Missiology in its relation to Intercultural Theology and Religious Studies

Francis Anekwe Oborji
Professor of Missiology, Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome; former Executive Secretary of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM)

foborji@hotmail.com

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The debate as to whether it is still relevant to continue the use of the traditional subject title “Mission Studies” (Missiology) to cover the emerging issues in missiological science as a theological discipline has continued to gain more interest and reactions from many circles. Religious studies and intercultural theology have direct or indirect relation with mission studies. For this, some are suggesting that the term “intercultural theology” be added to the traditional subject title “Mission Studies” to reflect the emerging concerns in missiological science. Some also suggest that the term “intercultural theology” should replace the traditional subject title “Mission Studies.”

An association of German missiologists has come up with some suggestions as a way forward in resolving this issue. The recent document by the section “Religious Studies and Mission Studies” of the Academic Association for Theology (WGTh) and the Administrative Board of the German Association for Mission Studies (DGMW), has suggested that the explanatory term “intercultural theology” be added to the traditional term “Mission Studies.” The document argues that this is feasible because the association between Mission Studies or Intercultural Theology and Religious Studies as is customary in theological faculties and most of the German-speaking universities, “has proven to be fruitful and therefore should certainly be continued.”

My intention in the present paper is not to agree or to disagree with the suggestions already offered as the reasons for the search for additional name or adjective for the traditional subject title “Mission Studies.” (Though I prefer to continue with the use of the more correct and traditional title of the subject: “Missiology”). The aim is rather to show how the new concerns in mission studies are already part of the subject matter of the discipline and therefore do not call for a change of name or additional adjective to the traditional title: “Mission Studies” (or “Missiology”). The paper wants to underline the fact that what is needed today in our mission studies is to develop an organic program of studies and course content that will preserve the traditional subject title of the discipline and indicate its role in theological education. Secondly, the paper argues that what the new emphasis on intercultural and inter-religious studies is bringing to our mission studies is the need for change of attitude and style in the way we discuss and relate with people of other cultural and religious traditions in our missiological research and education. It is the issue of theological language which does not necessarily mean a search for another subject title for “Mission Studies” or “Missiology” as a theological discipline. Thus, the paper underlines the fact that enlarging the course content or program of studies in missiology – that pays special attention to the issues of intercultural theology and religious pluralism – could be a better way of resolving the impasse.

Which Way: New Subject Title or New Language in Mission Studies?

Missiological reflections of the past were more a concern of theologians from the North Atlantic. This is the crux of the matter! With the growth of missiological input from the writings of Christian theologians from the Global South, is the subject title “Mission Studies” still valid? The central question is how do we incorporate “religious studies” and “intercultural theology” into the traditional subject title “Mission Studies” so as to reflect the new developments coming from the Christians of the Global South? Related to this is the question of whether the incorporation of religious studies and intercultural theology into mission studies without the change of the traditional subject title “Mission Studies” (or Missiology) does any harm to any of the major components in
missiological studies? Do we need the recent search for another title for the science of mission in theological faculties? Put in another way, does the enhanced emphasis on intercultural and religious studies not already accommodated in the traditional subject title “Mission Studies” (or “Missiology”)? For instance, in the Catholic Faculties of Missiology, intercultural and religious studies are studied as parts of the wider field of missiology. Each of the components in missiology – are studied as different areas of specialization that complements one another and which brings out the essence of science of mission in theological education.

In the context of the traditional understanding of mission studies as a theological reflection on the missio Dei (God’s mission), and missiones ecclesiae (missionary ventures of the church), the science of mission as a theological discipline has always concerned itself with both missio ad extra and missio ad intra. In each case, the area of concerns includes both the people the mission is being addressed and their ever changing cultural and religious spheres as well as socio-political and ideological influences. Its field of operation is the entire spectrum of the Christian mission – theological reflections on mission, the church’s missionary activities and the problems associated with the encounter of the Gospel message with other peoples, cultures, religious traditions, ideologies and philosophies. These are incorporated, each as a distinct area of specialization in missiology without altering the traditional subject of the discipline. Mission studies (or missiology in its original Latin root) is that theological discipline that reflects on the way the church understands and executes her missionary mandate in relation to peoples of various cultures, religious traditions and contexts. Though, the missiology of the old used a kind of language that was too narrow in its view of mission, but all the same, its chief concern was still on the encounter of the Gospel message with peoples of other cultural and religious traditions and contexts.

