Apostolic Spirituality: Aware We Are Sent

James H. Kroeger, M.M.

Adequately capturing realities in the spiritual life always demands the use of dynamic, expansive language. For this reason, spirituality is frequently described in relational categories — between a disciple and the master, between a Christian and a personal God, between the servant-herald and the crucified-risen Lord. Such a relationship of intimacy is at the heart of biblical spirituality: “I will be your God and you shall be my people” (Ex 19:4-6; Lv 26:12; Dt 7:6-9; Jer 11:4; 30:22); Christians are Jesus’ friends (Jn 15:15) and call their heavenly Father “Abba” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

Spirituality may also variously be described in terms of a growth-process, an evolution toward maturity, a pilgrimage. Each descriptive category attempts to present an authentic, albeit partial, grasp of the human-divine dynamic operative in our lives. In this piece, “consciousness” or “awareness” forms the framework to enhance our insight into spirituality. And, this category naturally overflows with an apostolic or missionary dynamism.

Consciousness: A Window Into Spirituality

Consciousness may seem to be an elusive concept; yet, no one would deny the reality. An individual is in a conscious state when perceptual and cognitive faculties are functioning normally. One continuously synthesizes various stimuli from within and from without; ideally, the result is a healthy personal integration.

Notice that a whole panorama of constitutive elements are included within the framework of consciousness. Diverse aspects of conscious awareness derive from one’s seeing, hearing, feeling,
thinking, desiring, experiencing. Consciousness incorporates perceptions, emotions, observations, thoughts, aspirations, choices. It also includes an introspective awareness of the personal impact of all events and experience.

In light of this brief and rudimentary description of the phenomenon of human consciousness, one may begin to elaborate the relationship between consciousness and a spirituality of the apostolate. Our faith-life derives much profit from prayer, reflection, experience, service — all focused on raising our God-consciousness and expanding the horizons of our spiritual awareness. We want to use our eyes to see perceptively and our ears to hear attentively (Mk 8:18); we hope to gain deepened insight into our lives through faith’s mirror (Jas 1:22-25).

In another vein, a look at the venerable Eastern traditions of many Asian nations reveals that the man of God or the God-conscious/God-focused person is essentially a seer, sage, or mystic. Such a person “sees” and experiences God; God is not an object of knowledge, but a subject of experience. To grow in holistic spirituality is concomitant with an experiential awareness and consciousness of God’s presence and activity in all dimensions of one’s life.¹

The beautiful prayer in the Upanishads, one of the Hindu sacred books, expresses the aspiration and spiritual desire to come to this deeper conscious union with the divine. In Sanskrit and English, it is:

\[
\text{Asato ma satgamaya} \\
\text{Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya} \\
\text{Mrutyu ma amrutam gamaya.} \\
\text{God, lead me from untruth to truth} \\
\text{Lead me from darkness to light} \\
\text{Lead me from death to immortality.}
\]

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and spiritual writer (1915-1968), has enabled countless people to gain insights into their spirituality. Merton intimately links spirituality and prayer with the

transformation of consciousness. He sees that a renewed conscious awareness underlies all spiritual growth; each Christian must cease to assert himself as the center of consciousness and discover God's presence as the deepest center of consciousness within him. Thus, as one's self-consciousness changes, the individual is transformed; one's self is no longer its own center; it is now centered on God.

It is important to note that for Merton, no one will ever be capable of communion with God and others without this deep awakening, this transformation of consciousness. Such transformative growth, as explained by Merton, "consists in a double movement: man's entering into the deepest center of himself, and then, after passing through that center, going out of himself to God."²

In addition, Merton asserts that unless our spirituality/prayer "does something to awaken in us a consciousness of our union with God, of our complete dependence upon Him for all our vital acts in the spiritual life, and of His constant loving presence in the depths of our souls, it has not achieved the full effect for which it is intended."³ Or again, Merton holds that in today's world: "What is required of Christians is that they develop a completely modern and contemporary consciousness in which their experience as men of our century is integrated with their experience as children of God redeemed by Christ."⁴

The renowned Indian theologian, D.S. Amalorpavadass, has written eloquently on the role of consciousness/awareness in attaining spiritual integration and interiorization. He notes:

If wholeness is a state of being at which one should finally arrive in stages, awareness is the running thread and unifying force. Awareness needs to flow like a river, like a blood-stream . . . Awareness is also the core of spirituality and God-experience.

