

### MISSIOLOGY AND MISSION THEOLOGY

- Topic: Theology and the "Missiological Imagination"  
 Conveners: Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union  
 Lou McNeil, Georgian Court College  
 Moderator: Jeanne Evans, Marymount Manhattan College  
 Presenters: M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College  
 Roger Haight, Weston Jesuit School of Theology

Shawn Copeland and Roger Haight structured their remarks on theology and mission as a dialogue, addressing four questions, which touched off a lively and energetic discussion.

1. "How do you understand the mission of the church, or the church as mission? Does the world today provide new exigencies?"

Copeland's response: The mission of the church is "to share the gift of Jesus, (who is) God's way of liberation" in the context of our global situation. The church's mission is its *raison d'être*, to point humanity toward the God of life. The world's context today provides the needs and exigencies of that mission. She referred to Hans Kung's *Global Responsibility* to illustrate a litany of global injustice that mission is called to transform concretely through social justice agenda.

Haight's response: The church *is* mission; or specifically mission is prior to church. He developed this notion theologically and then reflected on the new situation in which the church is unfolding. First, Jesus understood his preaching and action as mediating the Kingdom of God. Second, the church is the continuation and extension through history of the memory and ministry of Jesus. Third, Jesus came to be understood as the symbol of God's presence and revelation. Fourth, as a consequence of the recognition of Jesus' divinity, his mission takes on a deeper theological resonance. It is the *missio Dei*. The category "mission" has a religious symbol's significance. It becomes the foundation on and key by which the church accomplishes many things. This concept of *missio Dei* transcends the many ways in which the church fails historically. As a religious symbol it holds out to all its members an invitation to active responsibility and to become the visible sign in history of what Jesus revealed to be God's values.

Haight suggested that the exigencies of our situation are: First, globalization, second, a new understanding of the distinctiveness of cultures and their resistance to homologization and third, a new appreciation of other religions and the religious depth of other cultures. We live in a new postmodern missiological situation.

2. "Where and how does missiology fit into the larger discipline of theology and its task?"

Haight's response: If the church is mission, missiology is the ground floor center of ecclesiology and the symbol—"mission"—directs the whole of ecclesi-

ology. Mission defines the Church. The church relates to the "world" and cannot see its purpose as less than that. Christian spirituality is an "active" spirituality.

Copeland's response: Mission is the *missio Dei*, but the difficulty is inculturation became colonizing. Mission is central to ecclesiology because theological anthropology must be seen as the integration of the values of God in the life of communities.

3. "Does the dimension of church mission have a bearing on the vocation of the theologian as these are generally conceived?"

Copeland's response: Church mediates the mission and thus focuses the vocation of the theologian as an agent of mediation. The theologian as mediator must be, as the church, self-transcending as regards, their culture and ethnicity.

Haight's response: The faith is the community's faith. Theology should represent the church to the world and the world to the church. The theologian explains the church and its mission to the world. Second, this critical reflection must be both inculturated and inculturating. Third, it unfolds in an interreligious setting. And fourth, it becomes ecumenical given its pluralist context.

4. "How does the vocation of the theologian relative to the mission of the church, become specified and personalized in your own work?"

Haight's response: The theologian must consistently address the world. Second, one must inculturate and speak the Christian message to a particular audience conscious that this entails rather significant changes in meaning. Third, the theologian must explicitly seek to overcome a narrow, blinding, divisive, and ultimately anti-Christian denominaionalism.

Copeland's response: Theology places itself at the service of mission and it cannot acquiesce to the church as an end in itself or relinquish its inspired prophetic, critical and creative edge. Inasmuch as that determination is to be made before the cross of Christ, our theology must stand with society's most abject, despised and oppressed. The notion of vocation is a calling and response to that call, a decisive step away from careerism.

Copeland noted the enduring importance to her of Vincent Harding's essay entitled, "The Vocation of the Black Scholar and the Struggles of the Black Community." The vocation of the black scholar and the black theologian can never be abstract or complacent. The chief responsibility of the theologian in the mediation of God's word in culture must be truth telling and uncommon faithfulness.

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