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FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON CHRISTIAN MISSION



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Kenneth R. Ross

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## *Preface*

The Edinburgh 2010 study process has created a diverse community of discussion and reflection which spans the globe and extends broadly across the full spectrum of church life. At no time or place have all of its participants ever come together. Yet they have found ways to unite and connect – through a web site, through e-mail, Skype and Facebook, and through occasional meetings or consultations to address particular issues. It is from this extensive web of international interaction that this small book has emerged. I have had the enormous privilege of being placed, for a little while, at the centre of the web, with responsibility to draw together its various threads. This has given me a rare chance to experience the dynamism and diversity of the movement that has formed around the centenary of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference.

The aim of the book is to provide an accessible account of Edinburgh 2010's "transversal" themes. These offer perspectives which cut across all our missional thinking and action, bringing illumination and challenge. The development of these transversals has not been a neat and tidy process. Nor can this claim to be a

neat and tidy book. What it can claim is a great sense of vitality as perspectives are opened up which can inform and invigorate the missionary engagement of the church.

My role has been to compile and synthesise the thinking which has been developed on the transversal themes. I was therefore entirely dependent on the protagonists who have led the consideration of the various transversals. Amidst busy schedules they have made time to sharpen their contributions, without which this book simply would not exist. I therefore wholeheartedly pay tribute to Jec Dan Borlado, Gwen Bryde, Bambang Budijanto, Sunder John Boopalan, Ernst Conradie, Ruth Conway, Tim Davy, Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, M.P. Joseph, Afrie Songco Joye, Kapyra John Kaoma, Sebastian Kim, Vineeth Koshy, Christine Lienemann, Atola Longkumer, José López Vázquez, Fergus Macdonald, Maylanne Maybee, Jacques Matthey, Bill Mitchell, Fulata Moyo, Daniel Patte, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, Vinoth Ramachandra, Dana Robert, Marie-Hélène Robert, Lamin Sanneh, Philip T.Y. Siew, Wendy Strachan, Andrea Zaki Stephanous, Andrew Thompson and Allan Yeh. Working with them has been truly uplifting and inspiring.

My aim has been to use non-technical language and to state the issues succinctly so that these may be readily accessible to the ordinary church member or enquirer. For the shortcomings of the effort I accept full responsibility. It offers not prescriptions but perspectives – which I hope will supply readers with new ways of looking at their call to mission.

All Bible references are from the English Standard Version (London: Collins, 2002) and I am grateful to the publisher for permission to include biblical quotations.

Kenneth R. Ross  
*Netherlorn, April 2010*



## *Introduction*

The centenary of the “Edinburgh 1910” World Missionary Conference has proved to be a suggestive moment for those concerned with the meaning and direction of Christian mission in the world of the 21st century. “Edinburgh 2010” has succeeded in bringing together a broader representation of world Christianity than has ever before been mobilised in a common project. As will be apparent on the pages which follow, it has been able to draw on the experience and insights of people from every continent. It has also been enriched by the gifts and wisdom of almost every conceivable Christian tradition – from Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic to Pentecostal and Independent. Its various meetings and consultations have included women and men, young and old, fresh and experienced. Inasmuch the delegates to Edinburgh 1910 were predominantly white, Western, Protestant, male and elderly, Edinburgh 2010 has accepted the challenge to ensure that voices unheard a century ago are prominent today. The process is therefore informed by possibly a wider range of experience than has ever before been applied to questions of church and mission. For

further background on Edinburgh 1910 and Edinburgh 2010 the reader is referred to the companion volume *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard for Mission*.

Fundamental to the reconsideration of Christian mission which has been undertaken through the stimulus of Edinburgh 2010 was a preparatory meeting of a group broadly representative of world Christianity which took place in June 2005 in Edinburgh. This meeting identified the principal questions which required consideration in order to take account of Christian mission in the contemporary world. Nine themes emerged and over the subsequent four years study commissions formed around each theme. The results of the study process are elaborated in some detail in *Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today*, edited by Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim and published by Regnum in Oxford. A shorter account is offered in *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions for Church in Mission* by Kenneth R. Ross, published by William Carey International University Press in Pasadena.

In addition to identifying the nine substantial topics with which the Edinburgh 2010 study process should be engaged, the 2005 preparatory meeting also suggested seven “transversal” themes. These were seen as representing perspectives of great importance for the understanding of Christian mission today. It was expected, and recommended, that these should “run like threads” across all nine of the study tracks which were being initiated. Each of the seven transversals represents a way of looking at mission, like a set of binoculars which enables you to see things that you might otherwise miss.

As the Edinburgh 2010 study process has developed it has been fortunate to be able to draw on the experience and expertise of people with a particular affinity to each of the transversals. This small book attempts to bring together the perspectives which

## INTRODUCTION

they have offered in a way which makes them widely accessible. It is hoped that this will be a valuable tool for the rethinking of Christian mission in our time.

The Edinburgh 2010 process has always aimed to invite as great a width of participation as possible. Its excellent web site and popular Facebook group have enabled people to engage with the process wherever there is an internet connection. However, it is recognised that the process is broad and diverse, making it quite challenging to get hold of what it is really all about. This is particularly true of the transversal themes. Hence the effort to compress the results of worldwide engagement with the transversals into a short and accessible book.

Like its companion volume *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions for Church in Mission*, the book is designed to be used either in a study group or for personal reflection. Each chapter comprises a blend of comprehensive survey of the theme in question with relevant case studies. Incisive contributions are found in short indented paragraphs while some chapters include more extended passages contributed by experts in the field. Quotations come from internal unpublished Edinburgh 2010 papers unless otherwise specified in the text or Endnotes. Each chapter concludes with a biblical text to consider, questions for discussion and a prayer. Working through the chapters, either alone or in a small group, will yield fresh perspectives on the meaning and practice of Christian mission in the world of the 21st century.