Awareness or consciousness should flow through the various actions of our life. One should maintain awareness in all that one does. It should serve as a running thread and connecting bond . . . through the various activities of our day, and the different periods and stages of our life in an uninterrupted and continuous flow. This flow will make our whole life a

continuous prayer and a state of contemplation.⁵

Brief glimpses at Scripture, Eastern traditions, a Trappist monk, and a contemporary theologian have shown that "consciousness" is a fruitful category to grasp the human-divine dynamic operative in the Christian life. Within this framework — which is foundational — a vibrant spirituality and a concomitant missionary dynamism can flourish. And, in a Marian spirit, Christians who are missionary will grow ever more conscious of the marvelous deeds that God is accomplishing in us, our neighbors, our society, our church and the entire world.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF PAUL THE MISSIONARY

The New Testament describes the radical nature of Paul's awareness of God's active presence in his life. Though not naturally prone to humility, Paul admits that he was knocked to the ground (Acts 9:4) and that in Damascus "something like scales fell from his eyes" (Acts 9:18). His grace-filled conversion allowed him to perceive that he was the chosen instrument to bring Good News to the Gentiles and that he would accomplish his mission only with hardship and through suffering (Acts 9:15-16).

Paul's consciousness of his apostolic calling was certainly at the basis of his extraordinary missionary journeys. Without a vivid perception and faith commitment, no one would willingly endure the challenges Paul faced (2 Cor 11:23-30). Such endurance under trial would be no more than absolute foolishness. Yet, Paul is never willing — even momentarily — to minimize his authority and commitment as an apostle; the introductory verses of many of his letters are clear evidence of this fact. Paul's conversion was no superficial or passing phenomenon; it penetrated the core of his person and totally transformed his way of thinking and acting — his consciousness.

Further investigation into Pauline theology and spirituality reveals the depth of his convictions. Paul is absolutely certain that

---
God has a wonderful, marvelous, loving plan of salvation for the entire world (note his frequent use of the words *mysterion* and *oikonomia*). His letter to the Ephesians convincingly — almost mystically — explains how "God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery" (1:9), "the mysterious design which for ages was hidden in God" (3:9).

Pauline reflection on God's loving plan of salvation (*mysterion*) synthesizes his belief that this design has been fully revealed in Christ the Savior and will be recapitulated in Christ at the end of time. This manifestation is focused on salvation, not condemnation or judgment, and is open to all peoples. It unfolds in stages: God, Jesus, Spirit, church, world; humanity's response is faith or personal appropriation of the *mysterion*.6

A recent scholarly investigation has concluded that:

Any center of Pauline theology must therefore include *all* these components of the apostle's gospel: his understanding of Christ and of God, his understanding of God's salvific action through Christ, involving the Easter event and its implications, the present lordship, the future coming of Christ, and the appropriation of salvation. The center is thus not any *single* aspect of Christ, or of God's action through Christ, but rather the whole and undivided richness and mystery of Christ and of the Father's saving purpose through his Son (*mysterion*).7

In brief, mystery could be a one-word synonym which captures the heart of the Christian message.

Paul is the missionary *par excellence* because he believed, lived, prayed, served, reflected, witnessed, preached and suffered so that God's *mysterion* would be known, extended, loved and freely received. Obviously, Paul's missionary consciousness had the "*mysterion*-encounter" as its central focus and driving force.

Paul's self-awareness as an apostle was rooted in being chosen as a servant and minister of God's loving plan of salvation (Rom 1:1-6; 1 Cor 4:1; 15:9-11; Eph 3:1-21; Col 1:24-29). It might be asserted that the *mysterion* engulfed and consumed Paul; his consciousness was so transformed that he could assert that Christ lived

in him (Gal 2:20), that fellow-Christians could imitate him (1 Cor 4:16), that life or death no longer mattered (Rom 14:8), and that he gloried in giving his life for Christ (2 Tim 4:6). In a word, the *mysterion* is foundational to Paul’s missionary identity and consciousness.

**MISSION AND MYSTERION CONSCIOUSNESS**

The Second Vatican Council in its decree on the missionary activity of the church places mission and evangelization at the center of the church — not allowing this task to float somewhere on the periphery: “The pilgrim church is missionary by her very nature” (AG, 2). Pope Paul VI continues in the same vein: “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all peoples constitutes the essential mission of the church... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize” (EN, 14).

To evangelize: what meaning does this imperative have for the church? It is to be no less than the living proclamation of the *mysterion* — God’s loving design of universal salvation. As the community of Jesus’ disciples, the church realizes her “deepest identity” and “her very nature” when she fulfills her mission of evangelization. She is to be always and everywhere “the universal sacrament of salvation” (LG, 48; AG, 1). For her, to live is to evangelize!

