

## MORAL IMAGINATION AND THE *MISSIO AD GENTES*: REDRESSING THE COUNTERWITNESS OF RACISM

Granting the centrality of the missionary mandate in the life of the Church<sup>1</sup> and acknowledging the permanent validity of the *missionary* vocation,<sup>2</sup> this paper examines one of the major obstacles impeding the *missio ad gentes*, namely, the *counterwitness* of Christians.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I identify the multifaceted phenomenon of racism as an invidious problem throughout the world and posit the continued complicity of Christians in the perpetuation of racist attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies as a primary impediment to evangelization. In short, I argue that racism is one of the most serious forms of counterwitness to the Gospel.

Considering the Church's expressed commitment to "form consciences by revealing to people the . . . equality of all men and women as God's sons and daughters,"<sup>4</sup> I observe that in advancing the *missio ad gentes*, the Church acts in ways that reveal the *embeddedness* of some of its leaders and members in the sinful structures of racism. Whenever the Church fails, refuses, is unable or afraid to allow its own moral imagination to be engaged and transformed by the efforts of those who dare to confront racist forms of counterwitness, the very credibility of the Gospel message it seeks to proclaim is undermined.

In an effort to demonstrate the moral urgency of confronting counterwitness, I propose a thought experiment in *moral imagination and the missio ad gentes* as a point of reference for theological reflection on racism and white superiority. This thought experiment takes seriously the scandal of the racist counterwitness of many adult followers of Jesus and its effects on yet another generation of children. In doing so, this theological exercise in moral imagination looks to children as both supporters and subjects of Christian mission as well as the most vulnerable victims of racism and the most compelling protagonists for racial justice.

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<sup>1</sup>*Redemptoris Missio* 34.

<sup>2</sup>The working definition for missionaries follows the description given in *Ad Gentes* IV 23-27 and refers to those individuals and institutes in the Church "who take on the duty of evangelization, which pertains to the whole Church, and make it as it were their own special task" (AG IV 23).

<sup>3</sup>According to RM 36, primary obstacles to the Church's missionary work include "past and present divisions among Christians, de-christianization within Christian countries, the decrease of vocations to the apostolate, and the *counterwitness of believers and Christian communities failing to follow the model of Christ in their lives.*"

<sup>4</sup>See RM 58.

Focusing on the exigencies of the Reign of God as articulated and embodied by Jesus in his own turn to the child, I draw attention to this often overlooked *vision* and *criterion* for understanding *proclamation* and *reception*. In the light of this vision and criterion, I conclude by raising a question about the measure of our own courage and insight as theologians and interpreters of the *missio Dei*.

## I. INTRODUCTION

On the postmodern horizon of paradox and ambiguity, the missionary moratorium debates<sup>5</sup> rage on, the *pax et iustitia* vs. *missio ad gentes* controversies continue, and the *dangerous memories* of the consequences of muscular Christianity encounter the *bold and humble visions* of the often vulnerable yet courageous followers of Jesus. In this crucible of religious, social, cultural, political and economic consciousness, missionaries are often catalysts for ecclesial transformation inasmuch as theological reflection on their experiences and insights serve to form and inform the moral imagination of the church and, oftentimes, the world.

From the early beginnings of the Church until today, the example, testimony and influence of Christian missionaries has been characterized on the one hand as edifying and on the other hand as scandalous. Some are remembered for their compassion, insight and commitment. Others are remembered for their contentious behaviors, competing claims and devastating tactics. For centuries, ethical reflection on the witness and counterwitness of missionaries has compelled the community of believers to come to terms with the interactive dynamics of faith and history, of Gospel and culture, and of religion and race.<sup>6</sup> Such reflection, however, has been, is, and will continue to be both demanding and dangerous. It is demanding inasmuch as it requires Christians to constantly reexamine who we understand ourselves to be in relationship to God, the world, others and ourselves. It is *dangerous* because it requires all of us who count ourselves among the followers of Jesus to *live with dangerous and demanding questions*, particularly those unsettling and soul-searching questions that make it difficult for us to be at ease in our old dispensations.

Admittedly, when it comes to responding to the *call to live with the questions* raised by ethical reflection on missionary activity *in faith, hope, love and*

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<sup>5</sup>See Wahlbert Buhlmann, *Missions on Trial* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1979) and James A. Sherer, *Missionary, Go Home! A Reappraisal of the Christian World Mission* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

<sup>6</sup>See RM 36. "The task of proclaiming Jesus Christ to all peoples appears to be immense and out of all proportion to the Church's human resources. The difficulties seem insurmountable . . . these difficulties [those lacking *within* the People of God] are the most painful of all [lack of fervor manifested in fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest, and above all lack of joy and hope]." Cf. EN 80.

*truth*, the temptation to deny, suppress or censor the questions that trouble our still waters is a powerful one. Unwilling or unable to go where these questions might inevitably lead, some of us are drawn by the seductive appeal of absolutism, presumption, indifference and false consciousness. Unwilling or unable to bear the burden of these questions any longer, some of us yield to the fatal attraction of doubt, despair, contempt and amnesia. The vices of the idols of death rival the virtues bestowed by the God of Life (see table 1). Nowhere is succumbing to temptation more evident than in our failure, refusal, inability or fear to live with the troubling questions concerning the role of Christians in general and missionaries in particular in causing, contributing to and exacerbating human suffering and oppression.

Table 1

Absolutism	<b>FAITH</b>	Doubt
Presumption	<b>HOPE</b>	Despair
Indifference	<b>LOVE</b>	Contempt
False Consciousness	<b>TRUTH</b>	Amnesia

To the extent that racist attitudes, behaviors and habits of the heart may be ranked among the most serious forms of counterwitness to the message of Jesus, I contend that the multifaceted reality of racism remains a major obstacle to the proclamation and reception of the Gospel.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is an obstacle that is both veiled and visible. I would argue further that, in terms of the human suffering it has caused and continues to cause, it is of far greater moral consequence than other obstacles which often tend to command far more attention from church leaders and theologians, such as missionary malaise and theological relativism.

