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## **Mission and Power** (*Theme 4, Track 2*)

### **Women and Mission** (*Book project /Transversal*)

I express deep gratitude to God and the organizers for the opportunity and the honour given me to participate and offer my thoughts and perspective on behalf of the Women and Mission book project.

While I do represent the team of women from around the world working on the mentioned project I have not bracketed the specific socio-cultural location I belong. I offer my thoughts as an indigenous person from the Northeast India, and as a woman.

I appreciate the Study Group Conveners: Drs. Jonathan Bonk and Lori Ransom for their time and effort in providing a lucid, relevant and powerful study document to situate the theme of Mission and Power.

### **Mission gone awry**

The traumatic impact of residential schools among the native people in Canada exemplifies powerfully Christian mission gone awry as a result of misconceived notion of power. The transformative power of the Gospel confused with cultural and political power by the Christianizing western power wrought more harm than good for the natives in the long run. The pain, social trauma, cultural dislocation, and the loss of identity that resulted inadvertently through the well-intended mission of the church, can be re-affirmed by other communities around the world.

While not trivializing the traumatic legacy of the indigenous people in Canada and other parts of the world, it must, however, be recognized that critical analyses of Christian mission reveal also a better side of the project. The power of the Gospel has initiated and wrought positive changes and transformations which can be exemplified from women's experience of mission.

## **Complex canvas**

Women's experience of Christian mission presents a complex canvas: the power of mission was at best liberating and at worst limiting for women. Admittedly, women's experience of Christian mission has varied from different contexts. A plethora of studies attest to the liberating dimension of Christian mission for women across cultures. On the other hand, there are also qualms of the inadequate, limiting or acquiescence of Christian mission with oppressive structures for women. Despite the undeniable progress initiated and achieved, women continue to experience exploitation, discrimination, inequality within the church; women's experiences as victims and marginalized remain unchallenged in many communities; women's contribution, talents and abilities remain unrecognized and untapped.

## **Liberating yet limited**

A case in point of mission being both a positive force and a limiting structure for women is the experience of women in the Northeast India, particularly among the Mizo and Naga Christians. They are indigenous peoples, with high Christian population and high literacy rate, however, dismal degree of visibility and participation of women both in the larger society and the church. To put it bluntly, the inherited Christian community has not challenged the patriarchal structures and the church has not been inclusive in its structure and function. I would echo with Stan McKay (Canada) that "statement of apologies" is insufficient unless there are "significant change[s] in the society and its institution". The perils of being trapped in platitudes and tokenism are real and need be addressed resolutely. The Christian community has the power to engender radical changes, and to follow a spirituality of "hungering after what is right" (James Dunn).

## **Challenges**

Mission historians inform us that the most vibrant Christian communities are in the global south, the erstwhile 'mission field', ironically this region is the area that pose most challenges for women, be it the raging epidemic of HIV/AIDS, women trafficking, violence against women, cultural practices that are oppressive to women, illiteracy, patriarchal structures, male-centric worldviews. What are the implications and tasks for Christian mission in such context?

## **Key issues pertaining to women**

Gender based violence in conflict areas (rape), HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, honour-killing, domestic violence, dowry deaths, marginalization, discrimination, exclusion, invisibility; mentoring, training, leadership of women, resource allotment for women (gendered budget) etc, etc.

## **Mission and power and women**

Advocacy, support, courage to intervene, wisdom to direct, seek culture sensitive knowledge and maintain critical/prophetic stance, mutually critical and deliberate involvement, not just funding but accompaniment, require women to be represented in consultations, make room for women at the decision making bodies, deliberate measures to equip and develop women leaders, encourage Christian communities to organize gender awareness liturgies/bible studies, provide theological resources for gender inclusiveness, etc, etc.

### **Questions:**

1. What are the criteria to differentiate the power of the Gospel and the ways of the cultures, be it Indigenous or the Euro-centric culture?
2. What measures can be taken for accountability of powers within the church?
3. How can we ensure participation of women in the church and the larger society?
4. Can western mission partners stress/require gender inclusive partnership and networks? If yes, how?
5. What are the features envisaged in a missiology that is inclusive and gender-sensitive?
6. What are the critical bases and foundations for a missiology that is gender inclusive?
7. Despite the demographic shift of Christianity, the reality of economic and political dominance by the West remains, then what powers do western Christians still have to influence and partner towards a just and inclusive world?