Phrased in contemporary language, the church accomplishes her “self-realization” or “self-actualization” through mission and evangelization. She is only authentic and true to herself when she is announcing and witnessing the *mysterion*. A non-missionary church is impossible; it is self-contradictory. Once again, the great missionary pope, Paul VI, writes that the church “is linked to evangelization in her most intimate being” (EN, 15); mission is *not* “an optional contribution for the church” (EN, 5).

In addition, the church’s missionary identity is not a late afterthought of the risen Jesus — though this outlook may seem true today of some Christians and local churches. Animation and re-creation are necessary, because Christians “are faithful to the nature of the church to the degree that we love and sincerely promote her missionary activity” (EE, 2).
These few paragraphs may invite the comment that "I've heard it all before." True, yet all of us often hear without hearing, see without seeing, and listen without comprehending (Mk 8:17-18). It is precisely at this juncture that the phenomenon of consciousness is poignantly relevant. Many Christians do not deny the missionary nature of the church; but their level of conscious awareness is weak or minimal. This fact is unfortunately true even of many full-time church personnel. The intention here is not to berate or castigate individuals; rather, it is a stark statement of the need for "consciousness-raising"; it is a call for Christians to expand and deepen their awareness; all urgently need "conscientization-into-mission." In short, the entire church herself must experience a profound re-evangelization in order to become a truly evangelizing community (EN, 13).

Recall some of the key themes presented earlier on the centrality of consciousness in Christian life and spirituality. In a unique way, they seem particularly relevant as the church struggles with her fundamental missionary identity. Is not this a central burning question in the church today: What has happened to her mission consciousness — where is its urgency and dynamism — where are the contemporary St. Pauls?

A rephrasing in mission terms of earlier quotes on consciousness from Amalorpavadas may prove enlightening: Church-as-mission is "the running thread and unifying force"; it "needs to flow like a river, like a blood-stream"; it is at "the core of spirituality and God-experience"; it "will make our whole life a continuous prayer and state of contemplation."

TRINITARIAN FOUNDATIONS FOR MISSION
CONSCIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY

In the very same breath that the Vatican Council spoke of the church’s missionary identity, it also presented the foundational rationale of mission. In a word, the why of church-as-mission is Trinitarian: "For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (AG, 2).

This mission vision — expressed in Trinitarian language — must not frighten or intimidate readers. Do not say: "I don’t under-
stand Trinitarian theology, so I can’t grasp this”! While a bit difficult and challenging, this insight is also beautiful and rewarding. It transports us to the heart of mission; it flows from the core of our faith in the Trinity; it greatly enhances our mission-consciousness and spirituality.

The most inviting manner to appreciate mission — via the Trinity — is to remember that it is an eminently personal approach. The Father is a person, his son Jesus is a person, their gift of the Spirit is also a person. This is only a statement of a basic dogma of the faith. Grasping this immanence/closeness of the three persons appears far more fruitful than grappling with the incomprehensibility of the transcendent Trinity.\(^8\)

Growth in consciousness-awareness-experience-encounter with each of the three persons richly broadens our vision of mission. It also manifests that mission theology and spirituality draw from the same wellspring. An appreciation of the roles of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in mission produces an integrated missiology, incorporating “Abba”-theology, Christology, and Pneumatology. The result will certainly be a more holistic theology-spirituality of mission.

Finally, it is the firm conviction of this author that such an approach serves to relieve some current tensions and questions in mission. For example, debates centered on interreligious dialogue with the living faith traditions of the world can probably be better resolved more from a Pneumatological approach than from only a Christological viewpoint. Therefore, if mission theology-spirituality are an integrated endeavor, the deepened consciousness will provide insights to approach both theoretical and practical questions.

Our attention now turns to the unique roles of Father, Son, and Spirit in mission. The goal of this discussion is a heightened awareness of how each person of the Trinity sends and accompanies us into mission. Recall the title of this presentation which links mission and spirituality with a consciousness of being sent.

THE ROLE OF THE FATHER

The Father is presented in Scripture as the harvest master and

---

vineyard owner (Mt 20:1-16; 21:33-43). Mission, therefore, originates with the Father; mission is God’s project. The Father determines its parameters. Already this awareness places the church and her evangelizers in an auxiliary, servant role.

Vatican II clearly set aside triumphalistic ecclesiology as well as any simplistic church-kingdom identification. As servant of the kingdom or laborer in the vineyard, the church is to be “the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery” and “the initial budding forth of that kingdom” (LG, 3, 5). In addition, the Council, situating the church within the larger framework of God’s design of salvation (mysterion), entitled its first chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: “The Mystery of the Church.” Within this context, the church and all missioners must radically see themselves serving the mysterion, “according to the will of God the Father” (AG, 2).