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*One Faith, Many Contexts*

**ROOTS IN THE LOCAL SOIL**

**D**uring the past two centuries the Christian faith has put down roots on every continent. The centenary of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference brings this clearly into focus. In 1910, missionary strategists thought in terms of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ *from* the “Christian world” of Europe and North America to the “non-Christian world” of Asia and Africa. Despite the acknowledged shortcomings and blind spots of the missionary movement, its core vision has been realised. So much so, that much of the vitality of world Christianity is found on the southern continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The dynamism of Christian faith in the Global South arises, at least in part, from the fact that the good news of Jesus Christ has been embraced by people of many different languages and cultures. There has been a vast and widespread translation exercise as the attempt has been made to explain and interpret the gospel in familiar terms in a great variety of particular contexts. This dynamic interaction between gospel and culture has had dramatic effects on both sides of the equation. The gospel has

been understood in new ways, bringing renewal to the Christian faith. Meanwhile, entire cultures have been transformed through the reception of the gospel.

During the heyday of the missionary era it was almost inevitable that the gospel was first presented in the cultural dress which it had acquired in the home context of the missionary. Equally inevitable was the reaction on the part of those receiving the gospel. In context after context, they welcomed the biblical message but were not comfortable with the foreign dress in which it was presented. There followed an often contentious struggle as people sought to reinterpret the gospel in the terms of their own culture. The difficulty was compounded by the fact that the missionary era coincided with a period when Europeans and Americans had a high level of confidence in the superiority of their culture. This was often experienced by indigenous people as a component of colonial oppression. Regaining confidence in their own culture was an important element in their liberation struggle. Far from causing disenchantment with the gospel, in many contexts this led to a powerful renewal of Christian faith as the gospel became rooted in local soil.

Africa, of which Edinburgh 1910 had limited expectations, has proved to be the outstanding case of such renewal. As Africans in many different parts of the continent have brought their culture to embrace the biblical gospel they have introduced new vitality to the faith. While the missionary message struck notes which were welcome in Africa, there remained a “yearning for a religion which would embrace all of life and would fill the whole day”.<sup>1</sup> There was a whole range of questions, important in the African context, which a European interpretation of the gospel did not even begin to address. As these questions were brought to the biblical text and the worshipping life of the

church, new understandings of the faith began to be formed, geared to addressing the deepest issues in African experience.

This process has often found expression at a deeply religious level as, in a great variety of contexts, people have brought their prior understanding of God to their consideration of Christian faith. Debates often focused on the question of whether traditional names for God could be used with reference to the God of the Bible. Often the traditional names continued to be used, honouring the local heritage, but were increasingly informed by biblical content, demonstrating the impact of the gospel.

The challenge of contextualisation is well illustrated in the infamous “Term Controversy” among missionaries to China. When the Bible was being translated into Chinese, the most hotly contested issue was what term to use for “God”—should they translate the word as *Shangdi* (God on high), *Shen* (spirit), *Tianzhu* (Heavenly Lord), or *Yehehua* (Yahweh)? The first implies a supreme god among a pantheon; the second implies ancestral or nature spirits; the third is a generic term for a high-ranking deity; and the fourth implies that Christianity is a foreign religion imported into China. Scotsman James Legge (1815-97) argued for *Shangdi* citing Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci’s (1552-1610) advocacy of the same word (though Ricci also used *Tianzhu* even more frequently). American William Boone (1811-74) preferred *Shen*, which Legge dismissed as suggesting subordinate spirits. Both men were accused of syncretism by other missionaries. Interestingly, none of them (Legge, Boone, or Ricci) was ever really in favour of the transliteration *Yehehua* because they all thought it was too Western and would have the hardest time being accepted by the Chinese culture! Contextualization was the one thing they could all agree on, though their methods varied.

It is fascinating that the name of God was the biggest impedi-

ment to translating the Bible into Chinese! It just shows that language is laden with culture. Today, all four names of God are used in Chinese, much as “God,” “Lord,” and “LORD/Yahweh” are all used in English Bibles. The task of contextualization is to be culturally specific and universally applicable simultaneously. To let the former trump the latter is syncretism; to do the latter without the former is impossible.

—Allan Yeh

In situations where the gospel has been rooted for many generations it is easy to assume that one particular way of interpreting the faith is the only valid way. It has been a learning experience for European and American Christians to realise, for example, that their understanding of the gospel is shaped by their culture and history. This lends it formidable strengths but also exposes it to certain blind spots and weaknesses. Acknowledging that their understanding of the faith is also shaped by context opens the way for European and American Christians to have their faith enriched by learning from fellow Christians witnessing in other contexts.

The worldwide nature of Christian faith and practice is fixed in the multiplicity of languages employed in translation and worship, and that linguistic activity reached one of its high points in the twentieth century to stamp the religion with its peculiar indigenizing character. Whatever the situation with regard to the core of the religion, there can be little doubt that it has never been about a universal linguistic or territorial core. The local idiom, not the language of social scale, is the original language of Christianity. The universal God of apostolic preaching is encountered in the humble character of the people’s vernacular, an audacious notion that often has unsettled the Church itself.... Bible translation is evidence that Christianity’s “neurological centre” is in flux, that its vocabulary is growing and changing, that foreign idioms have lodged in the system like oxygen



in the bloodstream, and that new, expanded intercultural tasks have stimulated openness and diversity in the religion.<sup>2</sup>

—Lamin Sanneh

### **FAITH ENGAGING HISTORY**

The growth of Christianity in the Global South has not only introduced unprecedented linguistic and cultural diversity to the faith, it has also taken it to very different social contexts. The gospel has had to be interpreted in contexts where great social injustice has been the experience of the people. Dissatisfied with the faith being used to uphold the status quo, leaders in the Global South began to explore the meaning of the faith in the context of struggling against the odds to attain greater justice in their societies.