Inasmuch as *proclamation* and all that it entails continue to be understood by the Church as the permanent priority of the *missio ad gentes*,<sup>8</sup> moral responsibility for promoting racial justice by redressing and eradicating racism is undeniably one of the primary ethical imperatives of mission. Practically speaking, this means that the Church, in the process of proclaiming the Good News to people of every land and nation, continually needs to remind itself of one important fact.

<sup>7</sup>For example, see Stephen Bates, "Racism in Catholic Church 'driving minorities away,'" *The Guardian* (16 October 2000) <[www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4077013,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4077013,00.html)>.

<sup>8</sup>See RM 34. "Missionary activity proper, namely, the mission *ad gentes*, is directed to 'peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ,' 'who are far from Christ,' in whom the Church 'has not yet taken root' (AG 6, 23, 27) and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel (EN 18-20. It is distinct from other ecclesial activities inasmuch as it is addressed to groups and settings which are non-Christian because the preaching of the Gospel and the presence of the Church are absent or insufficient."

Efforts at inculturation, on the part of missionaries and, by extension, all those who participate in Christ's mission to communicate effectively the Gospel message, are exceedingly important, but they are not sufficient. Though truth and goodness may be found and abound through inculturation, racism and white superiority will not be exorcised unless they are called by name.

Given the realities of our world, something more is required of all Christians and in particular, of all missionaries. This *something more* involves going beyond the offering of *warrants for* and *affirmations of* the value and integrity of every human person. It goes beyond the valorization of cultures and histories. This *something more* requires us to render a constant and consistent evangelical witness that *acknowledges, identifies, confesses, redresses and prevents* racism, along with its multiple causes, consequences and manifestations in the world and within the Church.<sup>9</sup> When and if the Church does not do this of its own volition, the moral forces at work within the world have and will compel it to do so.

## II. REDRESSING AND ERADICATING WHITE SUPERIORITY AND ALL FORMS OF RACISM IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: THE PROBLEM, THE SIN, AND THE OBSTACLE TO THE *MISSIO AD GENTES*

On August 31, 2001, during this year declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, the World Conference on Racism will be convened in Durban, South Africa.<sup>10</sup> Drawing the attention of the world, the Conference has created an arena of discourse and dialogue about racism and racial justice. Proceedings from preparatory regional gatherings as well as the preconference statements issued by a number of countries and non-governmental organizations present both negative and positive observations about missionaries in particular and Christians in general.<sup>11</sup>

On the one hand, these findings attest to the fact that the legacy of Western Christian missionary activity continues to be identified as an historical and contemporary factor in the exacerbation of racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination based on race and ethnicity. Among the most unsettling criticisms are those raised by cultural survival groups that call into question the sincerity

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<sup>9</sup>In marking the United Nations celebration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Pope John Paul II declared that "Catholics must work to ensure that no one is excluded from their communities and that people of all races and cultures feel the church is their home. . . . it is obligatory that religious communities join international efforts to fight racism." See <Zenit.org> 21 March 2001.

<sup>10</sup>For background information, see the United Nations information site at <<http://www.un.org>>.

<sup>11</sup>For more complete documentation on the World Conference on Racism, see <[www.unhcr.ch/html/racism/index/htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/racism/index/htm)>; <<http://www.state.gov/plo/uncnf/wcar/>>; <<http://www.ngoworldconference.org>>; <<http://www.hri.ca/racism/>>; and <<http://www.racism.org.za>>.

of apologies offered in recent years by church leaders for atrocities committed in the past against indigenous peoples. They cite examples of Christian missionaries who are currently taking part in similar atrocities against indigenous peoples in the north of Thailand and in Amazonia.<sup>12</sup> Their conclusions are condemnatory of church leaders who have made apologies and offered token reparations for misguided zeal, ignorance, abuse and exaggerations on the part of missionaries. They question why individuals and groups of missionaries who engage in the same reprehensible forms of proselytism that gave rise to the need for apologies and reparations in the first place continue to be commissioned. The conclusion drawn by these international observers is that some Christian churches do not seem to learn from their acknowledged mistakes and must be held accountable for the violations of human rights associated with the activities of missionaries.

On the other hand, observers also take note of the positive contributions made by Christian leaders, some of whom are expatriate missionaries, who have offered substantial support and ongoing guidance in national, regional and international efforts to bring about racial justice, reparations and reconciliation, in places such as South Africa, Guatemala and East Timor. In a similar fashion, international recognition of the efforts made by Christian leaders to address racism and other forms of discrimination have been viewed as a source of hope and encouragement to many national, regional and global agencies, particularly those that endeavor to emphasize the positive resources that the religions of the world bring to the promotion and defense of human rights.<sup>13</sup>

Whether intended or unintended, the World Conference on Racism has created the necessary conditions for raising consciousness and eliciting accountability from Christian leaders at this moment in time. It has set in motion a revisiting of the questions that have troubled many Christian missionaries and missionary-sending societies for over four decades and longer. The World Conference also is posing new questions to Christian leaders and missionaries. In the process, the Conference is evoking from Roman Catholic leaders, among others, a renewed commitment to articulate pastoral statements about racism *and* plans of action for placing and keeping racial justice at the center of mission and ministry in the post modern context.

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<sup>12</sup>See the Akha Defense and Survival Project focusing on the people in Thailand's Chiangrai Province at <[www.Akha.org](http://www.Akha.org)>.

<sup>13</sup>See Harvey Cox, Arvind Sharma, et al., "Positive Resources of Religion for Human Rights," in *Religion for Human Rights*, ed. John Kelsay and Sumner B. Twiss (New York, 1994) 60-79; Robert Traer, *Faith in Human Rights: Support in Religious Traditions for a Global Struggle* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991); and *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of World Religions*, ed. Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel (New York: Continuum, 1993).

### 1. Racism as a Problem in the World

In 1978, UNESCO declared that

Any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others, presumed to be inferior, or which bases value judgments on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity.

Twenty-three years later, despite the best efforts of UNESCO and other worldwide agencies, impressionistic evidence from around the globe would suggest that racism, like other forms of structural oppression, is alive and well and rampant just about everywhere, having evolved into an ever more violent, dehumanizing and demonizing phenomenon.

