

VISUALIZING THEMES IN REDEMPTORIS MISSIO BY STATISTICAL GLOBAL DIAGRAMS

■ What is the significance of *Redemptoris Missio* in light of global Christianity and its commitment to mission *ad gentes*? Perhaps both Catholics and non-Catholics could benefit from this cogent analysis of the stark contrast between ideals and the present deployment of Christian resources.

By David B. Barrett

The eighth encyclical of John Paul II, entitled in English "The Mission of Christ the Redeemer" with 92 sections, is clearly a document of major significance. It comes at a most opportune time. Its subject is: how Christians can rededicate themselves to Christ's task with regard to the non-Christian nations of the world. The technical phrase to describe this that John Paul II has been promulgating comes from the opening words of Vatican II's 1965 definitive conciliar decree *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (translated as "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity"). The phrase is "mission *ad gentes*" (mission to the non-believing peoples) which is very close to the Protestant usages "frontier missions" and "reaching unreached peoples". It is defined exactly as follows: "The specific nature of this mission *ad gentes* consists in its being addressed to 'non-Christians'" (*Redemptoris Missio*, Section 34).

How did this concern come about? We can perceive three main reasons. Firstly, because the pope has come into contact with the multitudinous populations of the world as no predecessor was able to do, nor any other contemporary Christian leader. Since 1978 he has completed 53 "apostolic journeys"—major missionary travels around the globe. He has talked with thousands of non-Christian leaders, from every country and every religion. They have made an indelible impact on him: "My direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the urgency of missionary activity" (Section 1).

Secondly, he has watched with dismay the contemporary decline of missions: "Missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations' (*ad gentes*)

appears to be waning" (Section 2). One reason for this concerns one of the "many dimensions" of evangelization (he lists seven in Section 20), namely interreligious dialogue—Christian leaders talking in depth with Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Marxist, or other non-Christian leaders. Certainly, "Interreligious dialogue is a part of the church's evangelizing mission" (Section 55). However, it has gradually displaced the more central dimensions of the church's traditional missionary thrust towards non-Christians: witness, preaching, evangelism, conversion, baptism, church-planting.

Thirdly, first-hand experience of the frightening demographics of Christian mission, reflected in the faces of the masses living in absolute poverty everywhere, has alarmed him: "The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the church is constantly on the increase" (Section 3). He notes this number nearly doubled since 1965.

In view of these problems, John Paul II asks missiologists and others—including all of us reading this issue of the *International journal of frontier missions*—to help: "I earnestly ask theologians and professional Christian journalists to intensify the service they render to the church's mission" (Section 36). We are all urged to think about these issues in profound depth, and to circulate our feedback to each other and to ever wider circles.

The present article attempts to clarify and illustrate these themes by means of four in our current series of 50 global diagrams including global maps. These diagrams are one-page statistical fact sheets each presenting and interpreting one specific facet of Christ's world mission. They deal with four

major questions, as follows.

1. *Where are the "peoples"?* The first question is: Who and where are the *gentes* the encyclical refers to? Some readers will be startled to know that "There remain vast regions still to be evangelized. In many nations entire peoples and cultural areas of great importance have not yet been reached by the proclamation of the Gospel and the presence of the local church" (Section 37). We can give exact geographical answers to this enquiry. As the encyclical states, "Missionary activity *ad gentes*... is exercised within well-defined territories and groups of people" (*ibid*).

John Paul II answers this first question therefore by seeing the globe under a three-fold typology, and by going on to elaborate on the first segment as follows:

"Looking at today's world from the viewpoint of evangelization, we can distinguish three situations.

First, there is the situation which the church's missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups and sociocultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term." (Section 33).

To understand "mission *ad gentes*" in depth and in detail, therefore, we first construct a geopolitical map of our globe today. We have done this here in Global Map 1, entitled "The Great Un-evangelized Belt". (Note that a far larger and more detailed global map is also being prepared). Global Map 1 shows the entirety of the non-Christian world: it portrays the countries where 98.2% of the globe's 3.6 billion non-Christians

live. (We omit the Americas here because only 1.8% of all non-Christians live there). The heavy black boundary then contains the core non-Christian nations and peoples that the encyclical is talking about.

First the map interprets *gentes* as "nations" (sovereign states), and shown their boundaries. It then lists and enumerates the 23 sovereign nations which are the most out of contact with organized Christianity and the Christian world mission. The data shows each's percent Christian (C%, which can be subtracted from 100 to get each's percent non-Christian). It also gives each E%, the percentage of the population who have become evangelized—adequately aware of Christianity, Christ, and the gospel.

