

# **“MEGATRENDS AND MISSION: RE-IMAGING THE MISSIONARY IN THE NEW WORLD”**

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## **Introduction**

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the shape of mission in the twenty-first century was a concern among many missiologists in the world. Part of the discussion on the shape of mission was the identification of the social events and processes, or current trends that have a bearing on what mission would look like in the twenty-first century. Not long ago, three Megatrends were identified for our consideration, namely: *mega*-migration, *mega*-urbanization, and *mega*-mediatization. Very observable in the description of the trends is the addition of the word *mega*. This is to emphasize the enormity of the trends. In simple terms, we can say that there is so much migration, urbanization, and mediatization going on in the world. Never before has the world experienced these trends in great magnitude.

## **Old and New Boundaries**

It is said that globalization has caused the breaking down of many boundaries, many frontiers. To symbolize the breakdown of the old frontier, is the fall of the Wall of Berlin (11/0) and the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in New York (9/11). Did the event of 11/9 (the fall of the wall signal the fall of the tower in New York in 9/11? You can have your own answer or opinion about these events. What is important is that the wall and the tower, symbols of bordering the free from the unfree, and the rich from the poor, have collapsed. Such collapse brought about many changes in the world.

One of these changes is the emergence of new divides, new borders, new frontiers. The old world had old boundaries. But the new world has also new borders, new divides. These new divides separate the migrants from the nationals or locals, the rural folks and the urban societies, and the illiterates from the literates. These trends are creating the divides or borders that cannot be ignored. They have a significant import for the re-imagining the identity of a missionary in the continents of Asia, Africa and the Pacific.

## **Going to the Other; the Other is Different**

Mission today is described as crossing boundaries. It is going to the public square. It is described as going to the new *Areopagi*, the new public square of the contemporary times (John Paul II. *Redemptoris Missio*, 31-37). In this new

situation, the missionary faces the question of how he/she can establish his/her identity and presence in the public square. In addition, the missionary faces the question of how he/she can establish the meaning and significance of his/her Christian faith without imposing this faith on the religious-other whose faith is different.

The missionary of the past came to teach about his/her understanding of the Christianity. The missionary also came to impose his/her culture on the host culture that was considered inferior, savage and barbaric. Today's missionary, on the contrary, must be a *learner*, a *listener*. To be able to do this, the missionary has to adopt a posture of listening; the missionary goes to the religious-other with the conviction that his/her religion or church possesses exclusively all the truths in all their fullness, then his/her objective is to convert the religious-other.

Followers of other religious traditions are allergic to such conviction. They consider this as neocolonialism. The missionary would not be able to defend himself/herself against the accusation or suspicion of converting the followers of other religions to Christianity. For all he/she knows, the religious-other has already committed himself/herself to God in his/her religion of choice. The religious-other has already made his/her commitment to God as he/she experienced him in Traditional Religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and so on. Change of religious affiliation is no guarantee for salvation. It is God who saves (1 Timothy 2:4).

Mission today is going to the "Other." It is reaching out to the "Other." The missionary crosses frontiers. He/she crosses the borders that cause the othering of the Other. He does not set borders or divides. A missionary then is a *bridge-builder*. He/she sees the religious-other or the reality of the difference or diversity as God's gift (Isaiah 19: 23-25). Mission *inter gentes*, however, is not moving from the old to the new frontiers. Rather, the missionary builds bridges between (*inter*) all the divides that fence out the migrants from the nationals, the rural communities from the urban societies, and the illiterates from the educated ones. Diversity is a gift (Isaiah 19:25). Hence, the missionary is one who carries the banner that proclaims, "*Vive la difference!*" (Long live the Difference).

Asians, Africans and Pacific Islanders acknowledge the great achievements and contributions of missionaries to their continents. But they also remember history and the wounds inflicted on the rights and dignity of the indigenous peoples in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. Today's missionary must be a *healer* and *reconciler* of people's dangerous memory (J-B Metz) of the past. Christianity was brought to Asia, Africa, and the Pacific by missionaries who accompanied the colonialist. Mission was in many cases a violent enterprise. It destroyed many elements of the local cultures and religions of many people. But genuine and long-lasting healing and reconciliation is impossible without remembering

the past truthfully, by both the victimizers and victims. The former (people) have to regain their human dignity despite their painful past.

The world is God's household. It is the *oikos* of God. This world, however, is constantly mind and action" of many people led to the environmental crises that we are experiencing today.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the missionary is a **household-builder**. When the missionary shall have been friend with the people he is being sent to, the process of making the whole world our spiritual home must be initiated. The missionary invites the religious-other to create with him/her a larger family where a welcoming atmosphere and warm hospitality and friendship are real. Reaching out together to greater truth and goodness would make the world a better place to live in for everybody.