Truly, the Father desires generous cooperators and humble workers for the harvest (Mt 20:1-16; Lk 10:1-11). He freely chooses them and they are to belong to him (Lk 6:13; Mk 3:13-16; Jn 15:15-16). These passages remind evangelizers that all mission is a sending (missio/mittere), originating in the Father; their vocation is God’s gratuitous gift. Missioners do not send themselves; mission cannot be defined in legal terms; all must be according to the Father’s gracious design. Affirming mission, therefore, as a gratuitous gift in the Father’s gracious vision, emphasizes the centrality of grace. Thus, missioners understand, as the country priest in Bernanos’ novel says on his deathbed, in all vocations “Grace is everywhere.”

Trinitarian mission is always soteriological; its purpose is liberation and salvation. The Father has no other goal as Paul clearly reminded Timothy; he “wants all to be saved and come to know the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Condemnation or rejection are inconsistent with the Father’s design (Jn 3:16-17; Mt 18:14). The Father, overwhelmingly “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4), extends his great love to everyone as the universalism of both Luke and Paul portray.

All evangelizers have experienced “the kindness and love of God” (Ti 3:4); it is out of their deep consciousness of the Father’s

personal graciousness that they journey to all places, peoples, and cultures. They are aware that they have received all as gift and they desire to give all with the same generosity (Mt 10:8). Any missioner would relish being described as being “rich in mercy”!

The Father cannot be surpassed in his kindness and generosity (Jas 1:5; 1:17); his mercy is made concrete and visible when he sends Jesus his son. This is definitely a new mode of God’s presence with his people — it is love in personal form. This unfolding of the mysterion far surpasses previous manifestations of Yahweh’s presence to his people Israel (Heb 1:1-2). Missioners strive to be continuations of the love of God manifested personally in Jesus — and this approach brings transformation and deepened consciousness.

Our discussion of the Father’s role in mission carries us back to the heart of the Trinity. God is fundamentally love (1 Jn 4:8) and all manifestations flow from this identity. No less than the inner life of the Trinity is founded on the dynamism of divine love. Thus, the mysterion necessarily is a loving design since it arises “from that ‘fountain of love’ or charity (fontalis amor) within God the Father” (AG, 2).

It is imperative that missioners and evangelizers become mystics like John the Evangelist (cf. 1 Jn 4:7-21); nothing less can explain the love of God for a fallen world and rebellious humanity. No other motivation is adequate to the missionary calling — of the entire church! Mother Teresa of Calcutta has named her congregation the Missionaries of Charity and she never tires of reminding her audiences that this is the fundamental vocation of all Christians. It sounds fantastic — but it is true: the love of the Trinity is personally poured into our hearts and it transforms all evangelizers into missionary messengers of God’s limitless love. Knowing our personal God as the font of love is the highest level of consciousness possible. Mission spirituality becomes a conscious centering on Trinitarian love. This is the solid missiology-become-spirituality promoted by Vatican II.

THE MISSION OF THE SON

Jesus declares openly that he has been sent by his loving Father;
precisely, the phrase "the Father who sent me" occurs 46 times in the Gospel of John. And, a salvific thrust is evident in the missioning of Jesus by his Father. Vatican II expresses Jesus’ mission as a reconciling presence: "... to establish peace or communion between sinful human beings and Himself ... Jesus Christ was sent into the world as a real Mediator between God and men" (AG, 3). In Paul’s theology, mediation and reconciliation are vital elements of the mysterion (2 Cor 5:19; Col 1:13; Rom 5:1).

Jesus’ continuing “abba-experience” — enabling him to faithfully accomplish his mission — has several dimensions: his coming or proceeding from the Father (noted above), his remaining with the Father (Jn 10:38; 16:32), and his eventual return to the Father (Jn 16:5; 7:33; 13:36). This means that Jesus fulfills his mission in light of a particular consciousness: continual intimacy with his Father. Luke tells us that before making such a decisive move in his ministry as the choice of the Twelve, Jesus “went out to the mountains to pray, spending the night in communion with God” (Lk 6:12). Mission in the Jesus mode has its source, continuation, and fulfillment in the “Abba-experience”. This dimension in Jesus’ pattern of living mission provides evangelizers an inviting model for their own mission consciousness.

In its holistic vision of God’s design for salvation, the Council sees the church as continuing, developing, and unfolding “the mission of Christ Himself” (AG, 5). The apostolic exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi (13-16, 59-60) and the pastoral statement on world mission of the United States Bishops To the Ends of the Earth (25-27) also confirm mission as an ecclesial act in fidelity to Jesus.

