by human effort, alone. When we have things extremely clear, we will probably want to draw back from such clarity. Only clarity that results from an openness to be taught by God is worth investing in, if we consider mission important. We recall that “mission” comes from the Latin verb “mittere”, “to send”, and thus, by appreciating the need to live with mystery, with unknowability, we appreciate that we are not sending ourselves, nor is it precisely the Church that sends us. True to our new, Christ-centered paradigm of mission, we consider ourselves as sent by Christ to continue his mission, and thus await orders, and the revelation of what precisely we have to do and say, with openness and trust.

-Fear of Intimacy

Trust involves intimacy—and a fear of an intimate relationship with God might be another obstacle we inherit from our cultural heritage. That is, taking God seriously as an entity that might not fit into our preconceived notions about God is one of the tasks of becoming an adult in our faith community. Jesus spent much time and energy in his own earthly mission in Palestine clarifying for his fellow Jews what to legitimately expect of a “Messiah”, as well as who God is, deepening the Israelite understanding of their collective and intergenerational experience of a relationship with God, one that no other nation could lay claim to receiving.

This relationship was experience very early on, from the time of the patriarchs and matriarchs, as one that required, and still requires, a certain way to live of this people. For us, this can be immediately challenging today: our faith community does not just provide us with objective facts about God, but more at the core of the revelation we have received, strong and clear indications about how to live in harmony with God’s will. Believing in God, that is, means there are consequences for one’s lifestyle and decision-making, both long-term and daily. Saying “We believe” in the Creed carries with it the commitment to behave as believers, since this is the door to salvation for us—living our faith in the practice of love, as we commonly say.

Thus we engage in a pattern of life that brings us ever closer to God

-Fear of Community

Working-class life in the U.S. has been described as an isolating experience, most notably, perhaps, in the study written by Lillian Rubin, *Worlds of Pain*, published in 1976. I was impressed by the book during seminary studies, and it remains a standard text in many universities. She described the grim childhood memories of the men and women who make up what was called “the silent majority,” their troubled marriages, uncommunicative sex lives, unfulfilling work, and all too costly leisure. Middle-class aspirations placed a heavy burden on these working-class families, many of whom manage to get by financially, but then slip ever more deeply into debt to purchase cars, washing machines, color televisions, and other prized symbols of social mobility. Her research led her to write eloquently about the reality of a life that, “despite all modern conveniences,” still “costs worlds of pain.”

Studies like this helped me to look at my life in Chilean working-class neighborhoods, called *poblaciones*, short for *poblaciones callampas*, or “mushrooming populations”. This referred to the vast collections of thousands of shacks, each holding an extended family, that would spring up literally overnight in a single, well-organized land-squatting movement that would be impossible to prevent or be removed afterwards by the police, for the sheer number of occupants. The land seizures would take over large empty lots not used for anything, which would legitimize their takeover in the eyes of Catholic moral theologians and even by the social teaching of the Church, since private property is never considered an absolute right, and even St. Thomas Aquinas would not qualify as “theft” the taking of something necessary for the life of the poor. It became a frequent strategy of the poor during the 1940s through the 1970s to alleviate the housing problem.

Chile’s working class today also suffers from such heavy expectations of middle-class life, very similar to the U.S. reality studied by Dr. Rubin—not surprising, since Chicago University’s Milton Friedman and his disciples saw their first opportunity to apply his “disaster capitalism” theories to a nation in shock after the 1973 military coup headed by General Pinochet plunged the Chilean people into a social nightmare of mass murder, disappearances, torture and exile. The dictatorship lasted for 17 years, and I was present for the last 10 of them. “Friedman advised Pinochet to impose a rapid-fire transformation of the economy—tax cuts, free trade, privatized services, cuts to social spending and deregulation. Eventually, Chileans even saw their public schools replaced with voucher-funded private ones. It was the most extreme capitalist makeover ever attempted anywhere, and it became known as a “Chicago School” revolution, since so many of Pinochet’s economists had studied under Friedman at the University of Chicago.”

Fortunately for me, I could still be impressed by many of the surviving humanitarian values in evidence in the working-class neighborhoods, despite the economic upheaval of the 1980s in Chile. Many factories closed, unable to compete with the cheaper imports from China and other countries, as Pinochet made Chile accessible to foreign companies. (Yes, China—despite the ideological differences between the rabidly anti-Marxist “national security” regime in Chile, and the Communist-run People’s Republic, both sides saw profits before principles.) But the organizational ability of the poor remained strong, even in the midst of vast unemployment, thanks to labor unions and political organizations that, although prohibited during the dictatorship, found spaces for their continuing limited activities in churches, monasteries and convents throughout the country, thanks to the leadership of a prophetic conference of Catholic bishops, led by Cardinal Raul Silva Henríquez, archbishop of Santiago.