Finally, the world we live in has become a noisy world. In a highly or mega-mediatised and noisy world, a missionary is expected to be a man/woman of **silence, a mystic**. Asia, Africa and the Pacific, the contexts of mission *inter gentes*, are continents of human quest for meaning, quest for the Ultimate. Silence then, that is profound and contemplative still remains the most effective communication among believers, among adherents of different religious traditions. Silence, in fact, leads to a new mode of doing mission parallel to prophetic dialogue. This new mode of doing mission is called "mystical prophetism." In this new mode of doing mission, the power of silence makes the missionary a spiritual and mystical person.

### **What's Next? What is our Response to the Megatrends?**

The missionary's old image can be re-imaged. So far, new images have been proposed. The missionary must be: (a) a listener/learner, (b) bridge-builder, (c) healer, (d) house of God builder, and (e) a mystic.

- **Listener/Learner:** The missionary has a lot to learn from those he/she lives with. Hence, the missionary must learn the skill to listen to the people, listen to what they are saying and to what they are not saying.
- **Bridge-Builder:** The missionary serves a a bridge that connects people; the missionary bridges the locals to the migrants, the rural folks to the urbanites, and the illiterate and the educated ones.
- **Healer/Reconciler:** The missionary is the healer of dangerous memories. He/she reconciles the groups that are put against each other. Forgiveness and reconciliation must take place.
- **House-Builder:** There is only one Earth; there is only one home for all of us regardless of what divides us. The missionary must be a man or woman of green evangelization.

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<sup>1</sup> Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 12.

- **Mystic/Spiritual:** Preaching the truth is not enough. Witnessing to the truth is more effective. Prophetic dialogue is not enough. Mystical prophetism must compliment it.

What's next? What shall we do now to response to the challenges posed by the Megatrends that we have identified?

- Awareness programs of the Megatrends that are taking place in the continents.
- Deeper understanding of what divides the migrants from the locals, the folks from the urbanites, and the educated and uneducated.
- Skills have to be learned to bridge the gaps between the groups we have identified.

These Megatrends will continue to shape the world. We cannot stop them. They are irreversible and unstoppable. We have to accept them as shapers of the new world we are in. crucial in this new situation is the role of the missionary. These new roles must be played to the best ability of the missionary.

### **Conclusion**

The world's Megatrends – migration, urbanization, and mediatization – are transforming the nature and shape of mission today. They are also challenging the missionary to re-image himself/herself in to (a) a listener/learner, (b) bridge-builder, (c) healer and reconciler, (d) household builder, and (e) mystic/spiritual person.

Qualitatively speaking, there is no doubt that the intensity, extent, and reach of the Megatrends show that the missionary is facing a situation different from the past. Moreover, the reality of growing religiosity (in the peripheries) alongside growing secularity (in mega cities) present the missionary a host of challenges that is not easy to understand and interpret. Today, the missionary lives in a global village that contains a different milieu, with radically different world views and diverse mindsets existing alongside each other. Mega-migration, mega-urbanization, mega-mediatization define the shape of the contexts within which the missionary articulates his/her witness to the Gospel.

Shalom!

## **Open Forum After the Keynote Speech of Fr. Edgar Javier, SVD**

After Fr Edgar Javier, SVD has delivered his conference on the topic, "The Challenges of Mission in Asia Pacific Today," the following questions were raised:

### **1. How to cope when people in mission areas do not accept us missionaries?**

Fr Edgar's answer was, to simply do the ordinary things like smiling at people. He gave an example that earlier he had a stroll outside the compound of the retreat house and he saw people along the streets and smiled at them. People did not respond to his smile. When he came back, he smiled at them again and this time they responded by smiling also. He advised not to talk on complicated things like Theology, talk about life to people.

### **2. As women, how can we come up with beautiful traditions like incensing the altar which may not still be acceptable to the hierarchy?**

The only thing that can be done is to learn to set down with priests and bishops to discuss and plan things that will be integrated in Liturgy.

### **3. Regarding the problems in Mindanao, that despite all efforts of Interreligious Dialogue, religious and missionaries are still target of threats and victims of kidnappings.**

Fr. Edgar first stressed that not all Muslims are terrorists. Furthermore, he emphasized that globalization demands education. In Mindanao the least educated are the Muslims and they are the ones reacting to globalization. It is when they are proselytized that they become dangerous. There is actually no clear cut answer that can be given to the situation. The reality is that, threats for religious and missionaries will always be there.

### **4. How far can we enter into culture without losing our identity?**

How far can we go is also how far that we will be received. We should not be afraid to enter. Nothing will be lost in you because you will be enriched. In entering, we should not put limits. Let the Holy Spirit be our guide wherever He wants us to go. Just be human, be Christian, be friendly and keep on that smile on your face.

### **5. How to deal with morality in Mega trends?**

We have to accept that our Christian morality is different from the morality of others. The example given was that for Christians there is much taboo placed on pre marital sex, but in other cultures, marriage is already started when the couple set eyes on each other. Differences in culture and morality should be taken into consideration.

With no further questions raised, Fr Edgar thanked the opportunity to be invited to talk with such an enormous gathering of brothers and sisters in the Dominican Family.