Contemporary evangelizers, cognizant of the Jesus-Church continuity, seek to live and witness as the community of Jesus’ followers. They recall his promises (Mt 16:18; 28:20), but readily admit they are fragile “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7). They faithfully accept that “Christ in His mission from the Father is the fountain and source of the whole apostolate of the Church” (AA, 4). A missioner’s model is “sentire cum ecclesia” (feel and think with the church), frankly admitting that one is “simul justus et peccator” (concomitantly both upright and sinful). Who among Jesus’

followers does not need a deeper consciousness of these realities?

Central to the mission of Jesus is the mystery of the Incarnation: "the Son of God walked the ways of a true Incarnation that He might make men sharers in the divine nature" (AG, 3). This radical identification of our brother Jesus with us mortals (Heb 4:15) makes us rich out of his poverty (2 Cor 8:9). He became a servant (Mk 10:45) and gave his life "as a ransom for the many — that is, for all" (AG, 3).

Consistently, Church Fathers of both East and West have held that "what was not taken up [assumed] by Christ was not healed." Thus, when Jesus took to himself our entire humanity, he healed, renewed, and saved us. In brief, Incarnation is the fundamental pattern of all mission. Today, evangelizers are deeply conscious of the ramifications of mission as incarnation. No missioners worthy of the name underestimate the importance of indigenization and inculturation; they develop a spirituality of "depth identification," becoming as vulnerable as Jesus was in his humanity. This same pattern is the model of growth and development of all local churches (AG, 22).

While it is certain that the mission of Jesus is initiated at the Incarnation, his baptism by John in the Jordan is an act of public commitment-consecration to mission. Jesus pursues his ministry; though it will encounter growing opposition and lead to the human disaster of Calvary, he will not betray his commitment.

Note that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all juxtapose Jesus' baptism and the triple temptations in the wilderness. The tactic of Satan is to subvert Jesus with possessions, pride, and power; at the core, all Satan's promises tantalize Jesus to reneg on his dedication to mission. The more conscious that an evangelizer becomes of the struggle involved in mission-faithfulness, the closer he will be drawn to Jesus "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." The missioner will constantly and with confidence "approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need" (Heb 4: 15-16).

Instructive for the church and her evangelizers is an appreciation of the continual action of the Spirit in the life of Jesus. The

creed affirms that he was conceived "by the power of the Holy Spirit." The same Spirit descends on Jesus at the moment of his baptism (Mt 3:17); he is led by the Spirit to the desert (Mt 4:1); he returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:14); he begins his preaching mission at Nazareth asserting that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Lk 4:18).

As Jesus was empowered by the Spirit, he sends forth his own disciples saying: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). Peter (Acts 4:8), Paul (Acts 9:17), and Stephen (Acts 6:5; 7:55), as well as those who listened to their preaching (Acts 10:44), were all filled with the Spirit. In fact, the entire nascent church brims with the Spirit's presence (Acts 2:4) and thus, the community increases while it enjoys the consolation of the befriending Spirit (Acts 9:31). Jesus, his disciples, and likewise today's evangelizers all are in mission through the marvelous action of the Spirit.12

Concretely in the practical order, Jesus carries out his mission through evangelization — proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. The first words that Mark places on Jesus' lips are centered on this very theme (Mk 1:15). Luke also portrays Jesus' mission as focused on glad tidings to the "little ones of this world" (Lk 4:18-19). As Paul VI has noted, this theme "sums up the whole mission of Jesus" (EN, 6). Jesus could not be impeded in his ministry: "I must announce the good news of the reign of God, because that is why I was sent" (Lk 4:43).

Contemporary evangelizers, reflecting on the urgency and scope of Jesus' kingdom proclamation, will find themselves imitating Jesus' ministry as he lived it in silence, in action, in dialogue, in teaching, and in prayer. Yes, the Good News of the Kingdom for Jesus means an integral, holistic approach to evangelization — because all dimensions of the total gospel are expressions of his enduring love (Jn 13:1).

Jesus' entire life, from the Incarnation to Pentecost, was a proclamation. All he said and did were a testimony to the Father's loving design (Jn 3:31-35; 7:16; 8:38; 14:24). Jesus existed on nothing else; his "sustenance-food-meat" was to do the will and work of the one who sent him (Jn 4:34). In everything Jesus was

faithful to the Father.