Again, one of the problems raised as to why the name “Mission Studies” no longer qualifies as a sole title for missiological science is the current emphasis on the global context in which we do our theological reflections. North Atlantic people no longer see themselves as the sole bearers of theology and culture. In the last decades, for example, Western theology has become increasingly conscious that its theology, too, is contextual, not universal, and has produced a number of important missiological reflections in line with this realization. Thus, today, North Atlantic and Global South theologians are now engaged in a fruitful and mutually critical dialogue. But even the theological reflections of the authors from the Global South owe its inspiration from the traditional theology of North Atlantic authors. Here we are dealing with the meeting of theological and missiological reflections of Christian thinkers from the different cultural zones – each of which was influenced by the history and cultural context in which the authors found themselves. In this case, is it intercultural theology that is required or acknowledgement of the emerging global nature of Christian theology and missiological reflection? After all, in the ultimate analysis, the point of departure and arrival in mission studies is Jesus Christ and the mission he entrusted to the church. The question here is whether it is logical to speak of intercultural theology in the family of God which is the church (if one is permitted to bring in here the African renewed image of the church-as-family of God)? Is the emerging global theological reflections in the pens of Christian authors from the different zones of the world, not a sign of the global nature of the Christian faith itself? Is speaking of intercultural theology in such a development not working against the tide of times? What of an integrated and organic program of studies and course content for missiology – a global Christian theology of mission in which all these concerns of the present time are covered, and each receiving an adequate place in mission studies.

The danger here is that if the new concerns of intercultural and inter-religious studies are allowed to alter the traditional subject title of missiology, we may be heading to promoting parochial or rather ethnic theology in the family of God. It may also mean returning to the old way of fragmentation of the world and theology which is the very thing the present concern, I supposed, is aimed to guide against. Thus, intercultural theology and religious studies if adopted or added to the traditional title “Mission Studies” will in the long run, work against the very thing it intended to address. One of the concerns in the writings of the theologians and missiologists from the Global
South is the universal claim of the North Atlantic theology and the superiority complex that naturally goes with such a claim. There is no way to show that the type of intercultural theology that is envisaged in the document (of WGTh and DGMW) will bridge such superiority claim of one zone over the rest of the world in theological reflection.

Another problem raised in the WGTh and DGMW document as the reason for the call for another subject title for “Mission Studies”, is the issue of religious pluralism in Europe. The awareness of this religious pluralism requires a special theological reflection. The question of religious pluralism is a global issue and a reality that has always been there since the dawn of human civilization. What may appear revealing, especially after the September 11, 2001 Terrorist attacks in the United States of America, is the extent human beings could go in using the name of religion to launch havoc on fellow human beings. But religion as such, in its history, has always the tendency of being manipulated by some fanatics for selfish interests and political agenda. It is important that we separate the manipulation of religion by some overzealous fanatics from mission studies or rather theology per se. The presence of many Muslims in Europe and of Christian migrant minority congregations in mostly Muslim environment is cited as an example of why “Mission Studies” should have “Religious Studies” appended to it as a subject title.

The suggestion of appending religious studies to the subject title “Mission Studies”, at a first glance may appear recommendable. But behind it one sees some difficulties that could jeopardize the new status that missiology as a theological discipline is beginning to gain in theological education. In the first place, the suggestion brings out the need to be sensitive of other cultures and religious traditions in our theological and missiological reflections. There is nothing that offends people as the use of disparage language against their culture and religious heritage. Intercultural and religious studies may mean that all religions are to be given equal hear and voice in the theological studies. This is recommendable especially in these days when human society is burdened by religious acrimony that calls for a theological model that promotes better relationships among diverse peoples. However, social studies and sciences have special competences in social anthropology and comparative religious studies. Many universities in different parts of the world have faculties in these areas. Contemporary missiology is already benefiting a lot from the fruits of studies and researches done by experts in social sciences and cultural anthropology as well as in comparative religious studies. While experts in these areas do the field work, missiologists have the duty to make use of such field work in their reflections on the essence of the Christian mission. It is not expected that missiologists should take over the work of social scientists and anthropologists. As an inter-disciplinary theological subject, missiology is expected to make all these aspects in human sciences to bear in its theological investigations on Christian mission without altering its subject title or changing the content of its aim and mission in the field of theology.

