

## **Mission Work in Post-Nietzschean and Post-Schmidtian Society**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The reality of change amidst globalization is increasingly preceded and guided by science, namely the intellectual study of the physical and natural world through observation and experimentation. In today's increasingly science-oriented world, cognitive paradigm shifts will inevitably give birth to significant changes in all domains, including mission work. Such changes will demand new ways of conducting missionary activities.

Postmodern mission work allows more openness to mission service and missiological theories transcending the boundaries of logic and reason. With changes in life patterns among people at the center of the church's mission, the Church and missionaries need to re-reflect on the models of ecclesiastical missions. The old patterns successful in the past might not be relevant today. The Church needs to reorganize its mission strategy to answer the needs of the new generation in the contemporary era. In the 6<sup>th</sup> ASPAC MER International Seminar (2022), we discussed various issues and provided practical suggestions for the Divine Word Society and missionaries in general. More specifically, we suggest that local and Universal Churches reposition their mission and pastoral ministry. In this paper, I attempt to draw the attention of our readers to Post-Nietzschean Anthropology with its focus on multiple objective worlds and Post-Schmidtian Anthropology with its idea of *Urmonotheismus*.

### **THE HISTORICAL RELATIONS AS MISSION**

Catholic mission history from the days of the early Church until the 21st century relates to concerns of daily life that are holistically based on biblical experience, and provides guidance to both individuals and communities. The present aspects of missionary work are inseparable from the past. According to Drewes and Mojau (2003), carrying out a mission without knowing its history is the same as attempting mission work without undergoing any experience or training.

The Bible is the past and present source of our missions. Past missions were constructed based on valid doctrines and values, with observations used to conduct ongoing revisions and corrections in missiology. Mission doctrines and history are not only studied by dominant parties, as reflected in the decisions of the councils and committees, but also by those marginalized in the Church such as women and the poor (Drewes & Mojau, 2003).

Another phenomenon of mission work relevant today is the reversed position of countries that used to send missionaries to the Global South. Now countries that used to send missionaries to the Global South receive missionaries from nations that received missionaries from the Global North for centuries. The role of European countries such as Germany and Poland as sources of missionaries has now shifted to Asian countries such as Indonesia, India, and the Philippines. Christianity's initial colonial mission to convert populations to dominant religions, namely Christianity, has now adapted to promote the appreciation of other religions and local belief systems as central to mission work. This approach prioritizes dialogue.

In dealing with the indigenous belief systems of East Nusa Tenggara or NTT (Flores and Timor), we should speak of the dualistic relationship with the Supreme Being, as the Heavenly Power with various names. The people of Timor call this being *Uis Neno*; the people of Keo name it *Ndewa Reta*; the people of Sikka name it *Lero Wulan*. Locals also pair this supreme power with the Earthly Power such as *Uis Pah* for the Timorese, *Nggae Rade* for the Keo, *Nian Tana* for the Sikka.

With the introduction of Christianity and Islam to East Nusa Tenggara and the insistence on a Monotheistic God, the dualistic form of the Supreme Being gradually shifted into a monotheistic paradigm. Missionaries paid attention to the Heavenly Power and identified it with God in Christianity but did not pay it the same attention as they did to Earthly Power. The Heavenly Power is identified with One God in Christianity, and is sometimes equated with the incarnated God, Jesus Christ. The Earthly Power has been pushed aside but has not truly disappeared. Where is the *Uis Pah*, or the Earthly Power? In practice, the concept of Heavenly Power is absorbed by Christian monotheism, but people still worship the Earthly Power – a practice that seems to contradict with monotheistic doctrines.

According to Yulius Yasinto, SVD, who currently researches local agriculture in Bena villages using a Geertzian perspective, argues that with the increasing reliance on modern technology the Earthly Power is replaced by modern technological tools. Yet from a theological perspective, people do not worship man as an earthly god, but rather worship the Heavenly Father. Through the incarnation, the Heavenly Father has involved men as His collaborators to take care of and to preserve the Earth. In a sense, the earth that was once worshiped as a god is now subjugated to Human Power as God's collaborator. This reminds us of God's command to man to take care of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15).

From another perspective, the monotheistic and the local believers of East Nusa Tenggara do not only make appeals to a single Heavenly Father but also to the whole universe. In order for Lamaholot migrant workers to earn protection from falling trees in logging districts of Kalimantan, for example, or from police arrests in Adonara, the workers utter this prayer in their Lamaholot dialect: *Lewo pana molo goe dore //Tana gawe wahan goe tedon* [O my country, go ahead I follow // O my homeland, step forward I tag along].

The term '*lewo*' in principle refers to the 'village', which includes all the elements surrounding it: the mountain and the sea, the forest and rivers, the traditional house and the ancestors. All the elements together constitute the cosmic order, ruled over by God himself. One might interpret that the appeals to the cosmic order upheld by local adat or tradition are effective means to appeal to God as introduced by Christianity. This reminds us of Jesus' teachings that you cannot love God without loving your neighbors. On another occasion, Jesus warned his listeners: "If you want to bring sacrifice to God but behind you there are people you are still on bad terms with, go back and reconcile with them first, then bring your offerings to God" (Mat.5:23-24). Jesus makes it very clear that one's relationship with God cannot be realized when one is neglecting his or her relationship with his or her neighbors. But who is a neighbor? A "neighbor" is a person cohabiting in a natural environment. This is why the Jewish people call Yahweh "my Rock and my Fortress" (Psalm 18:2). The fact that God is identified with a rocky mountain in Jewish tradition is parallel with the fact that the local people identify God with the rivers and seas, mountains and valleys, customary houses and ancestors.