Reflective, insightful evangelizers interiorize the *fidelity mindset of Jesus* (Phil 2:5); they also imitate St. Paul in his concern for faithful transmission of the message of Jesus preserved by the church (1 Cor 15:3, 11). In prayer and meditation missionaries re-focus themselves on Jesus and his kingdom — and often this demands setting aside personal opinions and ambitions. Mother Teresa of Calcutta notes that Jesus does not always call us to be successful, but he always invites us to be faithful.

This fidelity to Jesus and his message should not be interpreted in too narrow a sense. As announcers of Good News, we consciously interiorize Jesus’ gospel values; however, we seek to transmit them to humanity in all its cultural, social, religious, and politico-economic diversity. Certainly, this is a fantastic challenge; it is central to contemporary evangelization. Paul VI expressed it so wisely and so poignantly: "This fidelity both to a message whose servants we are and to the people to whom we must transmit it living and intact is the central axis of evangelization" (EN, 4).

*Life-style* — certainly a key focal-point in any vision of evangelization. For our contemporaries, who only willingly listen to witnesses (rather than theoreticians), the missioner’s authenticity and transparency are generally the first elements in evangelization; wordless witness is already a silent, powerful, and effective proclamation. It is an initial act of evangelization (EN, 21, 41).

Jesus himself adopted a particular, concrete life-style. His mindset was of fidelity and obedience to his Father; his outward manner manifested the lived values of poverty, total dedication, persecution, apparent failure. The church and her evangelizers "must walk the same road which Christ walked: a road of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death" (AG, 5).

Bluntly, there is no authentic Christian mission without the cross — and all its surprises, foolishness, and scandal (1 Cor 1:18-25). True mission is *always signed by the cross*, and without it, we cannot be Jesus’ disciples. The evangelizer is always generous in bearing a personal share of the hardships which the gospel entails (2 Tim 1:8). Constantly, the Christian disciple is measuring his life and apostolate against the life-style of Jesus and the patterns of the gospel. Sustained prayerful reflection and an ever-deepening consciousness of one’s personal relationship with the Trinity are
the unique way of interiorizing the paradox of the cross — and the power of the resurrection.

An anonymous poet, speaking of the centrality of the Incarnation and Redemption in Christianity, noted that there are no definitions in God’s dictionary for these terms. One must search for the meaning of Bethlehem and Calvary under another category. Their significance is to be found only when one reads how God defines love.

Indeed, God’s loving plan of salvation is a message of hope for all peoples. It is universal and should be preached/witnessed “to the ends of the earth” (Mt 28:18-19a; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:47). To spread this universal message demands great dedication and faith as seen in the practical advice that Paul gave to Timothy (2 Tim 4:1-5).

The evangelizer, conscious of his role in the actualization of the mysterion, will surrender enthusiastically to the invitation of Jesus: Come and follow me in my mission. This conscious surrender will open his eyes to perceive, not so much what his efforts are accomplishing, but how God-Father-Son-Spirit are working fruitfully in and through his life. With this vision, contemplation and action harmoniously blend and sustain one another; the evangelizer experiences living the mysterion. Eventually, all will be recapitulated in Christ and God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:24-28).

This lengthy section on the mission of Jesus can fittingly be concluded by recalling Paul’s reminder to the Corinthians: “Look, I am telling you a mystery” (1 Cor 15:51). This same mysterion-awareness is central in the evangelizer’s consciousness; energized by it, one readily accepts Paul’s encouragement: “Be steadfast and persevering, my beloved brothers, fully engaged in the work of the Lord. You know that your toil is not in vain when it is done in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).

THE MISSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit . . . the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization” (EN, 75). Clearer words cannot be found to describe the centrality of the Spirit’s action in the life of the church and her evangelizers. This activity has a continuity; it is present as the
Spirit fills the life of Jesus, the church, missioner-apostles, the entire laity. Essential for all — and no one can claim a monopoly on the Spirit who “blows where he wills” (Jn 3:8).

Luke’s Gospel puts the action of the Spirit at the beginning (4:18) and end (24:49) of Jesus’ ministry; similarly, in the Acts of the Apostles (often popularly known as “the Gospel of the Holy Spirit”), Luke also places the Spirit’s action at the beginning of the church (1:8), throughout its early expansion, and within the final address of Paul (28:25). Mission continually demands the life-giving presence and action of the Spirit.13

Though generally weak in its appreciation of pneumatology, the church now lives in a time of rediscovery, especially in Vatican II, the 1974 Synod on Evangelization, and the 1986 encyclical Domi-
num et Vivificantem of John Paul II. All evangelizers need a similar growth in consciousness, affirming the Spirit’s accompaniment at every moment in mission. It is imperative that this consciousness focus on the personal presence of the Spirit — whom John Paul II calls “Person-love” and “Person-gift” (DV, 10, 22, 50).