In this approach, the truth of the gospel does not come pre-packaged but is discovered through committed action. As Christians identify with the poor and their cry for justice they walk a path of discipleship in which the meaning of the gospel becomes plain. The faith is understood not primarily as a doctrine to be accepted but as a way to be followed.

Attention to our contemporary context, and committed action to change it for the better, became a key with which to interpret the gospel. The phrase “theology rises at sundown” suggested that the energy of the day be given to working for the transformation of society. Thereafter understanding of the faith can be developed by reflecting on what has taken place. In this way engagement with our current context is a vital component in our growth in faith and discipleship.

Instead of looking at the drama of God’s salvation as separate from our ordinary, everyday history, this approach looks at all history as one—God’s purposes coming to fulfilment in the

struggles of human history. It recognises that the reality of God's kingdom stretches far beyond our current situation. Yet this approach takes seriously the small steps that can be taken now, seeing them as having value in terms of the kingdom of God.

Across the whole range of Christian traditions from Roman Catholic to Evangelical and Pentecostal, the need to come to terms with the realities of life in the Global South has brought the question of context sharply into focus. Engaging with the particular historical realities which meet us in our time and place, and seeking to see these transformed in the direction of the kingdom of God, has come to be understood as integral to understanding and expressing the faith, wherever we are.

Taking the contemporary context seriously has also led to an awareness that Christianity is not neutral in contexts of oppression and struggle. Those who seek to promote the faith in any given context are likely to be asked: whose side are you on? Whose interests do you represent? There is an onus on practitioners of Christian mission to demonstrate that they are on the side of God's justice.

Political Christianity in the Middle East is developing as a result of specific trends: crisis in personal identity and ideology; the decline of Arab nationalism; the emergence of Political Islam as an alternative political ideology; the imposition of "democracy" as a foreign Western political concept; the lack of political legitimacy in existing regimes; authoritarian rule in most Middle Eastern countries; the lack of effective economic development; the re-Islamisation of existing institutions and political systems; the Islamisation of media, economy, and culture; a weak civil society and the absence of a political theology that supports coexistence.

The theology of minorities in the Arab world is characterized by either passive resistance or sectarian violence. A theology

that focuses on heavenly intervention does not encourage co-existence. Theologies that support sectarian politics—both Muslim and Christian—hinder the promotion of dynamic citizenship. Theological development that encourages pluralism, coexistence and citizenship is needed. The development of civil society through the practices of democracy can contribute to flexible relationships between majorities and minorities.

Religious Institutions need to develop an Arabic political theology that can contribute to the emergence of civil society, encourage democracy and realize dynamic citizenship. Such a task is crucial in developing the role of Arab Christians. A contextual theology that transcends the barriers of the past and contributes to the development of dynamic citizenship will enhance coexistence and affirm pluralism.

The notion of absolute truth is one of the root causes of theological problems in the Arab world. To encourage a theology that recognizes multiple loyalties, pluralistic identity and transcends a single legitimate truth, multiple interpretations of the religious texts are required.

Arabic political theology considers solidarity as the basis of co-existence. Pluralism does not mean fragmentation. The theology that sees solidarity as a tool for common struggle and coexistence can contribute to the realization of dynamic citizenship. Solidarity must be based on the doctrine of creation where all humans have an equal right to exist and to thrive. Equality and justice come before solidarity. Religious doctrines are selective by nature and tend to exclude those who are different. A political theology that can establish a concept of solidarity and go beyond the limitation of doctrine will contribute to the notion of unity and diversity that is essential for civil society and democracy.

Political theology that promotes institutionalization as a theological concept will encourage the Church to have an insti-

tutional role that is independent of the state and contribute to building bridges between the Church and society. Institutionalization will bring the Church to the heart of civil society and help it to overcome the isolation and alienation that the Church faces in Arabic society. Institutionalization will affirm the role of God's people as a community committed to equality, justice and full involvement and these are the essences of dynamic citizenship.

—Andrea Zaki Stephanous

### THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION

The 20th century witnessed creative efforts in many situations to enable Christian faith to be expressed in terms appropriate to the particular local context. The start of the 21st century has seen the emergence of a global culture, supported by and expressed through new communication technology, notably the internet. Many people have their understanding shaped not only by their historic local culture but also by the cultural forces of globalisation.

Christian faith finds its authentic voice in the vernacular, the mother tongue, the language of the heart. It therefore often becomes identified with the local context in its resistance to domination by global forces. At the same time, Christianity itself has a global character and has unprecedented opportunities to function as a world faith in today's context of the global village. This tension finds expression at the level of language. Huge efforts have been put into translating the Bible so that it is available, at least in part, in more than 2,500 languages. At the same time, in order to function as a world faith it is necessary to use such international languages as English and Spanish. It may be that a bilingual approach will be necessary so that what is discovered in Christian faith at the vernacular level can enrich the world

church by being translated into an international language.

Globalised culture extends its influence to all age groups but it is particularly influential among young people who have grown up in the internet age.

Young people dream of a church fully catering to the needs of the church in the new and evolving context of “common global culture”. The truth is that regardless whether the youth live in village or city, they are all being influenced by the three great unifiers of global culture: internet, movies, and music. Recently someone asked me: “what is the secret of media in their strong influence on this generation?” I replied: “they don’t influence them, rather they own them”. Today it seems to me that church is the last one to catch up and own these changes, therefore the church’s mission needs to be tuned and adapted in accordance with the rising cultural revolutions.