Migrations and co-existence of different religions in a particular society is not new to human and Christian history. What may appear new is the increasingly awareness of the rich cultural and religious heritage of other peoples hitherto judged to be without culture and civilization. Modern studies in social and cultural anthropology have enriched our knowledge of how the divine providence has endowed each people in their ever-changing cultural and religious context with knowledge and civilization that cannot be considered inferior to those of any other group. For instance, in the African context, the mission studies of the old employed some missionary theories and language that denigrated the local people and culture and which tried to show that it is only through the culture of the foreign missionary that the Gospel could be preached to the Africans. This adaptation mission theology of the old is now obsolete and the new language now is that of inculturation which recognizes the influence of local culture on the people. The theology of inculturation is showing that it is fruitless to try to evangelise the local people on the basis of the cultural vestiges of the foreign missionary. But to arrive at the present theology of inculturation in missiological studies, mission studies did not change its subject title. What was needed was a change of mentality, style and missiological language and approach.
Furthermore, the present awareness of religious pluralism is a typical example of where the new language is beginning to yield some good fruits while respecting the traditional subject title of missiology. For instance, when the Vatican Secretariat for dialogue with other religions was established in the early 1960s by Pope Paul VI, the other religions were referred to as “Non-Christian.” Thanks to modern scholarship on cultural anthropology and social studies as well as contemporary theological investigations, the name of the Vatican Office was later changed to “Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue.” While this does not mean equality of all religions, it nonetheless signals a new development in our theological perception of the other.

In the same vein, ecumenical dialogue and its theology began with focus on the division between the church of the West and that of the East (Orthodox churches), and also of promoting collaboration among the churches that sprang up after the fifteenth century Reformation in the West. Today ecumenical theology is also witnessing a new phenomenon—the New Religious Movements, the Pentecostal churches, African Healing or Independent (Initiated) churches, etc. It is interesting to see if ecumenical theology will change its subject title so as to reflect the emerging developments of the entry of these new Christian ecclesial communities into ecumenical dialogue? Just as missiology is not expected to change its subject title so as to accommodate the present focus on ecumenical dialogue, dogmatic or systematic theology does not also need to change its subject title simply because the modern theology is today receiving ecumenical orientation.

The mystery of Christian faith is one. It is rooted and founded on the mystery of God in Christ. There may be diverse theological perspectives arising from the different socio-cultural contexts and human history from which each group or believers have attempted to reflect on the same mystery. The common denominator is Christ and the mystery of God revealed in Him. Moreover, the basic doctrines of the faith in Christ and the Trinity have already been defined during the apostolic and patristic eras before the schism of the eleventh century and the fifteenth century Protestant Reformation, or the present upsurge of the Pentecostal and African Independent (Initiated) churches. Whether one is reflecting on the Christian mystery as an African, Asian, or an Euro-American or Latin American, he or she is always conscious of speaking to brothers and sisters, not adversaries. If there is anything the present emphasis on intercultural dialogue and our awareness of other religious traditions have brought to the debate, it is the fact that our theological and missiological reflections are invited today to avoid the use of expressions and subject titles that have behind them the seed of polemics or of setting up one cultural or religious tradition against the other. Modern theology is invited today to bring into relief and to explore the universal dimensions of the cultural heritage of our diverse contexts, their origins in the One Supreme God, and to show how all these have their providential foundation and fulfilment in the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus Christ. In other words, the present emphasis on intercultural and religious studies in theological reflections is already reflected in the writings of missiologists from different cultural zones. The authors have enriched our knowledge of the Christian faith and understanding of mission by the theological models that are being emphasized in each of the zones.

