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Maryknoll Centennial Symposium: New models of mission

Heidi Schlumpf | Oct. 7, 2011 NCR Today

Models of Catholic mission over the past century succeeded, in part, because they were the right forms for the right time, but new models are needed for today, two plenary speakers told those gathered for the Maryknoll Centennial Symposium today at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

?Imagination, faith and hard work are still essential for mission work today. But the form they find today has been under question by missioners themselves for quite some time,? said Precious Blood Father Robert Schreiter, professor of theology at CTU. ?That questioning is not directed at what was created in the past. It arises out of living in a changed sense of circumstances.?Our search now is to find a fit for the commitment to evangelization under changed circumstances.?

Schreiter traced the history of mission *ad gentes*, ?to the nations,? in the larger history of mission in the church and weighed the pros and some unintended cons of that approach, especially in light of recent societal changes. He then summarized three models for the future.

- Mission *ad extra* (outward from ourselves): ?This was always an essential element of the mission *ad gentes*?the ?going out? from our familiar place and culture to a new place to bring the Gospel,? Schreiter said. ?For the people who receive this ?going out? it can make their own experience of faith more ?catholic? in the sense of awareness of the larger world of the community of faith.?
- Mission *ad altera* (to others or other things): ?. Such mission to the other might not require long-distance travel. It might be directed to the other in our midst: the immigrant, the homeless, the one who has never considered Christian faith,? he said.
- Mission *in altum* (out into the deep): This would feature ?the church taking risks in its missionary commitment to seek out the new possibilities,? including even virtual spaces.

In her response to Schreiter?s talk, Maryknoll Sister Antoinette ?Nonie? Gutzler suggested now is the time for a qualitative leap in the church?s understanding of mission to one of mission *inter gentes* (among the nations).

?In this new moment of mission, we hear the call to leave the safe borders that framed our teaching and preaching in the past,? said Gutzler, associate professor of theology at Fu Jen University in Taiwan. ?We are in a new moment of faith seeking understanding. We must humbly listen to the call to leave a way of being in mission that may have grown comfortable. It is a leaving of borders, not only geographical but spiritual.?

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