The rate of change brought about by spreading global youth culture with all its modern distinctiveness renders traditional structures of religious expression an obstruction to conveying their original meanings to the young people. The mandate of the contextualization of the gospel requires that no unnecessary stumbling block be put in the way of young people in understanding Christian mission. For an effective mission, the churches must understand the soul and spirit of today’s youth. Today there are a lot of discussions and debates going on about indigenization and inculturation of the liturgy with a view to achieving greater participation of young people. My observation is that unless Christ is truly incarnated, all these efforts will be fruitless and meaningless. Inculturation must go beyond adapting to contemporary cultures, traditions and strategies to attract young people. Therefore the challenge is to complement and mutually enrich the diverse cultures but at the same time appreciate that there is one people of God adoring him. Thus it means that the mission, life, and teachings of Christ will take different forms in different cultural situations, without adulter-

ating the values and principles of Christianity.

—Vineeth Koshy

### **DIVERSITY AND UNITY: CHRISTIANITY TODAY**

Anyone taking account of Christianity worldwide today will be struck by its extraordinary diversity. Enormous variety is evident in the forms in which the faith finds expression. Yet, at the same time, there is an irreducible commonality which demonstrates that Christianity has not fragmented into several religions but remains one faith. The commonality is apparent in such features as reading the Bible as the foundational text for faith, finding in Jesus Christ the indispensable clue to understanding God and God's purposes for our world, and sharing bread and wine in worship to express an intimate relationship to Jesus Christ and a sense of the ultimate significance of his death and resurrection. While celebrating the diversity of cultural and contextual forms in which it finds expression, a significant challenge for the Christian faith at this time is to find appropriate expressions of its coherence as one faith.

What at first glance appears to be the largest world religion is in fact the ultimate local religion. Indigenous words for God and ancient forms of spirituality have all become part of Christianity. Flexibility at the local level, combined with being part of an international network, is a major factor in Christianity's self-understanding and success today. The strength of world Christianity lies in its creative interweaving of the warp of a world religion with the woof of its local contexts.<sup>3</sup>

—Dana Robert

### **KEY TEXT: ACTS 11:19-26**

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that

## ONE FAITH, MANY CONTEXTS

arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What is the significance of the fact that the Christian faith quickly spread from its Jewish beginnings to gain acceptance among people who had no Jewish background at all?

What part has your engagement with your context played in the formation of your faith?

How can world Christianity be genuinely at home in a great diversity of contexts while at the same time express its unity as one faith?

### PRAYER

*I praise you, O God, for your Son Jesus Christ who made himself at home in human life,  
and for your church, following him, which puts down roots in local soil.  
Forgive me, that I have often been arrogant in asserting my*

*understanding of the faith,  
and unwilling to have my understanding enriched by that of others.  
Bless your church around the world, in all its variety and diversity,  
and grant that it may live and speak the gospel in terms that are  
readily understood.*

*Increase my faith, O Lord, that it may be big enough to learn from  
far and wide,  
and to travel the journey that will bring the full challenge of the  
gospel to my context.  
All for your glory and praise, through Jesus Christ the risen Lord. Amen*



## 2

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*Bible and Mission*

The Christian faith has a foundational text: the Bible. The reading, interpreting and dissemination of this text lie at the core of the missionary task. In this chapter a number of contributors reflect on aspects of the interplay between Bible and mission.

**THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE SOCIETIES IN CHRISTIAN MISSION—BY  
FERGUS MACDONALD & BILL MITCHELL<sup>4</sup>**

From its beginnings in 1804, the Bible Society movement had Bible translation and engagement at the heart of its mission. Today there are 147 member societies of the United Bible Societies (UBS), working in over two hundred countries. In the 20th century other, non-UBS, Bible translation agencies emerged, such as Wycliffe Bible Translators International (WBTI) and the Institute for Bible Translation. For Bible Societies each piece of Scripture distributed to people represented the possibility of a life-giving encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible Society movement has been summed up as “popular, translating, ecumenical, and efficient”, having “a unique missiological significance”.<sup>5</sup>

New audiences and their reading and hearing tendencies call for new products to be developed. Cultures are in constant change. The paradox of Christianity is that to be faithful to the gospel is not just to repeat it—we constantly have to translate it. To be faithful to the Word is to be faithful to the Word that speaks to people *where* and *when* they are. Bible translation today takes place in a world where difference and diversity are increasingly recognised and encouraged, where the centre of gravity of the church is no longer in the “West”, where the predominance of one culture over others is no longer accepted, and where cultural polycentrism is a fact of our time.

In the late 20th century a fundamental cultural shift was brought about by major changes in media. The world is being redefined by the internet and the new global language is digital—a major challenge for traditionally print-based organisations. The recognition of the Bible as “more than a book” has led Bible agencies into varied internet and social networking initiatives.

The UBS has defined “Scripture engagement” as “a concept that emphasises making the Scriptures discoverable, accessible, and relevant”. It went on to explain that this involves: first, “making the Bible recoverable and discoverable as sacred Scripture”, and, second, “making Scripture accessible as the place of life-enhancing and life-transforming encounter”.<sup>6</sup>

The recognition that some two-thirds of the world’s population lives in an oral context has led to major initiatives in Bible storying.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, in the world of academic biblical studies the rediscovery of orality in the Scriptures is leading to important contributions on “performance” in the communication of the Scriptures in both the 1st century and the 21st.<sup>8</sup>

The ministry of the UBS and other bible agencies is one of facilitating the impact of the gospel in all aspects of life by

providing the Scriptures—evangelisation is seen in the broadest terms as the gospel, in the Scriptures, addressing and renewing all areas of life, personal, interpersonal, social, political, for the sake of Christ. While affirming the movement of human history towards a divine consummation, it is a missiology motivated fundamentally by an eschatology that stresses the presence of the kingdom of God, the in-breaking and inauguration of this kingdom and its salvation in human history now.