Keeping local relationships to nature in mind, by using the postmodern perspective, we can reinterpret dualism in traditional beliefs of NTT people as 'Christianized' so long as we interpret local customary practices in praise of natural elements as collaboration between God's creative power and humans' participation in it. Pantheism is nothing but an effort to preserve a good relationship between God, man and the environment. God is the owner of the universe, but it is clear that we cannot build our relationship with God while neglecting our relationship with our neighbors and our environment.

## **THE POSTMODERN AND POST-TRUTH MISSION INSPIRED BY THE VATICAN COUNCIL II MODEL**

### ***Mission as Dialogical Relations***

Today's mission is not only aimed at conversion in the conventional sense, but also at dialogical relations. We are confronted with a dialogical context that emphasizes the fulfilling needs of the churches, other religions, as well as local cultures. Pluralistic societies are expected to produce mutual respect and understanding. Thus, the dialogic relations aim to carry out the mission which is open to other truth claims without presuming that syncretized belief systems are indicative of heresy or *bida'ah*. Instead, dialogic relations prioritize theological synthesis (known as inculturation or adaptation and acculturation), as elaborated in some of the papers and research projects presented in this volume. Furthermore, dialogical attitudes predetermine that no single form of a certain theology of any religion will dominate other religions. On the contrary, dialogical attitudes will present all types of theologies as open for ongoing revision without barriers of theological absolutism. Pannikar (1999) elaborated on this when he wrote:

*Dialogue puts the opponent in the same position towards the search for theological truth, and not as a dominating position. Therefore, it is clear that every true Christian interpretation needs to be valid and correct and accepted by the interpreted party (Panikkar, 1999).*

### ***The mission as Contextual Theology based on Anthropology***

We know that mission work as contextual theology is based on anthropology as a study of human beings and their cultures. Meanwhile, mission work is a critical human effort to understand God in his context and contemporary thinking accepted and applied by the Church. According to Hesselgrave & Romen (2004), mission work needs to be relevant in its cultural context. This means mission work must be carried out in harmonious and tolerant relations with local cultures and traditions.

The mission of contextual relationships seeks to understand its text/context and truth through dialectical methods. The contextualization of theology by Church members places the Bible as an invaluable source of God's truth. Mission work as contextual theology based on anthropology does not place God in the shackles of culture or tradition. Instead, mission work is used by God for His own glory. "God is not bound by human culture, but He controls its use for His glory and holy revelation" (Hesselgrave & Romen, 2004).

### ***Postmodern mission's dismissal of the adage, "Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus"***

Postmodern and post truth's doubt of universal truth is evidenced by the efforts of reason, both in science and religions. They do not want to accept a single source of rationality as benchmarks of truth. Postmodern generations and missionaries are looking for something higher in the form of non-racial ways of seeking knowledge and ways of life, and moreover through inclusive religiosity, cultures, emotion and intuition. In other words, thinking through cultures is an obligation. Even in the field of religion, post-Second Vatican Council Catholics have let the ***Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*** (No salvation outside the Church) move from institutional control and dogmatic certainty to associative communities and to the belief in religions as a paramount source of love and peace.

In reality, at the beginning of the 21st century, the belief in the ability of religions as the source of peace grew complex, because the results of religious life actually produced several negative things including religious radicalism or fundamentalism in Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. This resulted in social and natural damages and suffering on the part of man himself with the appearance of conflicts and wars on behalf of religions in some parts of the world (e.g. in Middle East Countries, the recent war in Ukraine and Russian invasion with the use of sophisticated war equipment). We are also facing the after effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in technology-aided methods of exploring our religiosity (such as virtual worship without Churches and Mosques), which to some extent creates inner emptiness and poverty in personal relations with people and with God.

## **POST-NIETZSCHEAN AND POST-SCHMIDTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY: THINKING AND ACTING THROUGH CULTURES**

Postmodernism as a cultural worldview has lately reached Asian society and other third world mission areas. It provides a great amount of values such as inclusive spirituality, pluralism, relativism, altruism, which cause significant shifts. In reality, the Church has rapidly developed numerous experiences and mission activities. However, the Church has produced only a few models for thought which harmonize relations between Christianity and other religions and cultures. This shows that the Church is quite newly sensitive to more profound questions about mission work, particularly when it comes to meeting and knowing differences and similarities between religions.

Griffioen argues that the issue of comparison and reciprocal relations between Christianity and other religions with various cultures also need to be reconsidered (Griffioen, 2018). In addition to our response to Post-Modern and Post-Truth issues, I invite us to rack our brains with the help of Post-Nietzschean Anthropology (Shweder, 1966: 27) and Post-Schmidtian Anthropology, a term I coined myself for the 6<sup>th</sup> ASPAC MER conference.

