

The challenge confronting our reflections on the foundations of mission is to find fundamental terms or practices that move beyond platitudes yet can respect the diversity of Christian experiences and contexts. The study report on this theme articulates the broad categories of experiential, Biblical, and theological foundations, and it interprets these categories with a hermeneutic of liberation, inclusive dialogue, and reconciliation. These reflections provide a salutary starting-point. But in order for these notions to be genuinely accountable to the great diversity of Christian mission, they need to be realized in a variety of specific contexts, without sacrificing some form of unity.

To that end, I propose that in addition to these conceptual bases we consider ethical – that is, practical – foundations for mission. It is through the concrete practices of particular communities that Christian witness speaks most clearly and attentively to its diverse contexts. Mission practices and behaviors interpret and incarnate the conceptual foundations. Even experience does not interpret itself; for mission to take specific contextual experiences seriously, we need to form Christians capable of reflecting on and understanding their lives in the light of the Gospel. Liberation and reconciliation, for all their value, are not self-evident notions; communities come to understand these concepts through the practices of their common life together. Our foundations for mission ought to include consideration of these practical or ethical foundations. I offer a few suggestions. Like all aspects of mission, these will vary widely in different contexts; nonetheless, they are specific enough to form a real foundation.

- 1) Education: Naturally, if the goal is to form communities capable of enacting mission in their own contexts, education will constitute an important mission practice. This education, though, will be less concerned with dogma or authority and more concerned with conscientization and dialogue. Good listening and dialogue are key features of such education. Likewise, social analysis and even practical skills may be necessary aspects. The purpose of this education is not merely to increase knowledge, but to form and transform persons whose lives bear witness to God's good news.
- 2) Lay Ministry: Again, it is the practices of the community that bear the most complete witness to the transformative power of Christ. Accordingly, great attention must be given to all the members of the community. In Roman Catholic Social Teaching, the role of the laity is to make the teachings of the hierarchy real and concrete in their daily lives. Christian mission must take this role seriously, working to form lay ministers whose leadership and lives express God's grace. In particular, effort must be made to focus on women and young people, whose experiences are often overlooked, and who, in many contexts, represent a powerful force for Christian mission.
- 3) Spirituality: As the final study report attests, spirituality provides a necessary resource for Christian missionary practices. The examples in that report also illustrate the great diversity of Christian and other spiritualities; what they have in common is faith in the Holy Spirit to empower and guide our witness. Spiritual practices (including, of course, worship) complement education to nurture and guide

communities whose common lives provide a compelling testimony to God's mission in the world.

These ethical foundations for mission do not replace the conceptual foundations offered in the study report. Rather, they complement them, expressing them concretely in diverse contexts. They are the practices whereby the values suggested by the categories of experience, scripture, and theology are made real.

I noted that dialogue and listening are key elements of the kind of education that must shape Christian mission. I'm eager to continue this discussion and hear others' suggestions for foundations for mission. I'd also like to offer a few questions that may bear upon our discussion (these aren't necessarily all directly related to the preceding comments):

- 1) What is the relationship between our "foundations" and our missionary engagement? That is, do our fundamental commitments – however we understand those – bear directly on our mission practices, or indirectly, or might they even be consequences of those practices?
- 2) How common or unified do "foundations" need to be?
- 3) Who finally are the practitioners of mission, and to whom is their witness directed?