Racism, understood as a *system by which one race maintains supremacy over another race through a set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, ideologies, and the requisite power needed to impose them*, is far from being eliminated or eradicated. Defined as a social problem by governmental and non-governmental entities alike, it may rise and fall in arenas of social and political consciousness, but it does not go away. Though the contexts where racism manifests itself may differ, the dynamics of racism are all too similar. Racist practices of oppression, marginalization and exclusion, whether based on skin color or cultural, ethnic and physical differences, continue to legitimate many forms of bigotry, discrimination, abuse and violence.

Speaking from within the contexts of North America and Europe, racism has been largely understood as a system of white supremacy and white superiority. These words fall heavy on the ears of white Christians as we scramble to distinguish ourselves from men in white hoods or brown shirts or youths with Confederate flags, shaved heads and swastika tattoos. As the grand and great-grand-children of immigrants, refugees and exiles, our appeals to our poor and peasant European roots do not alter the fact that we are the white-skinned beneficiaries of the very system we repudiate. To the extent that for the mean time ecclesiastical power structures continue to be under the direction of the descendents of Europeans, the power to make and enforce decisions continues to be in their hands as do decisions regarding access to resources. European standards of behavior are considered to be normative, if not superior, and they continue to be the standards by which the behaviors of other groups are judged. When talking about racism, Europeans and their descendents often define reality incorrectly and misplace the problem of racism from its perpetrators to its victims.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>This excerpt is adapted from a compilation of resources put together by the Women's Theological Center and entitled *Racism Defined* (Boston: WTC, 1995) 2. The text draws upon the insights of Robert W. Terry, *For Whites Only* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1970); The Cornwall Collective, *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1980); bell hooks, "Overcoming White Supremacy," in *Talking Back*

None of these observations are new. They have been around for quite some time. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that history and culture—global and ecclesiastical—have not remained static since 1968. In fact, it can be argued that globalization has effectively intensified the Euro-Americanization of world culture, which subsequently has led to permutations of racism as seen for example in internalized racism and cross racial hostility. The former “occurs in a racist system when an oppressed race supports the supremacy of the dominating race through maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird that supremacy.”<sup>15</sup> The latter “occurs in a racist system when one oppressed race supports the oppression of another oppressed race by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that underlie the dominating race’s supremacy.”<sup>16</sup>

And so, the multifaceted and insidious problem of racism continues to take a toll on human life and human relationships throughout the world. Often justified by the manipulation of religious beliefs and the tacit approval of religious leaders, the phenomenon of racism all too often remains impervious to ethical scrutinies and investigations of human rights violations. This situation has made it difficult for all religions, and Christianity in particular, to take full account of their complicity of silence, fear and indifference when confronted with the modern and post modern manifestations of a social evil of such magnitude.

## 2. Racism as a Sin in the Church

The twentieth-century record of Roman Catholic statements dealing with the realities of racism, discrimination and prejudice is worthy of a separate analysis as a case study in promulgation and reception.<sup>17</sup> Papal statements<sup>18</sup> and statements by Vatican commissions,<sup>19</sup> along with pastoral letters of national and

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(Boston: South End Press, 1989); and James Baldwin, *Evidence of Things Unseen* and “On Being White . . . and Other Lies,” *Essence* (April 1994).

<sup>15</sup>WTC, *Racism Defined*, 2.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>For historical background on the foundations of these statements through the mid-twentieth century, see John LaFarge, S.J., *Interracial Justice: A Study of the Catholic Doctrines of Race Relations* (1978).

<sup>18</sup>Pius X, *Lacrimabili statu: On the Indians of South America* (1912); Benedict XV, *Ad Beatissima Apostolorum: Appealing for Peace* (1914), *Maximum Illud* (1921); Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae: On the Catholic Missions* (1926); *Mit Brennender Sorge: On the Church and the German Reich* (1937); John XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum: On the Missions, Native Clergy and Lay Participation* (1959); Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio: On the Progress of Peoples* (1967).

<sup>19</sup>See the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society* (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1988).

regional episcopal conferences,<sup>20</sup> local bishops and diocesan commissions,<sup>21</sup> and documents of religious institutes and Catholic lay organizations, provide more than sufficient evidence of clearly articulated theological and moral positions on racism as a sin. Statements and formal declarations are made with regularity and intentionality.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Catholic Bishops of the United States, *Home Missions, Negro and Indian Missions, Foreign Missions* (1919); Catholic Bishops of the United States, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience* (Washington DC, 1958); Administrative Board of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, *On Racial Harmony* (Washington DC, 1963); Catholic Bishops of the United States, *Pastoral Statement on Race Relations* (Washington DC, 1966); Catholic Bishops of the United States, *Statement on the National Race Crisis* (Washington DC, 1968); National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Do the Work of Justice* (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1978); United States Catholic Bishops, *Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day* (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1979); National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment* (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1983); Black Bishops of the United States, *What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984); Administrative Board of the U.S. Catholic Conference, *Statement on South Africa* (Washington DC U.S. Catholic Conference, 1985); Administrative Board of the U.S. Catholic Conference, *Statement on the Ku Klux Klan* (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1987); U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Here I Am, Send Me: A Conference Response to the Evangelization of African Americans and the National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan" (1989); National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Time For Remembering, Reconciling and Recommitting Ourselves as a People—Statement of N.C.C.B. on Native Americans* (Washington DC U.S. Catholic Conference, 1991); U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Heritage and Hope: Evangelization in the United States* (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1992); Administrative Board of the U.S. Catholic Conference, *Political Responsibility: Proclaiming the Gospel of Life, Protecting the Least Among Us and Pursuing the Common Good—Reflections on the 1996 Elections* (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1995).

<sup>21</sup>For an analysis of recent documents of individual bishops and dioceses in the United States, see Bryan N. Massingale, "James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism," *Theological Studies* 61/4 (2000): 703.