For instance, the way African theologians stress inculturation and intercultural dialogue, and the search for common elements that bring the church-family together shows that what is needed today is not so much a new subject title for mission studies but recognition of these developments from new Christian communities in our traditional way of doing theology. The same is valid for the Asian theologians’ accent on inter-religious dialogue, or Latin Americans’ liberation theology as well as the Euro-American authors’ emphasis on ecumenism and dialogue with post-modernity or theological relativism. In other words, any branch of theology is invited today to incorporate the efforts of theologians from the new Christian zones while treating the traditional themes of theology. Discussion on Christology, ecclesiology, and other traditional themes of traditional theology should include also the contributions from authors of these new zones of Christianity. Furthermore, some of the leading concerns of theologians from the Global South, such as culture, inter-religious dialogue, human development, liberation, poverty, and oppression, are viable theological categories that can enrich the traditional themes of systematic theology and pursuit of
mission. In that respect, the inculturation orientation in African theology, for example, has become very important in our understanding of mission (Oborji 1998, 213). The African inculturation theology does not come into the field of theology for intercultural meeting but rather as a theological manifestation of how the Spirit of the risen Lord is leading the local church in the continent in the pursuit of the one mission of Christ. Mission studies anywhere is called upon to recognize this work of the Spirit and bring it to bear in our way of theologising.

All these illustrate the fact that intercultural and religious dialogue is about bridging the gap of divisions in our theological perceptions of the other. This new perspective in theological investigations brings to the fore the fact that the ties we share in baptism (for Christians) and our common origin in the one God (for all humanity) ought to be the basis of unity and community living. It is within that search that we are invited to be part of the effort to end the present day fragmentation of the world and its resultant neo-capitalist and neo-colonial hegemony. Therefore, the question is how are we to make our mission studies reflect the new landscape of Christianity – which in recent times has moved from the Northern hemisphere to the South. Can our missiology become the kind of theological discipline that will accommodate the voices and sensibilities of these new Christians from the Global South and bring them to bear in the way we used to understand theology and mission? It is in so doing that missiology will find its distinctive role and identity in the field of theology. This is the basic issue the new emphasis in intercultural and religious studies is inviting us to understand. So, it is clearly not a matter of revisiting or appending a new word to the traditional subject title of missiology, but rather of allowing the new development in the new zones of Christianity to reflect in our traditional way of doing theology and missiology. What is required above all, is new theological language, change of mentality and style.

**Previous Attempts**

What modern missiologists have been able to show is the fact that we have to overcome the entire approach in which the new use of the word mission and mission studies was associated closely with the colonial expansion of the Western world into what has more recently become known as the Global South (see Bosch 1991, 1). It is no longer fashionable to view mission and mission studies in terms of expansion, occupation of fields, the conquest of other religions and cultures, and the like. Indeed until the 1950s, mission, even if not used univocally by all, had a fairly circumscribed set of meanings. The German missiologist, Thomas Ohm summarized them as: 1) the sending of missionaries; 2) the activities undertaken by such missionaries, 3) the geographical area where the missionaries were active; 4) the agency that dispatched the missionaries; 5) the non-Christian (Western) world or “mission field” (see Ohm 1962, 52ff). These concepts affected the growth of missiology as a science of its own in theological education. They also initiated the debate on what should constitute the subject matter of missiology in theological faculties. This was also the time some theologians were beginning to view missiology as a science of and for the missionary, a rather practical study of how do we execute our mission. Thus, when it became necessary to begin scientific reflections on mission in the early part of last century, it took not only various historical stages but also strategies for this to be achieved. The following strategies or models can be mentioned: 1) incorporation of mission studies into existing disciplines; 2) the introduction of missiology as an independent theological discipline; 3) integration (incorporating mission studies into the entire field of theology); and 4) missiology as a “comparative theology.” (see Oborji 2006, 46ff.).

However, the entire development turned out to be, at best, a mixed blessing. It gave no guarantee that missiology now had an equal and legal status in theology. For none of the models – incorporation into an existing discipline, independence, or integration – could be said to be acceptable to all. However, in theory, the model of “comparative theology” (which looks closer to what is being proposed in the document of WGT and DGMW) looks theologically sounder (see Cracknell and Lamb 1986, 26). But we are still faced with giving missiology its distinctive and
specific theological goal and foundation. There is also the problem of distancing the discipline from the continuous meddling and ulterior motives of the sponsoring institutions and organisations. The concern here is how do we sustain the already achieved height of distinguishing missiology as science of its own in theological disciplines and absolve it completely from identity crisis and instability of its subject title in theological faculties?