Concomitant with accepting the Spirit as “the principal agent of evangelization,” missioners collaborate closely with him; they are “team-mates” in the work of evangelization. This continual dialogue reveals the full truth of Jesus’ teaching and person (Jn 16:13-15). The insights perceived are uniquely apropos to the context and challenges emerging within the evangelizer’s apostolate. Progress in everything (e.g., indigenization of theology, liturgy, church organization, social justice ministry, international solidarity, etc.) depends upon an in-depth personal-communal discernment of the Spirit’s promptings. It is the Spirit who opens hearts and moves people. Apostolic fruitfulness does not depend on one’s own ingenuity or organizational ability — but upon the power of the Spirit.14

St. Paul intimately knew the workings of Jesus and the Spirit in his life. A particularly revealing passage describes Paul’s experience in Asia Minor (Acts 16:6-10). Twice it is noted that they “had been prevented by the Holy Spirit,” that “the Spirit of Jesus

would not allow them” to enter certain provinces. Modern-day Pauls also need a “theology of road-blocks,” because not all their plans and projects will meet acceptance or success. Evangelizers may dream that their cooperation with the Spirit will always produce glowing results; however, this would not be living in reality. Only the ongoing interpersonal dialogue between evangelizer and Spirit in reflective prayer will enlighten one to see the detours and road-blocks as a form of the Spirit’s guiding presence.

Such faith-consciousness provides the equilibrium missionaries need in facing a wide diversity of challenges; it gives insight on how to “let go and let God”; it aids the apostle in avoiding the traps of bitterness, cynicism, depression and contemporary burnout. The Spirit will reveal how the cross of Jesus is a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light (Mt 11:28-30). Evangelizers will develop a spirituality of optimism, hope, and confidence — knowing that they can readily count on the strength of the Spirit.

This discussion of various aspects of the Spirit’s role in mission should always be placed within the inclusive framework of the mysterion — that loving plan of God for humanity’s salvation. Then, for example, with the awareness that mission is God’s project, our frustrations and difficulties can be integrated into a faithful surrender to God’s wisdom. This same inclusive view of the mysterion is essential to perceive the Spirit’s role in interfaith or interreligious dialogue.

Evangelizers need to be cognizant of the church’s own growth-consciousness in recent years on the Spirit-religions dynamic. Vatican II spoke positively of the Spirit’s diverse activity in the world (GS, 38); the 1974 Synod on Evangelization affirmed “the Holy Spirit’s action which overflows the bounds of the Christian community” (EMW, 11). John Paul II in two encyclicals has spoken of the “effects of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body” (RH, 6) and of the need to appreciate “the Holy Spirit’s activity also ‘outside the visible body of the Church’” (DV, 53).

Perhaps, it is not an overstatement to assert that “spirit-consciousness” is uniquely necessary for all evangelizers — particularly

in the Asian context. Only the Spirit can foster the awareness and sensitivity needed to approach the diversity of Asian peoples, cultures, and religions. Many peoples are in poverty and underdevelopment, requiring deep social transformation; the cultures should find authentic religious expression within gospel-inculturation; religions and their followers must be treasured because, as the Asian bishops have noted, “we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation” (FABC I, 14).

In light of these realities, the missioner’s daily communing with the Spirit will foster renewal and conversion (as an opening to a deeper God-consciousness). It will enhance one’s vision to see the active presence of the Spirit in peoples, cultures, and religions - both within and beyond the Christian community. The Spirit will provide the sensitive balance in both “bringing” God’s love and Kingdom values and in “discovering” their presence already operative. The Spirit’s diverse gifts (charisms) will generously be directed to their proper, fruitful employment. The apostle of Jesus is that person who is possessed by the Spirit - and is deeply conscious of it.

The evangelizer’s heightened awareness of the Spirit’s role in his life is not somehow only a narcissistic or individualistic awareness. It is to be fully integrated within the community, within the local church. Constantly, there is openness and sensitivity to what the Spirit is saying to the churches and how they must “grow in missionary consciousness, fervor, commitment and zeal” (EN, 58).

In contemporary approaches to evangelization, this attention to the guiding Spirit within the local church is a crucial imperative. It has been noted that John the Evangelist in his book of Revelation specifically mentions the names and places of the seven churches; he concludes all his admonitions with exactly the same words: “Let him who has ears heed the Spirit’s word to the churches” (Rv 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Thus, taking its cue from Johannine as well as Pauline ecclesiology and based on the insights of Vatican II (LG, 23; AG, 19-22), all current missiology-spirituality gives due consideration to the voice of local churches empowered through the Spirit.