<sup>22</sup>For example, speaking at the end of his weekly general audience in mid-March, Pope John Paul II said that international treaties, conferences and the upcoming United Nations World Conference against Racism are "important steps on the way toward affirming the fundamental equality and dignity of every person and for peaceful coexistence among all peoples." See <Zenit.org>, 21 March 2001. Also, in April 2001, commemorating the anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, the Illinois Catholic Bishops declared, "The Springtime for the Gospel which Pope John Paul II prays will mark the new millennium will be a time free of racism. The time is now. Let the place be our dioceses and our state." See "Moving beyond Racism: Learning to See with the Eyes of Christ," 4 April 2001.

If, however, the measure of the Church's success in effectively communicating its ideals is to be measured in terms of social transformation, rather than numbers of carefully drafted documents, the overwhelming evidence suggests a lack of adequate promulgation. The evidence also suggests a limited broad-based reception of Church teaching and a lack of persuasive, convincing, consistent and coherent pastoral practices. Outward visible signs of engagement, conviction and a visible commitment to living in that truth upon which reparations, reconciliation and prevention of racism are predicated, while observable, but all too few and far between.

Recognizing and acknowledging racism as a sin is a confession that has not come easily to many sectors of the Christian community. Resistance from its perpetrators and beneficiaries has been intense. Admitting that racism is both a personal and a social sin that individual Christians have committed and in which Christians have been complicit has been a long time in coming. Nonetheless, it has occurred. Confessing racism as a sin for which the Roman Catholic Church—as church—is guilty, however, has not occurred. As the Bride of Christ, the admission of such guilt is not possible for the Church theologically and symbolically. In part, because Jesus Christ as head of the church is not guilty and in part because the Church is made up of members who have experienced the consequences of racism as the victims and survivors as well as protagonists of racial justice. As for the guilt of those who have been the perpetrators and beneficiaries of racism, there is a collective dimension to our sin that cannot be mitigated by simply ascribing culpability to individuals.

Inasmuch as the Church is made up of perpetrators, victims, beneficiaries, bystanders, protagonists, offenders and offended, what does the authentic voice of the Church sound like when it speaks out against racism? I would venture to say that the world has yet to hear that voice. With some exceptions, ecclesial statements on racism tend to reveal a Church that is self-referentially white and speaks in a white voice.<sup>23</sup>

So it would seem that if it is possible to hear the voice of the white church speaking and visualize the white church acting in and through these documents on racism, the holy, yet sinful white church of history must be more than a figment of imagination. To be more precise, there must be some way for this *white church of history* to collectively acknowledge its counterwitness to the Gospel before the world, confess its sin to the Church of faith, ask for forgiveness, and do penance.

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<sup>23</sup>See Eduardo Hoornaert, "Ouvi o Clamor deste Povo Negro," *Revista Eclesiastica Brasileira* 48/189 (1988): 40-56.

### 3. Racism as an Obstacle to the *Missio ad Gentes*

Given the ethical imperatives that the Roman Catholic church faces in the new millennium, our moral imagination must help us to create a space within the Roman Catholic *church of faith* for the *white church of history* to become a confessing church.<sup>24</sup> I readily acknowledge the problematic aspects of this notion for Roman Catholic ecclesiology inasmuch as the invisible church is distinguished from the visible. The seeming impossibility of addressing collective guilt on the part of white Roman Catholics, however, is also problematic. There is nothing, however, except an act of will, preventing those of us who are white Catholic theologians from making such a confession, not only out of obligation, but as an authentic sign that indeed we are growing in virtue in response to the signs of the times and God's grace. In advancing the position that racism is a primary obstacle to the *missio ad gentes*, I simply want to emphasize that envisioning such an action on our part would be only an initial step, albeit a *potentially* significant one. I use the qualifier "potentially significant" advisedly because the degree to which such an action would actually bring about the social transformation this proposal envisions is tenuous and uncertain at best. Hopefully, it could be an important step in a much larger ecclesial process of revealing and redressing racism and white superiority as major obstacles to the *missio ad gentes* and indeed to doing the kind of theology that our Church and the world both need *and seek*.

Beyond collectively confessing our participation in the sin of racism, such an action could take us from the realm of moral discourse to that of moral agency if in fact we would give ourselves over to the undertaking of genuine acts of repentance. Though such actions could cost us nothing less than everything, I dare say that they could offer us an unprecedented opportunity as well. Such an opportunity, more commonly known as an occasion of grace, might enable us to discover or recover the core of our vocation as theologians, a vocation that among other responsibilities involves not only *talking about*, but actually *removing* those obstacles that impede people's access to the truth revealed in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

What I am proposing here is not a new idea. Rather, it represents an effort to review an overlooked chapter in the personal histories of Roman Catholic theologians that is often lost or forgotten and which, given the exigencies of our time, merits recovery. Indeed, there are individuals who centuries and decades ago anticipated the need for taking action against racism, while recognizing and admitting their own complicity in a sinful structure.

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<sup>24</sup>This notion takes as points of reference the Barmen Declaration of 1934 of the Lutheran Churches in Germany and the Belhar Declaration of 1981 of the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa.

Among the white Roman Catholic theological voices of the latter part of the twentieth century that perceived racism to be an obstacle to the Church's efforts to fulfill the mission entrusted to it, we find several names.<sup>25</sup> The example of each theologian's life reveals that taking up topics, such as racism and anti-Semitism, involves many challenges, not the least of which is the fact that attending to one form of structural oppression inevitably leads to the recognition of its interconnectedness with other forms. They remind us that whenever theologians upset the equilibrium of the status quo by seeking accountability from civil and ecclesiastical authorities, urging their theological colleagues to recognize the ways in which the Bible and tradition have been manipulated in order to justify sinful structures, or challenging Christians to acknowledge their individual and collective participation in sinful structures and habits of the heart, we do so knowing the possible consequences.

Tracing the life trajectories of white Roman Catholic theologians who responded to the call to reflect theologically, ecclesiological and morally on racism and white superiority over the course of the past fifty years, leads to some important observations and relevant insights in terms of what they actually did and what we, too, are called to do.

Committing themselves to the task of examining the biblical and theological underpinnings of counterwitness and its implications for mission and ministry, locally and globally, these theologians offered an example to their colleagues, their students and church leaders.