Adolf Exeler had wanted to resolve this impasse by suggesting that "comparative theology" (not really the same as the model of "integration of missiology into the different theological Subjects?") be used as the new subject title for mission studies. However, this model had not been achieved in the missiology of the old style. And some have questioned the relevance of an orientation to the comparative methods used in other fields of scholarship. In fairness to him, Exeler intends in this methodology, to overcome the Euro-centric captivity of theology, to substitute partnership for paternalism and to give a proper status to the intercultural theological dialogue already under way. Like others of his contemporaries, Exeler felt that the very success of the more recent mission had resulted in a grave crisis not only for the mission itself but also for missiology. The assumptions under which both began had radically changed. Paternalism, condescension, treating people as objects and the Western claim to universalism - all these concomitant symptoms of a mission infected by colonial thinking, says Exeler, are untenable for some reasons. For instance, because of the emergence of independent "mission churches", and because of this traditional missiology is no longer justified. This is because the so-called young churches do not regard themselves as objects but rather as subjects of their existence as communities sent into the world; why should Western missiologists dictate to them how a missionary church is to be realized in their special context? And even if missiologists did not dictate to them but merely confined themselves to a descriptive account of the "sent" character of these churches, they would not be immune to the danger of still asserting their outdated absolutist claims (cf. Müller 1987, 13). Exeler claims therefore, that "intercultural or comparative theology" is the only way out.

Nevertheless, as it is evident today, it is doubtful whether Exeler's alternative suggestion has solved the problem of missiology as a theological discipline. "Intercultural theology or comparative studies", indispensable as they may be, would inevitably result in driving this redefined missiology into a theological bottle-neck not commensurate with the all-embracing, integral character of the universal mission of the Christian faith. The missionary commission, which has its source in the missio Dei, cannot appear only in the specifically theological sphere but also embraces liturgy, prayer, proclamation, communication of the faith in all its forms. All of this, of course, needs thorough theological reflection, especially in the cultural context, but must not be confined to it, or take because of it to redefine the traditional subject title of the discipline. Besides, Exeler's theory seems paradoxical in so far as he takes with one hand what he gives with the other. In plain language, this theory harbors the danger of submitting a mission about to be freed from the paternalism of the West to the subservience to a theology and social science in which, despite its best intentions to the contrary, Western dominance would still reassert itself (see Müller 1987:15).

As David Bosch has shown, to redefine the subject title “Mission Studies”, we need to answer the basic question: What is the object of missiology (see Bosch 1991, 492). Are not the concerns expressed by the proponents of intercultural theology and religious studies as new appendages to the subject title “Mission Studies” already covered in the object of missiology?

In the first place, missiology is today no longer conceptualized only in terms of "science of the missionary and for the missionary"; that is, in the sense in which it can concern itself only with mission history, missionary geography and statistics, the morphology and phenomenology of mission and, of course, with exploration and further development of missionary method. Karl Graul who offered this suggestion (about a century and a half ago), thought that in this way missiology would "lift itself from the twilight of sentimental piety to the broad daylight of faithful scholarship" (cf. Myklebust 1955, 94ff). Contemporary missiology has also transcended the extreme position of those who view its object as a praxis of mission in which the world sets the agenda and the Christian message is primarily understood as a message of promise related to the world, history, and
society, independent of any intermediary of tradition or hierarchy. This model sounds good, but it is at least doubtful whether it would be more than a theory of a certain established praxis which may not necessarily be of interest to the other theological disciplines. Strictly speaking, it tends to suggest that missiology could do without any specifically Christian framework. The model takes its bearings from "shalom", the call to peace in the broadest sense of the term through which all aspects of human life acquire their promised fullness. Rütti, who developed this concept more consistently than Hoekendijk, advances a "political hermeneutic" which must be realized in social and political action in contrast to the traditional missionary practice and its theological implications. Largely, this theory received negative responses from missionary societies and many institutions. It was also viewed by theologians as placing the role and task of missiology in a second, wider sense. Thus, this model instead of solving the problem compounded it (see Müller, 1987, 12-13).

For the moment, the possibilities of missiology are more realistically assessed where it is asked whether it still possesses "the institutional compactness and energy" to satisfy itself once again of its position and thus, at the same time, its responsibility in the company of theological disciplines (cf. Kramm 1984:69). Recent tendencies point at this same direction when they described the task of missiology as necessarily "controversial, contextual, and confrontational". This implies that missiology, at any rate, can no longer retreat from a position between the battle lines into introspective complacency. Vatican Council II was to attend to this problem in an unprecedent manner (AG 6). The problem was not with the subject title of the discipline, but rather with the way theologians used to conceptualize the concept and goal of mission as the subject-matter of missiology. Thanks to Vatican II missionary decree Ad Gentes and the post-conciliar documents on mission, we have today a better understanding of these issues (see Ad Gentes 6; Evangelii Nuntiandi 50-53; Redemptoris Missio 31, 33).

