

E-BULLETIN #68

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 128

we're partners with God in Mission



The amazing grace of mission is that it involves participating in the work of the Trinity, making us partners in mission with God, visiting missiologist, Professor Stephen Bevens SVD has told a mission conference in Sydney.

Prof Bevens was speaking at the **Mission: One heart, many voices** conference, a gathering of more than 250 people engaged in God's mission from right across the Church community. He is the Louis J. Luzbetak SVD, Professor of Mission and Culture at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and a renowned teacher and author on Mission. As an SVD missionary he worked for nine years (1972-1981) in the Philippines.

"The mission is not ours, it is God's," he told the conference. "God's mission calls forth the Church. And God's mission is wider than the Church. Our task is to point out where God is already active."

Prof Bevens said he wished to take that idea further and to suggest that "we are more important than just being subordinate to God in mission".

"I think the amazing thing is that God has called us to be partners in that mission. Just as the Spirit was lavished on Jesus, so that same spirit is lavished on us."

Prof Bevens said that God's model for mission is revealed in Jesus. "Jesus reveals in his own practice the practice of God," he said. "Jesus proclaims God's message of acceptance, forgiveness, reconciliation, inclusion and commitment to the poor."

At Pentecost the disciples began to realise that the mission of Jesus was now given to them and gradually they came to understand that the Gospel was for all people. "So it was in realising that they had been invested with God's mission and practice that they understood themselves as Church. The Church is missionary by its very nature."



If we accept that we are made in the image of God, then it follows that we are given the same mission as God has, he said. "So we're not second fiddle to God in mission, we're

partners."

Prof Bevans said partnership is the basic practice of the Trinity and the whole point of the incarnation. "God needs us. We are the way that God's work gets done. God treats us as equals, as partners. Our task is to have the openness, the humility and the availability modelled by Mary so that we can live up to the task of being partners in God's mission. "This is the amazing grace of mission. It's participating in the work of the trinity."

In a second presentation, Prof Bevans expanded on how we can be missionary in secularised societies such as Australia and the United States, especially in the context of the New Evangelisation, or outreach to Catholics who no longer practice their faith.

"Basically, we need to cultivate a fundamental stance of openness, respect, friendship, deep listening and vulnerability," he said. "I think we need a spirituality more than a strategy. How we do mission is ultimately more important than what we do."

Prof Bevans recalled Pope Francis in his inauguration homily calling for the Church not to be afraid of tenderness and said that such a tenderness could chart the path forward for mission. "Given the lack of credibility of the Church today, and given the hope that the New Evangelisation holds, I think a tender Church would be wonderful good news indeed."

Stephen Bevans svd
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item 129

a Brother's reflections



St Vincent was a contemplative as well as an active apostle. Yet he used the words 'sacra ritiro' to describe the atmosphere of our houses. As I interpret this he wished our houses to exude an atmosphere of contemplative silence, and thus provide spiritual refreshment for those living in the hurley-burley of the active apostolate.

Over the years those SAC Brothers whose work, particularly in later life, made it easier to live a life of prayer than priests involved in pastoral activities, contributed to that atmosphere. As Pallotti wished, the contemplative life of some supported the active apostolate of others. I feel sure that there is an ongoing role in the vocation of SAC Brothers who become less active to provide invaluable prayer support to those engaged in more direct apostolates.

At first glance this may seem a strange notion for an active Society such as ours. But we need to remember that, as our Lord stated, Martha was worried about many things but only one was necessary – Mary had chosen the better part. Over the years I have come across many Brothers who practised a deep life of prayer.

Again in the area of spirituality most of our communities, at least in the Australian experience, consist of only one or two religious. So Brothers can often be restricted in the availability of spiritual direction. There are those who, like myself, do not subscribe to the modern trend of lay spiritual direction, but rather appreciate the grace of the sacrament of reconciliation as part of direction. This need can easily be overlooked. In my view the art of spiritual direction should be an integral part of any course of theology, and suitable provision always made for those who are not so active and mobile.

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you commented...

on #67

Once again, Fr Jacob Nampudakam shares with us his insights and spurs us on to spread the Kingdom of God beyond our comfort. It's another thrust to embrace the call to evangelization.

CF 13.05.13