- They took account of the broader implications of racism for evangelization and the *missio ad gentes*.
- They contributed to creating the conditions for sharing space with theologians of many races and cultures, perhaps imperfectly and not without creating other problems and tensions in the process. Nonetheless, they participated in the process knowing that one of its consequences would be the requisite decentering of their own voices, visions and insights in the theological arena of discourse for the sake of the Gospel and the future of the Church.
- They placed a priority on naming and confronting the reality of white supremacy, white superiority and white privilege and infused this consciousness into their subsequent works.
- They engaged in theological investigation and reflection on other forms of structural oppression including neocolonial imperialism, capitalism, sexism, militarism, religious absolutism, destruction of the environment, and the historical abuse of power in the Church.
- They contributed to a renewed understanding of the fact that theology could not be done in isolation or as a series of monologues. Rather, theology had to be predicated on dialogue, on engagement with the world, on fidelity, con-

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<sup>25</sup>Among others, I would include John LaFarge, Yves Congar, Austin Flannery, Thomas Merton, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Anne Patrick, Wahlbert Buhlmann, Daniel Berrigan, Johannes B. Metz, and Albert Nolan.

science, integrity, creativity and historical consciousness.

In recognizing racism as a root evil, a sin of incredible proportions, they joined their voices with those oppressed by racism. Endeavoring, though not always succeeding, to address the racism that filtered into their own ways of thinking and acting, they touched the conscience of the Church, the academy and society as they called for a deeper integration of theological imagination and moral imagination in the service of racial justice. The irony in all of this is that the theological reflection for which they may most be remembered, is usually not the work they did on racism. Accounting for this fact is certainly a point that merits more detailed investigation and analysis. For the purposes of this paper, however, suffice to say that recalling their example serves as a means for understanding the relevance of moral imagination for ongoing reflection on the *missio ad gentes* and the reality of racism. It also alerts us to the forces that prevail in the Church, in the academy and in society with regard to the selection process that determines the contents of theological legacies.

### III. MORAL IMAGINATION AND THE *MISSIO AD GENTES*: A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

In describing the dynamics of moral imagination, Sharon Parks observes that "people imagine their world into being. We compose what we find. The imagination orients one to choose and notice certain details over countless others. The imagination then informs the way in which one makes sense of the details, forming patterns out of disparate elements. In other words, it acts first as a kind of filter and then as a kind of lens."<sup>26</sup> In accord with this description, I would like to suggest that as theologians, we, too, imagine our world into being and compose what we find. We choose and notice details, we make sense of them and form patterns. What begins as a filter, turns into a lens. And so it with this paper.

Early on, I made the claim that racist behaviors, attitudes and habits of the heart are a counterwitness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and as such an obstacle to both proclamation and reception. I also noted that missionary malaise and religious relativism tend to preoccupy more attention from some church leaders concerned with the *missio ad gentes* far more than racism. Perhaps, this is because missionary malaise and religious relativism are more of a preoccupation for the *white church of history* as it ponders what its place and legacy will be in the already *emerged* world Church of faith *and history*.

Or, could it be that much of the contentiousness in Roman Catholic theological discourse today is in fact a manifestation of veiled, yet pervasive forms of white superiority and other forms of racism, including internalized racism and

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<sup>26</sup>Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) 116.

cross-racial hostility, that continue to obstruct and impede the *missio ad gentes*, in ways that none of us are fully aware? Does the conscious conflict that we experience in discussions of the *missio ad gentes* disclose some of our own uneasiness with regard to our actual participation in the *missio Dei*?<sup>27</sup> Is this uneasiness elicited from a sense that something is not fitting as we take into account what the Church claims and what the historical record shows? As we ask these questions, it is important to remember that in the year 2001, missionary activity is not only in the hands of missionaries from Western Europe and North America, but also in the hands of increasing numbers of missionaries from other regions of the world.

Mindful of this fact, it is important to underscore that four decades of theological reflection on various aspects of the *missio ad gentes* have been shaped by the interactive dynamics of theological curiosity, the devastating shattering of theological assumptions, a vague theological restlessness, an intense weariness of things as they are in the world and in the Church, a body of broken theological and ecclesiological expectations, a coming to terms with intraecclesial, interecclesial and interreligious conflict, and the discovery of theological dissonance.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, theological reflection on mission has been shaped by the spiritual resiliency of unrelenting reconcilers, the courageous testimony of witnessess of faith and hope, and the creative, constructive and compassionate visions of unwavering protagonists for peace, justice, dialogue and solidarity. Indeed, theological reflection on the *missio ad gentes* has brought to the attention of the Church and its leaders the moral significance of this unprecedented time of *kairos*.

If my analysis of the role which racism plays in obstructing and impeding the *missio ad gentes* is correct, there is a way in which the landscape of what has been characterized as the *new springtime for mission*<sup>29</sup> must also be understood as a metaphorical minefield. Perhaps, many of us would prefer to avoid this landscape/minefield altogether, rather than risk our lives and limbs embarking on a task of finding and defusing the landmines of racism, before they maim and kill the souls of another generation of unsuspecting children of every race and culture. To the extent that those who planted the landmines, whether long ago or recently, have no recollection of when they were buried, where they were buried and how many there really are, the task is all the more difficult and dangerous. Covered over now by new vegetation, lush, green and beautiful, the difficulties and dangers are compounded.

But this is no time for theologians to lack courage. Rather, it may be the time for us to place our theological, moral and missiological imaginations at the service of proclamation in unanticipated and yet unimagined ways. In an effort

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<sup>27</sup>See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1992) 389-93.

<sup>28</sup>These observations are adapted from Parks, *The Critical Years*, 117.

<sup>29</sup>RM 86, 92.

to consider the moral imperative that is at the heart of this paper, namely the moral urgency of acting for the sake of the child and with children, I would like to propose a thought experiment which involves taking *a turn to the child*, a turn which requires us to consider the child as a benefactor of the *missio ad gentes* as well as a subject, not only an object, and ultimately, as one of the world's most vulnerable victims of racist ideology and one of the Gospel's most persuasive protagonists for racial justice.