Next, the map interprets *gentes* as "ethnolinguistic peoples", and lists the globe's 23 largest unevangelized mega-peoples. These are the largest ethnic groups in John Paul II's description of the plight of the unevangelized: "Many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the Gospel revelation or to enter the church." The map demonstrates that all these nations and peoples are geographically contiguous—they touch each other in a solid unbroken chain or bloc from the Atlantic to the Pacific. For convenience, we are calling this World A because this is the most important world—the world of first importance to all Christians who are serious about obeying "the mission of Christ the Redeemer".

2. *What is Christ's mandate to his church today?* The second question is: Have Christians been given only vague, general instructions as to how to relate to the globe and its peoples, or have they been given clear and specific instructions in detail about objectives and strategies? Our second illustration therefore is Global Diagram 35, entitled "Matching up holistic resources with legitimate targets". It traces Christian history beginning from Christ's Great Commission, or as John Paul II calls it the Universal Missionary Mandate (Section 63) or simply the Missionary Mandate (Sections 22,23). The diagram traces this history up to today and on into the next century. It clarifies the requirements for successfully implementing the world mission of Christ the Redeemer, in particular its central component, world evangelization.

Throughout this encyclical reference is made to the entire scope of mission as

illustrated in Global Diagram 35. We list above the pictorial part four main headings: Commission, Resources, Responses, Targets. John Paul II recognizes that the whole spectrum of other Christians than Catholic must be involved too in mission. (See Section 50 et al.). Also there is agreement over the variety of responses needed, such as "preaching constitutes the church's first and fundamental way of serving the coming of the kingdom in individuals and in human society" (Section 20), "the many dimensions of the kingdom of God" (ibid), direct contact with non-Christians (Section 1), interreligious dialogue (Section 55), et alia.

3. *How are foreign missionary personnel allocated or assigned today?* The third question is: What about deployment of foreign missionaries—surely they ought to be the easiest resource to correctly assign? Our third illustration, Global Diagram 41 entitled "Global and confessional deployment globes or 'sharing globes'", shows that neither global Christianity as a whole, nor any of its major confessions, has got this right.

The diagram demonstrates that global Christianity assigns less than 3% of its foreign missionary personnel to World A. But what particularly troubles John Paul II is that his own church merely follows suit—only 2.9% of all Roman Catholic foreign missionaries (5,830 out of 200,430) end up serving World A. None of the seven major ecclesiastico-cultural blocs does any different on this criterion.

4. *Which mission agencies today are most at fault by the encyclical's criteria?* The fourth question is: Of the Christian world's 4,000 foreign mission agencies (100 being mega-agencies) and 12,000 home or domestic mission agencies (500 being major ones of national or international scope), how many are violating the basic principle of sharing that John Paul II is stressing? The startling answer is: all of them (or, all of the mega-agencies and most of the minor agencies). This is clear from an impartial reading of our fourth illustration, Global Diagram 42 entitled "Mega-agency deployment globes".

The diagram in fact shows that virtually every large foreign missionary agency is stuck in the same rut—it has proved too hard to allocate personnel to World A. Even the largest Catholic agency, the Jesuits, only assigns 1.3%. Since all agencies are similarly affected, the reasons cannot be personal or indi-

vidualist—they are societal, social, corporate, even demographic.

No doubt both the writer and the readers of the encyclical are hoping that mega-agencies will alter this pattern to redress the imbalance.

What solutions does the encyclical propose to this whole unsatisfactory situation? It is important to realize that statistics and statistical analysis show conclusively that this situation as a whole, and in most of its particulars, is a stable, ongoing, static pattern which does not change from one year to the next. *The demographics and the plight of the unevangelized have remained almost unchanged in a continuous succession from 1950 to 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and to this very day.* On the surface there are hardly any recognizable factors today which indicate, let alone guarantee, that their fate will be any different by AD 2000 than it appeared in 1950.

For this reason, the encyclical fastens on to the one hopeful factor which alone could reverse this impasse. Chapter 3 (which is the same as Sections 21-30) is entitled "The Holy Spirit, Principal Agent of Mission". Here we read that "the Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the church's mission. His action is preeminent in the mission *ad gentes*... in the choice of regions and peoples to be evangelized (cf. Acts 16:6 ff)" (Section 21). This theme is elaborated at length: "The Spirit is at work in the heart of every person... The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions" (Section 28). Again, "It is the Spirit who sows the 'seeds of the word' present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ" (ibid). The whole chapter is a brilliant missiological statement.

Redemptoris Missio was written and promulgated in the knowledge that the centrality of the Holy Spirit's activity in mission is now being reemphasized by some 76.2 million charismatics in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. With their Protestant and other counterparts, this worldwide Renewal in the Holy Spirit embraces today some 428 million affiliated church members. Seventy-one percent of them are Non-White, mostly citizens of Third-World countries.

This new and unexpected factor may well be the key to radically new progress for the world's 1.3 billion unevangelized persons.