- 1) **Post-Nietzschean Anthropology.** The idea of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) was termed as Post-Nietzschean Anthropology by Shweder, an anthropologist (Shweder, 1966: 27). Shweder tried to examine two major routes of Nietzschean ideas into relativism: 1) ontological atheism (God is dead) and 2) ontological polytheism (monotheism is dead). He explains,

*The main aim of relativist doctrine in anthropology is to give permission to diversity and difference, by indicating why and when such permission ought to be granted. The truth in relativism is that there are times – all time yet sometimes – when permission ought to be granted to diversity and difference. In drawing our attention to that truth by trying to be clearer about it, anthropology and other modern scholarly disciplines interested in relativism have in fact played a political role (Shweder, 1996: 29-30).*

*The idea of Richard Shweder above highlights the following elements. First, that postmodern and post truth society are in line with relativism, which appreciates the variety of truths. Second, Post-Nietzschean Anthropology acknowledges the idea of multiple objective worlds: effective in countering ethnocentrism, and even countering religious radicalism in ways that can help us build socio-centered societies (cfr. Shweder, 1996: 42).*

- 2) **Post-Schmidtian Anthropology.** Wilhelm Schmidt, SVD (1868 – 1954), the founder of the Anthropos Institute, seems a supporter of the above ideas. He has inspired many SVDs scholars, and has also left enormous contributions to the development of religious and anthropological studies. His largest contribution to scholarship concerns other religions based on his findings about Urmonotheismus

(German for “primeval monotheism”) or primitive monotheism as the hypothesis of a monotheistic Urreligion, from which non-monotheistic religions degenerated (Bargatzky, 2021: 119-ss). We can claim that the Urmonotheismus is the seed of modern Monotheismus as we find in Christianity and Islam. While polytheism is a reality of religious life, it constantly vacillates in relation to monotheism according to Hume’s oscillation theory.

David Hume, in his ***The Natural History of Religion*** (1757/1976), presents several theories of religion. He begins with a rather conventional theory of a unilineal kind, a progression from polytheism to monotheism. This is also a progression from a less rational view to a more rational one. He does, however, proceed to a far more interesting theory concerning a permanent oscillation in religious phenomena: the oscillation between polytheistic and monotheistic views (cfr. Hume, 1976 quoted in Tule: 2000: 92-108). Such findings of ***Urmonotheismus*** have served as an intellectual foundations for many influential theologians, including Prof. Ibrahim from Ankara University, one of my Muslim Professors at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) in Rome/Italy, back in 1987, who quoted Schmidt’s idea as the most suitable basis for interreligious dialogue and harmony.

Some of the reformation Church missiologists, such as Johan Herman Bavinck (1889-1964) also revealed the spiritual benefits of religious diversity. However, we still need to carefully analyze current paradigm shifts in mission work and our approach to other religions, in anticipation of doing mission work in countries primarily occupied by Hindus (like India) and Muslims (like Indonesia). In those two countries, where the majority of people are Muslims and Hindus, we cannot neglect the social impacts of tiny subgroups.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR BREAKING THE BARRIER**

We have been quite familiar with postmodern and post-truth society as reflected in various papers submitted for the 6<sup>th</sup> ASPAC MER conference. However, post-Nietzschean and Post-Schmidtian provides a less conventional lens on these phenomena. Every change has the potential to be both positive and negative. However, the Divine Word Missionaries, the local and Universal Churches, the scholars, theologians and philosophers must also see this as an opportunity rather than an obstacle through which our mission work can still be carried out. In this conference and through its publications, we will observe the following effects produced by postmodernism, post-truth, post-Nietzschean and Post-Schmidtian perspectives on mission work.

- 1) Postmodern challenges can stimulate balanced terms for thinking inclusively, especially for those who have embraced fundamentalist radicalism difficult to shake off. In post-modern culture, groups of people often maintain their conservative forms of thinking if they go unchallenged. Postmodernism overrules arrogant claims of absolute truth coming from science and logic. Thus, it designates room for the coexistence of Christian faith and environmental powers or science and religion as well.

- 2) Postmodernism tends to provide space for empathy for the marginalized and the oppressed without overemphasizing religious denominations. This offers an opportunity for the church to proclaim the Good News as Jesus in His ministry was on the side of those who have experienced oppression. Post-truth allows for freedom of opinion as one's perspective of relativism or non-absolute truth. It makes religious groups less judgmental and condemning behaviour, and allows personal preferences to become less conventional. It is an antidote to the true hypocritical nature itself.
- 3) Post-Nietzschean Anthropology's idea of multiple objective worlds will be effective to counter ethnocentrism (and even to counter religious radicalism) and build up a socio-centered society. Post-Schmidtian's ideas about *Urmonotheismus* will allow greater tolerance between religions and potentially open the way to a greater love and acceptance of other belief systems. It will also allow for greater empathy towards an increasingly pluralistic society, with tolerance models structured to train appreciation of a variety of truth claims in religions and cultures around the world and in our own communities.

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