### 1. Turning to the Child:

#### A Case Study in Children's Participation in the *Missio ad Gentes*

I begin by proposing that the formation of the moral imagination of the cradle Roman Catholic begins in childhood and that part of that formation involves identity formation, consciousness raising and the inculcation of responsibility for a larger world and a world church. Key to this process is *mission education*. Elements of this phenomenon can be traced to the dawning of the missionary era in the sixteenth century. However, it was the European missionary movements of the mid-nineteenth century and the North American missionary endeavors of the early twentieth century that contributed to the development and intensification of children as sponsors of the *missio ad gentes* and children as the subjects of the *missio ad gentes*.

Many missionary-sending societies organized children's campaigns in Europe and North America, ostensibly to support the evangelization and humanitarian care of children in regions of the world designated as mission territories. The establishment of the Holy Childhood Association in 1843 by Bishop Charles de Forbin-Janson in Nancy, France, marked the beginning of this children's missionary movement which continues to the present time.<sup>30</sup> I believe that a brief analysis of the evolution of this Pontifical Missionary Aid Society is a relevant case study inasmuch as the Holy Childhood Association discloses many of the tensions and ambiguities that are inherent in efforts to understand the relationship of Christian missionary activity and Christian moral imagination.

Until the time of the Second Vatican Council, the Holy Childhood Association was best known and later caricatured for the "ransoming of pagan babies," mite boxes and the fostering of missionary vocations among impressionable children. Its secondary purpose was to lay the groundwork for commitment on the part of adult Catholics to support missionary activity through prayer and donations to the Propagation of the Faith.

After the Second Vatican Council, the Holy Childhood Association came under the same scrutiny as other pontifical missionary aid societies and mission

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<sup>30</sup>See Charles Dollen, *Charity without Frontiers* (Collegeville MI: Liturgical Press, 1972) 34-35. The Holy Childhood Association eventually came under the direction and administration of the Propagation of the Faith and eventually was given the status of a Pontifical Mission Aid Society.

associations. As tensions and divisions regarding the *missio ad gentes* intensified among Church leaders, theologians, and missionaries, they trickled down to Catholic school classrooms and religious education programs. The Holy Childhood Association was identified as one of the vestiges of a pre-Vatican II ecclesiology. As changes in Roman Catholic missionary consciousness occurred in Western Europe and North America, some socially conscious, committed and self-reflective Catholic mission educators, teachers and catechists, affected to some degree by unexpressed guilt and moved by a desire to contribute to the process of reconciliation, readily replaced what were considered to be the obsolete mission education programs of HCA with alternative programs that focused on peace and justice, world religions, human rights and Christian values education. In many cases, they effectively removed themselves from conversations on mission, evangelization and world church consciousness. Some of the reasons for this were connected to an emerging, critical awareness of the shadow side of *missio ad gentes*. A few examples of such awareness included

- (1) awareness of the complicity of Christians in the extermination of six million Jews,
- (2) information about poverty, racism and oppression "at home,"
- (3) concern about anti-American and anti-European protests associated with anticommunist military interventions, multinational corporations, foreign aid/development agencies, and other forms of neocolonialism, and
- (4) questions about the lack of truth in advertising with regard to the actual distribution of funds collected for designated missionary activities.

As changes in priorities and organizing principles affected missionary activity, concern for the promotion of social justice had a prophetic urgency about it that rivaled a more traditional commitment to the *missio ad gentes*, narrowly understood as involving proclamation, conversion and catechesis. Significant differences in world views, ecclesiologies and theologies of mission effectively contributed to the uncoupling of *missio ad gentes* and social justice, at least in the perceptions of many Catholics and Protestants alike.

In Western Europe and North America, donations to the Holy Childhood Association began to decrease, an outward visible sign that *missio ad gentes per se* no longer captured the ecclesial imaginations of youth as it had in the past. Children in schools and parishes continued to raise funds, but they made allocations to other or at least additional groups and organizations. For thirty cents a day they were now adopting Sally Struthers' starving children instead of saving Bishop Fulton Sheen's unbaptized babies. HCA Lenten mite boxes were replaced by the cardboard cartons of Operation Rice Bowl, the Lenten drive for Catholic Relief Services. Children, often under the influence of post-Vatican II theologies of moderate, liberal and progressive sorts, envisioned themselves no longer as potential missionaries, but rather, as volunteers with Doctors without Borders and Habitat for Humanity. The term missionary was viewed by some as pejorative, precisely because of its identification with a church seemingly more interested

in baptisms than the causes of infant mortality. Even missionaries themselves sought ways of distancing themselves from the nomenclature.

This shift in ecclesial consciousness had serious implications for many children in Europe and North America as well as the adults who contributed to their formation. From the perspective of social justice, they learned about racism as a *social problem for the world* in terms of slavery, antisemitism, apartheid and genocide. However, in the absence of attention being given to the role of witness and proclamation in the *missio ad gentes*, there were few concrete ways to make the connections between *racism the sin* and the counterwitness of Christians to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There was no way into a dialogue about white superiority, white privilege and cultural imperialism as structures of sin both collective and individual.

In the early 1990s, Church leaders encouraged efforts to redirect the attention of Roman Catholics to the urgency of the *missio ad gentes*.<sup>31</sup> The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* and the Latin American Bishops Conference at Santo Domingo on the New Evangelization contributed to these efforts. Reacting in part to the vigorous initiatives of Protestant evangelical missionaries in Asia and Eastern Europe, the Vatican sought to alter the course of what had come to be described as *missionary malaise* in Western Europe and North America. The new impulse to mission included missionaries from around the world. Local churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America came of age. This was signaled by their interest and desire to become missionary-sending churches. A question emerged, however: Would the initiative resolve the perceived problem, namely, the displacement of zeal for the *missio ad gentes* that had been replaced by a passionate witness for justice and peace and commitments to interreligious dialogue? Or, would problems associated with *ad gentes* missionary activity be compounded?<sup>32</sup>

In some sectors of the world, renewed zeal for proclamation tended not to be historically conscious. Memories of the tragic legacy of racism as a counterwitness to the Gospel proclamation tended not to be passed on and ran the risk of being effectively erased. What appeared in the eyes of some to be a reassertion of a modern Western model of muscular Christianity held a certain reactionary appeal in an increasingly postmodern atmosphere influenced by the muscular relativism of the West.