### **RICHNESS IN THE BIBLICAL WITNESS—BY DANIEL PATTE**

Close attention to the biblical text enriches our understanding of mission, as illustrated by this reading of Romans 15:14-24 (see the end of this chapter for full text).

First, Paul's description of his mission is a model for our own missionary activity. Emulating Paul's model involves preaching the gospel message (15:19-20 read together with e.g., 1:15, 10:8, 10:14-15) to people who do not know it so that they might believe and be saved (from eternal condemnation, 6:22) by being justified by faith (e.g. 5:9-10 and 10:1-17). It involves calling people to the "obedience of faith" (1:5), that is, to the conversion and subordination to the sovereign authority of Jesus, which is the result of preaching the gospel. Like Paul (1:1), the Romans are, through their conversion, set apart to preach the word of the gospel. And so are we.

Second, alternatively we can identify our missionary activity with that of the churches that Paul describes. Paul, the apostle, brought the gospel where Christ had not yet been named (Rom 15:20), planted small communities "from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum [Albania]" (15:19), and was ready to move on to Spain (15:23-28). But propagating the gospel is not finished in all these regions! As all Paul's exhortations to the

Romans shows (especially in chapter 1 and chapters 9-16), these small communities are missionary centres called by God to carry out a special mission in their context – bringing the Gentiles to glorify God, 15:7-12—just as Christ did among the circumcised (15:8), and as Israel was and remains called by God to do as the People of God (11:28-29). The Romans are “called” or “chosen” (1:6) to be “saints,” i.e., set apart from the world, for a twofold mission (a priestly service): glorifying God in worship services (15:6); and bringing others to glorify God, through their way of life, their “deeds” (offering themselves as living sacrifice, 12:2) and “words” of hope (15:18-19).

Third, in Romans 15:17-19 Paul shares with us a much deeper view of mission overlooked in the preceding efforts to discern Paul’s teaching about mission. By declaring “I have reason to boast of my work for God” Paul opens up a series of disclaimers: all this church planting is not my doing; it is “what Christ has accomplished through me” (15:18). Gentiles have been won to the obedience of faith, “by word” (yes, he preached, emphasised in the “first” teaching above) and also by deeds (to bring people to glorify God, emphasised in the “second” teaching above), but Gentiles have primarily been won “by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (15:19). The mission is carried out—performed—by God, the risen Christ and the Spirit. Paul’s claim is that throughout these regions he has “*fulfilled* the gospel of Christ” (15:19b). What does this mean? Most translations interpret: “I have fully proclaimed [or preached] the gospel of Christ” (NRSV, NIV, NAB), and use phrases like “to proclaim the gospel” in 15:20, commonly understood as the proclamation of a pre-packaged message about Christ. Rather, in the context of Paul’s emphases on the mission as performed by divine interventions, we need to understand this proclamation as pointing to the fulfilment of

the promises of the gospel: look at what God, the risen Christ, and the Spirit are doing among you. Being missionary is being a witness not only about what God has done in the past in Christ, but also and primarily about what God is doing in the present, fulfilling the promises of the gospel.

**CREATIVE TENSIONS IN THE BIBLICAL WITNESS—BY MARIE-HÉLÈNE ROBERT AND JACQUES MATTHEY (ASSOCIATION FRANCOPHONE ŒCUMÉNIQUE DE MISSIOLOGIE)<sup>9</sup>**

Through an extensive study, with participation from Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant and Evangelical members, AFOM reached a core conviction:

Mission results from the dynamics of God revealed/understood as Trinitarian—God, Father, Son and Spirit, who provides a holistic frame for transforming life, personal and collective, and intervenes through humans as well as directly to reach the final goal of a new creation, announced by signs of hope. Within this frame, there are creative tensions:

- 1) The wide mission of God embracing the whole world, history and creation, is intrinsically linked to the mission of a particular people or group of people—people of God, group of disciples, local and universal church. God always precedes humans in mission, but they are called as members of the church to play a central role in it. There is a tension to be held between God's mission and the mission of the church.
- 2) The church is understood as being “sent”, resulting from God's own dynamic of sending the Son and the Spirit to heal the world. The church then is a community sent into the world to contribute

to God's mission. On the other hand, the church is "called"—like the people of God in the First Testament—called to "assemble", so as to worship and give glory to God. Worship then takes precedence over an instrumental understanding of mission as "action" in the world. A creative balance must be sought to hold together these two aspects of the biblical witness.

- 3) Mission can be understood as sending to the ends of the earth, linking the universality of the message to a geographic extension of the church. Mission can also be emphasised as the call to witness in one's own context first, to one's people, the universal aspect being incarnated in the way to approach "others" in one's local situation (Matthew 10). The texts justify both interpretations, and the classical mission sending speeches encompass both visions. We should not consider them as antagonistic.
- 4) The tension between unity of the community and the variety of charisms widely distributed and discovered among its members. Mission can at times stress the unity by leading to new forms of inculturation of the gospel. Again, there must not be an opposition, since it is the same Spirit who pushes for a concrete manifestation of unity and who empowers people with various charisms or leads to the formation of new communities. The criteria for the validity of charisms, however, remain their contribution to the edification of the community and their submission to the call to love one another.
- 5) There are also apparently opposed forms of sharing the gospel. There are biblical authors and traditions

which approach the communication of the message in terms of its effect on and clarity to the public. This is the contextualisation approach, in which the emphasis on language and method is linked with the culture and tradition of those with whom one communicates (Luke-Acts). There is, however, also a strong biblical tradition, in particular in the Johannine writings, according to which the message is proclaimed in paradoxical form, preventing it from being understood by the people to whom it is addressed. Such a radical paradox intends to prove that the gospel cannot be grasped fully if not by faith (see the dialogues in John).