When Peter is presented as entering the “house” of Cornelius, he is not alone. “Some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him,” Luke tells us. Luke consistently emphasizes that the meaning of events is the result of community discernment, and this chapter is an example of this message.

For people from the U.S., studies tend to confirm that communal experiences are few and far between, neighbors often unacquainted with neighbors, and this results in a certain atrophy in the potential natural social abilities of North Americans, speaking generally. I experience deep admiration for the social abilities of poorer Chileans, for whom isolation is unbearable and the capacity for shared experiences of whole neighborhoods is an energizing and joyful relief from the chronic material deprivation of their lives. This capacity was exercised in a defiant manner during this time, maintaining alive and vibrant the basic values of dignity and self-worth in a people deprived of basic freedoms and frequently repressed with brutal violence.

Similarly, an almost subversive manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the simple households on the margins of the Roman Empire maintained the light of Gospel values practiced by spiritually and morally powerful communities in the midst of a militarily powerful empire promoting its own religious system with sometimes savage brutality. The conscious decision to finally cease requiring converts to ritually become Jewish before baptism opened the doors of the nascent Church to world growth, and began in moments of community experience and discernment like the visit of Peter to Cornelius, an emblematic episode that sets down the principle of clarity about mission taking place in the context of mission, with the added feature of communal witnessing of this clarification, a communal learning process that arrives at its conclusions through discussion and consensus on the meaning of this visual and oral manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Inculturation

This incident described by Luke is an example of inculturation of the Gospel in a given cultural context.

Inculturation is a term that has only appeared in the early 1970s, in the context of the synod in Rome dedicated to evangelization. Pope Paul VI wrote the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* after that synod, summing up the findings of the bishops in his own words, a most lucid document that continues to guide us today. But it was Father Pedro Arrupe, superior general of the Jesuits, who reflected on the new term, inculturation, and provided us with some insightful observations about what it really refers to.

We are talking about a term that acknowledges the value of the word “culture”, and indirectly of the science of cultural anthropology for the mission of the Church. St. John XXIII first used the term “culture” extensively in his writings, and the Second Vatican Council noted everyone’s “right” to culture in terms of participation in society and education, notably in *Lumen Gentium*. The recognition in this gathering of our identity as a world church, beyond the ethnocentrism of previous centuries, was a confirmation of one of the basic features of the new paradigm of mission—the value of every culture, and the richness of a multicultural body of believers for the Church, as well as the eschatological unity of all cultures in Christ, giving a common goal that unites without reductionism or homogenization, but just

the opposite: the Gospel enhances the particular beauty of each culture, while giving all cultures a common finality in the fullness of the Reign of God.

The term “inculturation” refers to the process by which the Gospel becomes a normative experience, to use Arrupe’s term, for a given cultural group. As in Acts 10, we are referring to something that manifests God own action in a society, and not something planned and executed according to rational calculations and strategies.

Example:

I heard some years ago of an event in the life of a small village in Mozambique, from a friend of mine who is a Chilean priest living and working in that country. It illustrates for me, in a small but beautifully clear way, the sort of process we’re talking about when we speak of inculturation. It was the custom in that village, as it is throughout Africa, to have a naming ceremony for a newly born child, in order to officially recognize and accept the new creature as a person and member of the village community. When a girl is born, only women are allowed to take part in the ceremony. However, one day this priest, and several male elders of the village were invited to attend and observe the naming ceremony of a newborn girl, by the women of the village. They explained to the priest and the elders that the women had recalled the words of St. Paul (Gal 3:28) that “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” On the basis of this teaching, the women decided to invite certain men of the village, to more deeply reflect the Gospel value of which Paul speaks, and which Jesus lived in his own earthly ministry, drawing close to women many times, according to the canonical Gospels.

This is a clear example, I think, of what inculturation is, and how it cannot be imposed on one people by Christians from another people. It springs from the communal heart of a people, a fruit of reflection upon their own experience in the light of the Gospel, a free decision of their own on how to intensify, modify or discard a tradition, a perspective, a custom or an institution on the basis of a prayerful, reflective understanding of a particular Gospel value. The priest, a foreigner as well as representative of the wider Church, was informed—he was not the author of the change in their customs and beliefs.

Workshops:

Identify your own experiences in at least two of these categories: personal reflection, sharing in group. What principles of mission today can we draw from your own experience of witness, dialogue, listening, prayer, guidance by the Spirit, emerging clarity, receptivity, surprises?

What feelings come up as we consider the disappearance of older, more familiar forms of mission?

What feelings come up as we consider the appearance of new, unknown features of mission today?

What aspects of our life as people of faith will be needed as resources to live faithfully the mission of Christ today?