And so, the case study continues. As one might anticipate, a new generation of children was called upon to help support this new missionary impulse through

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<sup>31</sup>See William R. Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1993).

<sup>32</sup>Examples of such problems included the lack of sufficient cross-cultural training of missionaries, difficulties in ecumenical relations with Protestant missionaries and Orthodox church leaders, problems with religious extremism, the threat of reprisals and persecutions, identification of missionaries with right-wing political movements, a recapitulation of the counterwitness for which missionaries had been criticised in the past, and so forth.

the Holy Childhood Association. The Holy Childhood Association underwent a renaissance and a renewal.<sup>33</sup> Its most active members include children from every race and many nations from around the globe. In countries like Brazil, Nigeria, the Philippines, Korea, Poland and Mexico, these children, invited by Pope John Paul II to be *ambassadors of joy*, committed themselves to supporting missionaries from their own countries in bringing the *message of Jesus* to children in other regions of the world.

What theological meaning are we to make of renewed interest in the Holy Childhood Association? Should we presume that in the hands of missionaries from Korea, Nigeria, India, Brazil, Japan, Kenya, Rwanda, Guatemala, Vietnam, and Lithuania—and all who share a common ancestry, whether recent or distant—that the counterwitness of racism will not repeat itself, particularly in the forms of internalized racism and cross-racial hostility? Or, are we to despair at the inevitability of such a scenario? Or, should we hope that the *missio ad gentes* is, in fact, no longer defined or determined by the tragic racist legacy of the past and that this is truly a new moment for Christian mission? Based on impressionistic evidence, I would like to be a voice of hope in this regard.<sup>34</sup>

These questions cannot be answered yet, for they are questions that we will continue to live with for some time. These questions do, however, point to some of the concerns and anxieties related to *missio ad gentes* in the new millennium that may be opportunities of grace and understanding. For example, what kind of moral or ecclesial imagination is informing these new and renewed missionary endeavors? What are the short and long term risks involved in failure, inability or unwillingness to recognize the ideological underpinnings of mission that contributed to the counterwitness of racism in the past and could potentially do so once again? Given the fact that the imaginations, energies and resources of the next generation are being brought to bear on this new impulse for mission, these questions are not insignificant.

This observation brings me to the second part of my thought experiment in turning to the child. Moving from an historical case study, I would like to

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<sup>33</sup>See summary of annual report submitted to the Annual Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies by Msgr. Julio D. Botia Aponte, Secretary General of the Holy Childhood Association in *Fides*, 12 June 1998.

<sup>34</sup>An example of such hope is described in a letter from Marianne Farina, C.S.C. "In Bangladesh, we face the issue of racism and prejudice between various groups in Bangladesh. Therefore, racism and prejudice are at the heart of the Church's ecclesiological reflection. As part of the Church's efforts to heal and recover an authentic voice proclaiming the Gospel, the Holy Childhood Association in Bangladesh promotes the reality that every child in Bangladesh, be he/she Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Animist, be he/she Bengali, Shantal, Mandi, or Oran, he/she is a Holy Child of God. It has been a very positive program and during my eleven years there, I saw great changes occur through these reflections."

suggest another means of consciousness raising on the subject at hand using the fictional portrayal of children as depicted in novels and films dealing with the *missio ad gentes*. In these two selected examples, children are the embodiment of conscience for the *missio ad gentes*. At once portrayed as the most vulnerable victims of the counterwitness of racism, they also emerge as persuasive protagonists heralding the possibility of its eradication and reminding us of the paradox of mission.

## 2. Image as Insight:

### Children, the Conscience of the *Missio ad Gentes*

Whatever opinions may exist about the accuracy of portrayals of missionaries in literature and cinema, there is no denying the fact that depictions of missionary activity and attitudes about race have informed and influenced the moral imagination of those who have paid attention to the media. From the outset, narratives and films dealing with the subject of Christian mission have held the attention of Christians and non-Christians alike. Beginning with one of the first award-winning silent films, *Missionaries in Darkest Africa* (1912) and Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), nine decades of novels and feature films<sup>35</sup> have done as much to educate for the *missio ad gentes* as a lifetime of parish mission appeals sponsored by the Propagation of the Faith, the combined volumes of nineteenth and twentieth-century missiological research and the collective teachings of the Christian churches on mission and missionary activity. Certainly, the fascination continues with the popularity of works such as *The Poisonwood Bible* and *The Testament*. Even *Star Trek: The Next Generation* counts among its episodes *Guises of the Mind*, the intergalactic tale of two Poor Clare missionaries, one an empath peacemaker and the other a protector of abandoned orphans. Given the limits of the paper, I have chosen to mention very briefly two film segments: one from *The Mission* and one from *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*.

In the final scene of the movie, *The Mission*,<sup>36</sup> the Mission San Carlos has been destroyed, the Guaraní and the Jesuit missionaries share the same fate, death by fire and the sword. As the film concludes, a small band of young children make their escape from the tragic scene in a small canoe. In their faces, one sees the haunting questions left in the wake of the *missio ad gentes*, the recollections of all that had been and was no longer, the anxieties of an uncertain future, and the determined resiliency of a small Guaraní girl, who despite the

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<sup>35</sup>For a more complete analysis, see Alan Neely, "Images: Mission and Missionaries in Contemporary Fiction and Cinema," *Missiology* 24/4 (1996): 451-78 (includes a complete listing of novels and films through 1995).

<sup>36</sup>Written by Robert Bolt. Adapted for cinema by Roland Joffe in 1986.

visible disapproval of the children's leader, pulls from the river one memento of memory and hope, a floating violin of red mahogany.