These are serious alternatives, still incarnated today in different Christian spiritualities and church traditions of East and West. However, one should not overstate the difference: in every case, at least in the New Testament, a full understanding of Christ's saving message is only possible by faith and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**TEACHING BIBLE AND MISSION—BY TIM DAVY**

Teaching a class on the “Biblical Basis of Mission”, we came across the story in II Kings 5:1-19a of the anonymous slave girl in Naaman's household who became one of the great missionaries of the Old Testament. As we discussed her circumstances and her role in the story we were both inspired and humbled. Here was a young girl who had been captured by a foreign army, stolen from her land and put to work as a servant in an alien household. Yet, despite all this, she remained faithful and showed extraordinary compassion to her suffering master. Here we have a faithful believer in hard circumstances remaining faithful and being a

blessing to the nations. We took some time to pray for those in similar situations to this unnamed girl, that God would give them the courage, protection and faith to persevere. And we prayed that he would use them in similarly extraordinary ways. Perhaps you could take a moment to pray these things too?

When considering Deuteronomy 10:12-22 and what it tells us about our missionary God and our role as his people in the world I touched on the importance God places on caring for the vulnerable in society, as exemplified in the laws concerning the marginal groups (widow, orphan, alien). I relayed a story from my student days where I had been lazy, sticking to people like myself rather than looking out for and befriending the “international” students. A Greek student in the seminar talked about how she was going to make more of an effort to spend more time with a South-East Asian student with whom she was acquainted. It thrilled me to hear her say this! My prayer is that as she returns to her university she will learn from my mistake and, more importantly, allow God to mould her character and attitudes.

Recently I was teaching an introductory class on Mark's Gospel. It makes sense to me that Mark wrote his book for a community of Christians under pressure and persecution, like the church in Rome. His positioning of Jesus' glory and suffering are skilfully and starkly juxtaposed in a way that must have comforted and encouraged the church as they sought to make sense of their experiences and remain faithful to their commitment to Jesus. In this light we also considered the reality that every day 400 believers are killed for their faith. It was midday when I brought up this statistic. Since we had begun our lesson 50 of our brothers and sisters in Christ had lost their lives as a direct result of their Christian confession. We took some time to pray. Perhaps you might take a moment to do the same.



**THE BIBLE: THE SOURCE OF LIFE AND SOUL OF MISSION—BY  
BILL MITCHELL**

The Fifth Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate of the Roman Catholic Church was held in Aparecida, Brazil in May 2007. The bishops were aware of the massive changes in Latin America since they last gathered, among them the impact of globalisation, the huge inequalities between the rich and the poor, the threat of ecological devastation, the swelling numbers of urban poor and the burgeoning youth population. The conference theme was “Missionary disciples of Jesus Christ so that our peoples may have life in Him”.

In his Inaugural Address Benedict XVI struck a note that would echo through the conference and beyond:

As the missionary Church prepares here in Aparecida to begin a new stage in its life, a deep, experiential knowledge of the Word of God is essential. . . . We must build our missionary commitment, and indeed our whole lives, on the rock of the Word of God.<sup>10</sup>

The Conference affirmed that the Word of God is the “source of life for the Church and soul of its evangelizing action”. It leads to encounter with Jesus Christ, authentic conversion, renewed communion and solidarity. From this comes a proclamation of Jesus to all through an “inculturated evangelization”. The approach to the Word recommended to the people of God is the *Lectio divina*. The practice of prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture leads us “to meet Jesus, the Master; to understand the mystery of Jesus, the Messiah; to commune with Jesus, the Son of God; and to bear witness to Jesus, the Lord of the Universe”. The Bible is thus placed at the heart of what it means to be “missionary disciples of Jesus Christ”.

Among the challenges facing the church (and governments!) is the continent’s high birth rate. When asked what his greatest challenge was, a Costa Rican priest immediately said “how to

catechize the cell phone generation”.

Prior to the Aparecida conference, CELAM and the United Bible Societies (UBS) were exploring a *Lectio divina* programme for young people and children that would use a variety of media—print, music, radio and internet. This multimedia initiative would provide access for different strata of society, and would enable individuals, families, schools, churches, parishes and dioceses to network together throughout the continent. Technological and social networking developments since then have moved the programme to a different level, as *Lectionautas*<sup>11</sup> for young people, and *Discipulitos*<sup>12</sup> for children show, with MP3 downloads, Facebook, My Space all finding a place.

Already over 12,500 young leaders from parishes in a dozen countries have been trained in the programme. They are now introducing it in their churches and forming groups of young people using cell phones, computers and other technology to access the biblical passages for their prayer, reflection and action. The young people themselves develop the programme in creative and innovative ways—for instance, texting has become a way of encouraging one another and sharing together their experiences of the Word. From its beginnings in Spanish, the programme is now available in a number of languages and being accessed globally.

New generations are becoming “missionary disciples”, with an accessible, understandable Bible text, and using media tools that leave many of their bishops open-mouthed . . . and willing them on. Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez speaks of this *Lectio divina* programme for young people as “the spearhead of change in the Church”.<sup>13</sup>

#### **KEY TEXT: ROMANS 15:14-24**

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to

instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given to me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way round to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written,

“Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard of him will understand.”

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What does Romans 15:14-24 mean so far as your own involvement in mission is concerned?

How can we use the Bible to strengthen our understanding of mission today?

What steps do you think should be taken to make the Bible accessible and engaging for young people worldwide today?

