



I am a missionary priest and mission is my life, but often wish I could invent a new word for 'mission', a word that might give rise to new questions, new energy and a new vision.

Traditionally, mission has been seen in terms of Church growth through individual conversions or as the expansion of the Church into foreign lands. But while the growth of the church is important, mission is not primarily about the extension of the Church. It is something more profound than that.

The major change in the meaning of mission came with *Ad Gentes*, the missionary document of Vatican II. The Bishops rejected the prepared schema and in late 1964 asked a committee assisted by Yves Congar and Joseph Ratzinger to prepare a new document. This committee went back to the Trinity to ground mission.

Until then the Church was the principal agent of mission.

The Church tried to convert and Christianise the world. The committee reminded the Bishops that mission was not the Church's work it was God's. The Father so loves the world he sends the Son and the Spirit into the world to bring about the Reign of God. God has a liberating plan for the cosmos. The Trinity - Father, Son and Spirit, want to draw the whole cosmos into their divine life and are constantly creating, healing, reconciling, transforming and uniting the world.

St. Paul speaks of the mystery of God's plan for the salvation of all people (*1 Tim. 2:4*) – a plan to unite all things in heaven and earth in Christ (*Eph. 1:10*) or to reconcile all things in Christ (*Col. 1:20*).

I find it energising and hopeful to believe that God has a liberating plan for the cosmos that I am called to participate in, a project powered by God and as big as the cosmos.

This doesn't mean we ignore Church growth. We must build Christian communities everywhere to reflect God's coming reign. We are also compelled to proclaim Jesus and his Gospel that brings us life. However, Church growth is not primarily a question of expanding Church membership, but of becoming a more authentic sign of God's hopes for the world. The Church is most missionary when it is stretching itself, exploring and discovering what God is doing in the world.

The Church exists, not for its own sake, but for the sake of God's reign which is breaking into our world in many ways and many places. Our task is to proclaim, seek, encourage, celebrate and build on the Spirit's presence and activity in the world. God is especially active wherever people strive for justice, peace, freedom and reconciliation between peoples, religions and with the environment.

Mission is about God and the world. The missionary task is as broad and deep as God's liberating plan for the cosmos.

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