*At Play in the Fields of the Lord*<sup>37</sup> is a story about contemporary missionaries and mercenaries in the Amazon rain forest. One of its central themes is cultural genocide and another is the transformation of missionary consciousness. Its child protagonists are Billy Quarrier, the young son of the evangelical missionaries and Mutu, the son of Niaruna Indians. Midway through the story, Billy dies of Black River Fever, surrounded by the Indians who have found in him an ambassador of joy. Once again, children are the conscience of the *missio ad gentes*, but this time we are left looking into the faces of the adult American missionaries and the adult Niaruna. Once again, we see the haunting questions left in the wake of the *missio ad gentes*, the recollections of all that had been and was no longer, the anxieties of an uncertain future, and the grief, guilt and rage of a father, judged and found wanting by his wife, his fellow missionaries, and the Niaruna, as much a sign and symbol of contradiction as the handcarved cross of mahogany with which he marks his son's grave.

Open to many interpretations, our moral imaginations are engaged by these children and the adult polemics of the *missio ad gentes* in which they find themselves. Surrounded by the racist counterwitness of Iberian Christian colonists in one case and the racist counterwitness of North American missionaries in the other, these fictional characters are prototypes of countless contemporary children whose faces we see on the evening news, in missionary magazines, action alerts from Amnesty International and UNICEF bulletins—the Lost Boys of the Sudan, the children trafficked in Benin, the child carpet workers in Pakistan, the refugee children in Thailand, the homeless children of Miami, the working children of Lima, the orphaned children of Romania, the children living and dying with AIDS in Chicago, London, Kampala, and Sao Paulo.

Through the witness of their lives, these children preach more than Christ Crucified, they also proclaim the message of God-with-Us. Drawing our attention not only to their *otherness*, but to their *thisness*,<sup>38</sup> they disclose to us the radical uniqueness that makes every child precious in God's sight. Finally, they reveal to us our own complicity in the failure to eradicate the root evil of racism in our life time, in the world<sup>39</sup> and in the Church.

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<sup>37</sup>Written by Peter Matthieson and originally published in 1965 (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). Adapted for cinema in 1991 by the Brazilian director Hector Babenco.

<sup>38</sup>For further discussion of the Scotist notion of "thisness" [haecceitas], see Mary Beth Ingham, C.S.J., "The Harmony of Goodness: Mutuality as a Context for Scotus' Moral Framework," in *The Ethical Method of John Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas A. Shannon and Mary Beth Ingham, C.S.J., *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism* 3 (1993): 63.

<sup>39</sup>This was the envisioned future set out by the General Assembly of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on

As we consider their realities and our own, are we as theologians prepared to learn from them, to live with the questions they pose to us, to understand the obstacle that white privilege and all forms of racism have been and continue to be for the *missio ad gentes* from their perspective? In short, will we acknowledge children as our conscience and our guide in assessing the true measure of the our success as Christians to carry out the missionary mandates of Jesus Christ in this springtime of mission? Will we commit ourselves to addressing, eradicating and preventing the counterwitness that has gone on for far too long?

And further, in making a turn to the child, will we also take into account the unseen faces of the privileged children of prestigious Catholic schools in Rio, Manila, New York, Nairobi, Tokyo, Dublin, Seoul, Mexico City, Krakow, Beirut, and Johannesburg, and even those of Chicago, where the initial decision of largely white Catholic parishes to exclude children from a black Catholic parish from a football league discloses the fears and prejudices of generations, and a large group of Catholic high school students raucously call out to a Jewish high school basketball player "You killed Jesus" as he steps to the free throw line?

If my citing of such examples of counterwitness appear to some as a blurring of boundaries between the global and the local or between the theological and the pastoral, allow me to defend their use by saying that indeed the *missio ad gentes* extends to the ends of the earth, but in urban settings such as Chicago, the ends of the earth are also present in this microcosm of the world and the world church. Front page headlines bearing this bad news about Christians are read by adults and children who are Buddhists from Thailand, Hindus from India, Confucianists from Korea, Muslims from Pakistan, Jews from Russia and atheists from China. Such racist counterwitness to proclamation is further compounded by the scandal it gives to some children and the tacit license it gives to others.

#### IV. AN ALTERNATIVE VISION AND CRITERION FOR *MISSIO AD GENTES*

As Christian theologians, and more precisely as Roman Catholic theologians, we are part of an ecclesial community of confirmation and contradiction.<sup>40</sup> We share community with each other in the name of Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, we invite those who have not heard or understood his message to listen to our proclamation of the Good News and to observe how we love one another. A holy and sinful people, we are witnesses and counterwitnesses to the Gospel we preach. Called to be missionary, we sometimes betray the trust of the peoples and cultures by whom we seek to be found worthy, especially the trust of the children of our world.

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20 November 1963. See Resolution 1904 (xviii).

<sup>40</sup>Parks, *The Critical Years*, 129.

Among the hard sayings of Jesus, the injunctions against those who scandalize children are unambiguous (Mk 9:42; Mt 18:6). This fact should be more than sufficient reason to do all that is in our power to remove racism as an obstacle to the *missio ad gentes*. Inasmuch as the mission of Jesus extends *to* the children of all races and nations, it also extends *from* them as well. To be receptive to a child in the name of Jesus is to receive Jesus and the One who sent him. (Mk 9:37; Mt 18:5; Lk 9:48).<sup>41</sup> This is the hallmark of his vision and criterion for receiving and entering into the Reign of God: "Unless you become like children" (Mk 10:15; Mt 18:3-4).

For many of us, the world or worlds in which we live are constructed primarily by adults and for adults. It is we who benefit the most from this world, from these worlds, whether we thrive or merely survive. The farther removed we are from children who experience the consequences of racism, xenophobia and discrimination, the less likely it is that their concerns will be or become our own. It also might be said that the farther we are removed from missionaries and theologians whose ministries and theologies have emerged in response to the need to bind and heal these wounds, the less likely it is that their concerns will be our own. For those of us who experience the call to articulate theologies that will serve the *missio ad gentes* in this new millennium, living with the question "why is the child crying?" may be less common than "why is Jacques Dupuis crying?" But let me assure you that these two questions are not as unrelated as they may seem. For the initial response to both of them is the same: *If we knew, what would we do differently?*

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<sup>41</sup>The statement parallels the reward of discipleship as described in Matthew, "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me, receives the One who sent me" (Mt 10:40) and John, "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the One who sent me" (Jn 13:20).