**PRAYER**

*I praise you, O God, that you have spoken to your people through your Word, found in the Bible which I have in my hands.*

*Forgive me that I have neglected your Word, that I have read hurriedly and casually,*

*that I have failed to let the Bible shape the mission of my life.*

*Grant that I may read and absorb your Word with all my heart, that I may catch the vision of your mission and the courage to be part of it.*

*Bless all who work, in every part of the world, to make your Word available, in language and format geared to reach the hearts of all.*

*For the sake of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen*

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*Women and Mission*

To consider mission from the perspective of women is to employ a very broad frame of analysis.<sup>14</sup> Women constitute more than half the human race and their circumstances vary enormously. Nonetheless a shared experience of exclusion has conditioned the perspective of women on church and mission to such an extent that there is enough common ground to justify an attempt to consider their experience in general terms. To consider mission from the perspective of women is to employ a very broad frame of analysis. Women constitute more than half the human race and their circumstances vary enormously. Nonetheless a shared experience of exclusion has conditioned the perspective of women on church and mission to such an extent that there is enough common ground to justify an attempt to consider their experience in general terms.

**WOMEN AND MISSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The attitude which Jesus took to women was new and liberating. Women featured prominently among his friends and disciples. The Gospels are full of stories of Jesus relating to women on terms which suggest he took them no less seriously than the men. It

was to women that he first appeared when he rose from the dead and they were the first to bear witness to that decisive reality. Jesus' way of relating to people suggested a community of equals which transcended gender divisions. This stood in contrast to the traditional hierarchical approach where authority invariably lay with a man. This radical equality was memorably expressed by the apostle Paul when he stated that: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

In New Testament times the role played by women varied considerably. Much has been made of verses in the Pastoral Epistles which appear to rule out the possibility of women taking a public leadership role. However, there are other books in the New Testament which suggest that, at least in some contexts, women were playing a high-profile leadership role. Romans 16, for example, includes a list of people who were playing prominent roles in the life of the church at Rome. Among those named are many women: Phoebe, Lydia, Prisca, Mary, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Persis. The apostle Junia, is mentioned together with the apostle Andronicus as "prominent among the apostles". Just as no distinction was made on the basis of ethnicity or legal status, equally no distinction was made on the basis of gender.

This radical approach seems to have been short-lived and the church emerged from New Testament times with a pattern of excluding women from positions of leadership and public responsibility. Following the prevailing custom of Roman society, women were excluded from the public sphere, thus greatly limiting the role which they could play in mission. As a result a male approach to mission became standard, at the expense of the female. Effects of this included:

- a one-sided orientation of mission thinking towards sending people out, spreading the faith and winning

new members, at the expense of practical missionary service, participation and just gender relations;

- a priority on control, regimentation and discipline in the life of local churches, at the expense of diversity and letting the Spirit move, within Christianity;
- primacy of men in training for church offices, at the expense of participatory concepts of ministry which could include women.<sup>15</sup>

A male-dominated approach gradually gained ascendancy, with models of ministry and mission which reflected sexual equality increasingly being marginalised or excluded.

### **WOMEN, MISSION AND MALE-DOMINATED SOCIETIES**

Across many cultures it appears that social structures have developed which favour male domination and exclude women from public roles. Despite its radical nature, Christian mission has often complied with this social arrangement. Even when women have been highly active as agents of mission, the story has been told in such a way as to attribute the initiative entirely to men and to exclude consideration of the role played by women.

Complicity in male domination is a serious issue for Christian mission. Rather than countering the oppression of women, mission can find itself subtly supporting injustice. In today's world, women continue to be subject to violence and abuse perpetrated by men on a shocking scale worldwide. If Christian mission is not actively countering such exploitation and oppression, it exposes itself to the risk of giving tacit approval. By upholding and reinforcing male domination, the missionary movement has unfortunately contributed to the creation of social environments where women are subject to grave mistreatment and suffering.

Women across social and cultural settings continue to experience increasing violence, exploitation, and discrimination. Women have been abused and exploited, because of their sex; they become victims of sexual, mental, emotional abuse, usually in the cruel acts of domestic violence at homes, sexual harassment in work places, and rape. Violence against women is manifested in: wife-beating, whipping, verbal downgrading, and rape. They are treated as property, as objects to be used, and as second class citizens. In the Philippines, where 85% are Roman Catholics, 5% Protestants, 5% Muslims, and 5% without religious affiliation, at least 300,000 Filipina women have been involved in prostitution in the Greater Manila area alone, according to a research finding a few years ago. Thailand and Indonesia have similar problems with the sex trade. Abused women can lose their sense of self-esteem, self-respect, a sense of self if immediate help does not come their way.<sup>16</sup>

—Christine Lienemann, Atola Longkumer & Afrie Songco Joye  
Facing a very discouraging situation, there are women who have decided not to suffer in silence. Courageously they raise their voices to expose the abuse and violence to which they are subject in many contexts. Countering forces which exclude women from participation and leadership in church and mission is a key initiative in recovering respect for their human dignity and releasing the gifts which they have to offer. Ensuring that mission is just and inclusive presents itself as an urgent challenge at this time.

Women gathered at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, 24-28 November 2008 for a consultation titled: “Towards Edinburgh 2010: Women’s Perspectives on Mission and Theological Education in the 21st Century”. Among its findings were the following:



*With regard to the past century,*

**We mourn:**

- That women have often been invisible, their contribution has been undervalued, and they have been marginalized within the structures of knowledge and power;
- That women were not full participants of Edinburgh 1910 and that the contributions of women to mission were not well-represented at Edinburgh 1910.