A Case for the Traditional Title: “Missiology”

The question we have been discussing could not have arisen if experts in mission studies have, in their various theological faculties and chairs, worked hard to retain the Latin root in the traditional title of the discipline “Missiology” (missio logos = theological study of mission). Until the sixteenth century, the term mission was used exclusively with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, of the sending of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. Jesuits were the first to use it in terms of the spread of the Christian faith among non-Christians and other people. Later, it came to be used as the generic term and subject title for the study of mission (missiology), at least in the Catholic circles. By adopting the expression “Mission Studies” instead of missiology, missiologists give the impression that anything could go as mission studies. Such an idea also gives the impression that missiology as a theological reflection on Christian mission could cede its seat to any study or discipline that claims to have something to offer to our understanding of the essence of the Christian mission. Under such arrangement, any teacher could then be employed to come and teach in the department of mission studies. The question of competence and the theological scope of the discipline will be relegated to the background and become relative if not insignificant in determining the course content and in the appointment of professors of the discipline – after all, anything could be called missiology?

We have raised the above problem simply to demonstrate that altering the traditional subject title of this theological science on mission for reasons of accommodating new emphasis on intercultural and religious studies, is loaded with some fundamental problems. One would think that the problems that brought about the present call for another subject title for the science of missions, have already been overcome since missiology came to be accorded its rightful place of honour in theological education through the efforts of the early pioneers of the discipline. Raising anew the issue at this advanced stage of the subject will make missiology still look like a theological discipline with perennial identity crisis. It is true that mission studies came into being as an academic discipline during the nineteenth century missionary expansion, yet the evangelising
church has never in any epoch lost sight of its missionary foundation and goal even if these were not from the beginning the object of reflection in theological faculties. Christian theology of every epoch developed under missionary situation. The church had in each case to convoque a council or similar meetings that deliberated on how to face the challenges of mission in such situations. The doctrines on the Trinity, Christology, Ecclesiology, and so forth, were formulated through such councils and mission inspired meetings. Missiology is a theological disciplines’ out-reach to the world of sciences. It is intercultural and inter-religious by definition and purpose. While other theological disciplines may concern themselves with reflections on the self-understanding of the church and her doctrines, missiology opens the door of theology to interact with the developments in other areas of study in social sciences and humanities. It is this mediation role of missiology that is crucial today in relation to the new emphasis on intercultural and inter-religious studies.

Missiology is about the mission of the Triune God and the participation of the church in that mission through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a theological discipline that reflects on the faith of the church on its mission which was given to the church itself by the risen Christ. This also means that the object of missiology is deeper than the issues of intercultural and inter-religious studies in both theology and social sciences. The object of missiology is permanent while that of intercultural and social sciences are relative and transitory. Again, the modern emphasis on intercultural and religious pluralism does not warrant a change in the subject title of missiology or mission studies. At best, what such awareness requires is for missiology to re-examine its theological language in the encounter of the Gospel with peoples of other religious and cultural traditions, and in its role of promoting interaction between theology and other sciences.

**Enlarging the course content**

The question raised by the current debate on a new subject title for mission studies could best be addressed by enlarging the existing course content and areas of specialization in missiology as a theological discipline. The discipline of missiology could still retain its traditional subject title while adding some specific areas of specialization that will reflect the new concerns of intercultural and inter-religious studies. Some universities with particular reference to the Catholic sphere, have adopted this style in resolving the impasse. For instance, in my own university, our Faculty of Missiology has three principal areas of specialization: 1) Mission Theology; 2) Évangelisation and Pastoral Mission Theology; and 3) Mission and Religions. After the institutional courses and studies of basic subjects in mission studies, the course content is divided into three principal areas of specialization in missiology. Following the missionary character and orientation of the university, after the basic studies in the institutional cycle in the missiological science, students are encouraged to choose one out of the principal areas of specialization for further study and research. In that case, each student graduates at the end of his or her studies with either licentiate or doctorate in missiology but with specialization in his or her chosen area of study in the discipline.