The Asian bishops repeatedly affirm that the “primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the
building up of a truly local church . . . . the local church is a church incarnate in a people . . . . this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions . . . .” (FABC I, 9, 12). A pivotal document of the universal church affirms the same stance: “Every local church is responsible for the totality of mission” (PD, 14).

Evangelizers — indigenous and expatriate — in harmonious interaction with the local church are always conscious of the personal Spirit maintaining them in mission. What is the source of their optimism, courage, unity, patience, detachment-poverty — even martyrdom (Rom 15:18-19; Heb 2:3-4)? Who inspires them to bring forth enduring fruit and convincing witness (Jn 15:16; Gal 5:22-23)? Who “causes people to discern the signs of the times — signs willed by God” (EN, 75)? All these gifts surely have as their source “the love of God that has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). To every evangelizer, the Spirit is indeed “Person-love” and “Person-gift”.

CONCLUDING SYNTHESIS

The author of this piece remains totally cognizant that a contemplative-mystical thread spans this entire presentation; it has focused on “consciousness of the mysterion” as foundational to a spirituality of the apostolate. This emphasis, of course, is in harmony with the central missiological insight of Vatican II: the Trinitarian foundation of mission (AG, 2-4).

This perspective resonates well with what the Spirit is saying to all the churches — particularly in Asia. It is noteworthy that the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences — FABC I (Taipei, 1974) discussed “Evangelization and Modern Day Asia.” Significantly, the next Plenary Assembly — FABC II (Barrackpore-Calcutta, 1978), designed to be in harmonious continuity with the challenges of evangelization discussed in FABC I, focused on “Prayer — the Life of the Church in Asia.”

Evangelization and Prayer, Missiology and Spirituality: these are two coordinates of one integral process. All evangelizers seek to enhance their consciousness of the intimate personal activity of the triune God within their lives, attitudes, values, and activities.
Thus, witness of life, faith-consciousness, and diverse forms of evangelization coalesce into an integrated unity.

 Permit a brief return to the statement of FABC-II on prayer and a spirituality for evangelization. The Asian bishops affirm the need for "conscious personal communion with God our Father, in Christ Jesus. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts." They note that "the spirituality characteristic of the religions of our continent stresses a deeper awareness of God and the whole self in recollection, silence and prayer, flowering in openness to others, in compassion, non-violence, generosity." They sincerely desire "a genuine renewal and revitalization of these realities in our prayer-life" (FABC II, 14, 35, 20). This, in short, is the "Asian formula" for mission spirituality.

 This presentation has been a long pilgrimage toward an holistic view of missiology-spirituality. The sign-posts on the road have indicated the need of awareness, Pauline theology, "mysterion-consciousness," Trinitarian foundations, and the personal role of Father, Son, and Spirit in the lives of all evangelizers. The ground that has been traversed has included the two-fold journey of all missioners: the inward journey of deepened consciousness or spirituality which overflows during the outward journey of all evangelizing endeavors.

 And yet, much more needs to be explored — at another sitting. This cursory treatment of diverse yet complementary elements of mission spirituality plunges the reader into an acceptance of the fact that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9).

 If I were tasked to summarize the core insight into mission and spirituality required by all evangelizers, I would readily and confidently respond by affirming: You and I all need a vibrant, conscious awareness that we are sent — by the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus, and the power of the Spirit. This insight fired St. Paul in both his theology and missionary activity — it will do no less for contemporary apostles. Missioners, following St. Therese of Lisieux the patroness of mission, are people conscious that they are on fire with the love of God; they know they have been sent to light a fire on the earth (Lk 12:49); how they wish the blaze were ignited!
Church Documents:

**AA** Apostolicam Actuositatem (Apostolate of the Laity)

**AG** Ad Gentes (Missionary Activity)

**GS** Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World)

**LG** Lumen Gentium (The Church)

**DM** Dives in Misericordia (On the Mercy of God, John Paul II)

**DV** Dominum et Vivificantem (On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, John Paul II)

**EE** To the Ends of the Earth (Pastoral Statement on World Mission, U.S.A. Bishops, 1986)

**EMW** Evangelization of the Modern World (Synod of Bishops Declaration, Oct. 25, 1974)

**EN** Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in the Modern World, Paul VI, Dec. 8, 1975)

**FABC I-II** Both FABC I and II are available in C. Arévalo, ed., For All the Peoples of Asia (Manila: IMC Publications, 1984 and 1987).


**RH** Redemptor Hominis (On the Mystery of Redemption and the Dignity of Man, John Paul II)