

CATHOLICITY AND MISSION—TOPIC SESSION

Topic:	<i>Missio Dei</i> and the <i>Sensus Fidelium</i>
Convener:	vanThanh Nguyen, S.V.D., Catholic Theological Union
Moderator:	Marinus Iwuchukwu, Duquesne University
Presenters:	Dianne Bergant, C.S.A., Catholic Theological Union Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University
Respondent:	Steve Bevans, S.V.D., Catholic Theological Union

In the first paper entitled, “*Missio Dei: The Transfiguration of All Creation*,” Bergant showed that as important as the refocusing of missionary activity has been, it remains narrowly anthropocentric. Too often the rest of natural creation is viewed as subservient to the aspirations and goals of the human race. Drawing on her expertise as an Old Testament scholar, Bergant made a bold claim. Pointing to the biblical roots of the concept *missio Dei*, and building on recent missiological insights of several ecclesiastical bodies that recognize the importance of the community of Earth, Bergant argued that the *missio Dei* includes but is much broader than the salvation of souls. She affirmed that the *missio Dei* is the “transfiguration of the whole of creation.” She referred to various church documents to point out that the Christian’s responsibility within creation and her duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of Christian faith. This more expansive understanding of the *missio Dei* does not consider ecojustice simply an addition to the well-established essentials of social justice. Rather, it sees it as the basis of all justice, every aspect of which is somehow rooted in our perception of the created world of which we are a part. Furthermore, the move to broaden the understanding of the *missio Dei* to include sensitivity to and care for all of the created prompts us to readjust the ways in which we participate in that mission.

In the second paper entitled, “*Bahala Na and the Filipino/Fil-Am Faith in God’s Providence*,” Punsalan-Manlimos argued that attending to the particular cultural faith expression of a people, which is critical for doing contextual theology, is critical for understanding the *sensus fidelium*, that is not only the reception by the laity of the faith but also the great wisdom they have to teach about the faith as expressed by their life of faith. She pointed out that members of the Filipino/Filipino-American Catholic community express a profound sense of God’s agency in their lives that is often misconstrued as an expression of fatalism. To hear the phrase *bahala na* (come what may) or to hear phrases like *ipasadiyos mo na lang* (just hand it over to God) can leave the uninformed hearer wondering about the image of God and God’s providence that must undergird these cultural understandings of the relationship between God and the world. Yet upon closer examination, one discovers an expression of deep trust in God’s providence. There is a manner of surrender and trust that is captured in the way this community speaks about God’s role in everyday life that invites deeper theological reflection. There is something in the intuition of the community that can provide profound insight into the meaning of the doctrine of providence that is often lost when theology and doctrinal pronouncements are so abstracted from the everyday life of the community that they fail to communicate the *fides ecclesiae*.

Following the two presentations, Steve Bevans gave his remarks to both papers. According to Bevans, both papers offer an enrichment of our understanding of

mission from two fresh perspectives: from a perspective of the transfiguration of the entire creation, and from the culture of the Filipino people. He pointed out that the papers contributed to reflection on the theme of this conference, the “Sense of the Faithful.” Ecological commitment has arisen out of the midst of secular science and ethics, but also out of the deep sense of women and men in the church. As such, Dianne’s paper could not be more timely. As for Catherine’s paper, Bevans pointed out that this is a prime example of how those who are or feel marginalized or oppressed in a particular society need to “speak out” clearly and prophetically while those who wittingly or unwittingly participate in such marginalization or oppression need to “let go.” Here is mission as prophetic dialogue at work. Not only is Catherine finding her own voice as a Filipin@ American, mining the *locus theologicus* that is the popular religiosity of her culture, she is giving a gift to all other members of her new homeland.

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