Thus, the course content in the faculty of missiology is built around these three principal areas of specialization. Such a program is aimed at an organic formation of students in mission studies and intends to promote the study and research in various camps of missiological science. It retains the traditional subject title of missiology. Faithful to the divine revelation in Jesus Christ and the church’s understanding of her mission, the program of studies places emphasis on biblical and theological investigations as well as on historical and anthropological research and an in-depth study of the nature and aims of the mission of the church. It aims also at promoting reflections on the relation between the Gospel, cultures and the social life of our time, and favours a serious knowledge and study of other religions. This means that the university’s program for mission studies aims at offering students the knowledge and scientific methodology for research on the theological foundations and pastoral orientations for inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, the transmission of the gospel message together with the duty and means of missionary activity.
In all, it is a course content that promotes an organic study of missiological sciences and at the same time gives primary attention to the question of mission ad gentes – to promote and re-orientate the proclamation of the gospel to those who have not yet heard it. Indeed, the program of studies is structured around the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*’s three areas of appreciating the missionary ventures of the church in the modern world: 1) mission ad gentes; 2) pastoral care; and 3) new evangelisation or re-evangelisation (see *Redemptoris Missio* 33). This in turn is rooted in the mission theology of the Vatican II, particularly in its vision of the aim of mission as evangelisation and founding or consolidating of the ecclesial communities. Another interest here is to promote a program of mission studies whose interest is the missionary vocation of the baptized and of the Christian communities. Therefore, the program of studies aims at promoting and sustaining the missionary activity of the baptized in their own environment and for their participation in the universal mission of the church.

In other words, the program aims, above all, to train students in scientific methodology, research and study of the vital and foundational themes of missiology. It is a course content aimed to provide an organic formation of experts and researchers in missiological sciences. Thus, the program is built around the salvific mystery of Christ and the problem of salvation in other religions; the missionary nature of the church and the new means of evangelisation. Special attention is also given to the following areas: ecumenical dialogue and the unity of Christians, inter-religious dialogue and the inculturation of the gospel, the evangelising activity and transmission of the Christian message as well as evangelisation and human promotion, missionary animation and cooperation, and missionary spirituality. In this program one notices immediately that the course content is intercultural and inter-religiously oriented and at the same time provides an organic study of missiological sciences. In this case, the traditional subject title “mission studies” (or “missiology”) is retained and the new areas of emphasis on intercultural theology and religious pluralism are also highlighted.

**New Role and NOT New Subject title for Mission Studies?**

The interaction of the theological disciplines, intercultural and inter-religious studies in mission studies may not necessarily mean searching for another subject title for missiology. Rather it is a call to missiologists to bring all these new developments to bear in the overall course content for mission studies in our theological faculties and chairs of missiology. The new emphasis on intercultural and inter-religious studies is another eloquent way of highlighting the inter-disciplinary role of missiology in theological sciences. The present day emphasis may mean that a new theological language is already under way and it is the function of missiology to show the way. Again, the present emphasis on intercultural and inter-religious studies brings to the science of mission, a new role in theological studies. It is a call to missiology to promote a real dialogue in theological sciences in view of new developments in intercultural and inter-religious studies. Missiology is today called upon to mediate between theology and the new developments in social sciences and to let the churches “hear what the Spirit says to them” (see Revelation 2,7).

In their 2003 meeting in New York, the Executive Board members of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM), were confronted with this reality. For the Catholic missiologists, the task facing missiology today is not that of looking for another subject title for the discipline, but rather of how to promote a real dialogue in which everyone will be participatory-listener and hear what missiologists in each zone is saying and can learn from the other. The dialogue role of missiology will afford various theological disciplines and believers the opportunity to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church in each cultural zone through the mediation of missiologists. Furthermore, such mediation role means that our program of studies must aim to reflect the problems confronting missiological research and education in relation to the language in use in various cultural zones. It is a role centred on sharing of experiences mediated by the fruits of our missiological research and study. For instance, what is the African experience of doing...
missiology? How do others perceive the theological language in Africa? What are the reactions of and on these missiologists? Therefore, it is a question of recognizing the mediation role of missiology in theological field with the task to study and identify the problem of theological language inherent in our missiological research and education.

All this points to one direction: the challenge facing mission studies today is that of theological language that could help the church in her evangelising mission and in living out the integrity of mission in bearing witness to the risen Christ in the present day reality. To paraphrase the theme of the 11th Quadrennial international conference of IAMS in Port Dickson (Malaysia), our mission studies must aim at promoting the integrity of mission among the believing community, and in allowing missiologists to engage more deeply with the nature of, and the motivation for mission in a pluralistic world (see Mission Studies (24(2007)2, 167). Missiology is a theological discipline that reflects on the faith in relation to the missionary activity of the church. Our theological language must therefore be at the service of the evangelising mission of the church. Missiology is like a family. In the past, in the family there was one language, one way of talking and doing things. In the past, there used to be one language, dominating our missiological perspective and research. But today we have many languages arising from the Christian expansion in the Southern Hemisphere. So, we are talking of theological language for the larger hall. There are many misunderstanding today because of different languages in missiological research and education. What is the response of our mission studies to this situation?

Once more, it has been proven that the right response is for our mission studies to promote integrity of mission through a program of studies that presents the organic nature of missiological sciences in its subject title and in the use of theological languages. One of the major problems of missiology today is the diversity of theological languages (of interpretation of the faith), and the way we often perceive the other. The present emphasis in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is urging experts and institutions of mission studies to mediate between theology and the new developments, to identify and help theology itself to cherish the reality of diversities. The question is how do we develop a theological language for the dialogue with other religions and cultures? In this case, therefore, it is the task of missiology to explore how people already participate in God’s plan of salvation and how this has been perfected or culminated in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. It is also the task of missiology to explore the action of the Spirit of God in other cultures and religions as well as in the believing community. How do people experience God in their cultures and then express it in their Christian context? In what way is the Spirit at work in other religions and in traditional religions as well? This is the concern of missiology. It is all embracing – intercultural and inter-religious (made simple).

This leads us to the next consideration: when we speak of theological language, what do we mean? Is it our language about God or the language of God at work? Is it the language of theologians in speaking about God and the people; of the relationship between God and humanity? Is it the language of theologians about others (cultures, ideologies, etc.)? By theological language, do we mean an ideological language or language as a science among theologians, which must be diverse – but which could be understood? In mission studies, theological language is that which we use in our research and education to express the Christian faith (catechesis). It is that which missiologists use to express an experience of the faith. For instance, inculturation as a theological language may not be used in homiletics, biology, etc.; but it is valid in the field of missiology. Theology is a communication; and it is first of all, a communication among theologians (missiologists). This communication could be research and education that promote a sharing of a new language and symbols in mission studies. It could also be people sharing among themselves in different contexts in order to find new image and symbols to express the mission of the church.

Today, people do not want to be considered as objects of compassion. They want, instead, to be recognised as subjects in God’s saving plan. How do we make this reality reflect in certain aspects of mission language that often tend to highlight a bizarre pictures of the other people (e.g.: of African people and nations), and which makes them look as objects of foreign charity? In other
words, what theological language should be applied when talking of the relationship between mission and charitable works without offending the self respect and human dignity of the person being evangelised? In mission studies, we are called upon to see theology as a process of communication and proclamation. The task here is to discern the action of the Spirit in the world, in those movements and organisations that claim to be working for the salvation of humankind. The criteria in this work of discernment is always the Cross of Jesus Christ, his paschal mystery.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasize once more the fact that the course content for mission studies should be founded on the basic unity of the Christian faith. Such course content must also show how to relate the different manifestations of the Spirit to the mystery of Christ, to the evangelising mission of the church and to our theological language. Indeed, the fact that it is always the one Spirit that is working to restore all to Christ, should inspire the need to maintain the traditional title of missiology even as its program of studies is enlarged to accommodate the new developments of intercultural and inter-religious studies. What is lacking in these last years, is how to present the uniqueness of Christ amidst the emerging studies and developments in intercultural theology and religious pluralism (see Dominus Iesus). Our theology and mission studies must be faithful to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and to the conditions of the living human beings. One unique way of being true to their task, is for missiologists to develop a program of studies in theological faculties that will respect the organic nature of missiological sciences and promote the traditional subject title of the discipline in the field of theology.

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