**We celebrate:**

- That the status and role of women in society and in church has advanced in many contexts and in many ways. We have women theologians and women in ordained and lay ministry. More doors of seminaries and theological faculties have opened to women as well as increased opportunities for lay formation. There has been a proliferation of feminist theological literature around the world. Women have been active in advocacy and their ministries increasingly recognized.

*With regard to the present,*

**We regret:**

- That resistance still exists in church and society to the full participation of women in societal structures;
- That parity does not exist between women and men on the organizing team for the Edinburgh 2010 process, reflecting an ongoing marginalization of women.

**We affirm:**

- The priceless contribution of women theological

educators who have brought women into the scene of mission and theological education, the many women's networks that support women in their call to be agents of transformation in the world, and the existing partnerships between women and men;

- The commitment of the organizers of Edinburgh 2010 to have balanced representation of women and men and people from the global south and global north.<sup>17</sup>

A significant task facing the church is the challenge of retrieving and celebrating the stories of women who have played a distinguished part in the mission of the church. Such has been the influence of male domination that often the story of mission has been told in a way which privileges men and excludes women. A more balanced approach is called for and there are many inspiring stories waiting to be told.

Remembering and celebrating the women who, against the odds, have made their mark on Christian mission is one way of inspiring those who struggle against exclusion today. Lienemann, Longkumer & Joye contend:

The question must be asked of mission history, "where are the women: wives, co-workers and single women who served in the mission fields and those 'native' women who responded with enthusiasm, who resisted independently, who participated as assistants to the missionaries in taking the gospel beyond their specific locale?" Until recently, history of mission was male-centric, where the activities and successes of mission was described and defined by the male. However, this one-sided view of mission history and vision has begun to be evaluated and women's role, participation and experience have begun to be re-discovered and acknowledged.<sup>18</sup>

The 19th-century women's missionary associations are a powerful memory. These bodies were founded and led by women. In the male-dominated world of that time they constituted a

sphere within which women could exercise leadership to a degree which would have been inconceivable in mainstream society. In this way mission played a part in building up the confidence of women and in demonstrating their capabilities.

Women historians are now retrieving the stories of some remarkable women who undertook pioneering mission in difficult conditions. An enormous contribution was made, for example, by Ann Hasseltine Judson, wife of the famous missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson. A prolific writer, she composed a short catechism and tracts designed especially for women. Pandita Ramabai, a Brahmin woman in western India, defied the conventional norms of the day to make an independent decision to embrace Christianity. She went on to establish women welfare institutions, orphanages and schools. Such stories continue to inspire today.

In Northeast India, women were both participators and receivers of mission. A woman from the Ao Naga tribe, named Tongpan-gla, was one of the first converts sent to the neighbouring village as an evangelist. Another example comes from the Angami Naga women, who contributed to the development of literacy, by living in non-Christian villages where they taught children during the day and women in the evenings. Mary Mead Clark, the wife of the missionary wrote prolifically about the Ao Naga. Her writings serve as one of the first ethnographical records for modern Naga people. Northeast India's native women, were and continue to be self-supporting and self-propagating. A practical method of fund-raising for the mission of the church is the practice of a "handful of rice". Every woman in the church sets aside a handful of rice, every time rice, (the staple food of the region) is cooked for the family. This collection is then either turned into money or given for mission needs.

—Atola Longkumer

Another source of encouragement has been the strong role played by women in all of the Edinburgh 2010 study commissions. The overall coordinator of the study process, Kirsteen Kim, is a woman. All the commissions have women co-conveners. In terms of women being able to influence the process and the outcomes, Edinburgh 2010 represents marked progress when compared with Edinburgh 1910 when almost all leadership was in the hands of the men.

All this progress notwithstanding, it remains the case that women suffer discrimination in church and mission. The large proportion of women in the membership of the Churches is not reflected in their leadership structures where men continue to predominate. Fulata Moyo concludes that:

We can celebrate more inclusion in this twenty-first century, and some churches can celebrate even more inclusion than others. However, when we compare the great numbers of women in church membership versus their position in leadership and decision-making processes, we can still talk in terms of women's exclusion in that manner.<sup>19</sup>

Work remains to be done before women are accorded the leadership roles which their contribution to the church's mission suggests should be theirs.

### **PARTICIPATORY MODELS OF MISSION**

Inclusion of women in the missionary action of the church is more than a matter of placing a token number of women on responsible groups and committees. The kind of contribution which women bring is much more far-reaching. It provokes a rethinking of the meaning and character of mission. Women have been concerned to foster a collaborative approach to mission. They have prized mutuality and cultivated modes of

mission which are transformative for all involved. Partnership, interdependence and mutuality are keynotes of the approach to mission which women tend to advocate.

Traditional imperialistic and colonial models have little appeal to women, so whether they travel from Canada to work with Africans in Africa or stay in Egypt to work with garbage collectors in Cairo, the approach is working with rather than working for.<sup>20</sup>

—Mercy Amba Oduyoye

Male-led models of mission which are characterised by domination and exploitation have reached a crisis with growing awareness of the ecological catastrophe which has been brought about by human activity. An approach to mission which seeks to impose on the situation it is addressing chimes with the modern exploitative approach to the earth and its resources. Only now are we realising how disastrous this has been for the planet. By contrast, a more feminine approach recognises that we are embodied, interconnected and interdependent with one another and with the creation as a whole. It cultivates a spirituality which provides “a lived experience in contemplation and praxis of being interconnected and interdependent, challenged to contribute to the balance, blossoming, the healing and wholeness of the life of the human race, and of the rest of creation, inspired and embraced by God’s Spirit”.<sup>21</sup>

It has become clear to us that Christian mission must engage with economic, ecological and gender realities. Our work as stewards of God’s mission must, therefore, integrate concrete action to work for justice, inclusion, and transformation of our suffering world. We must also identify the Church’s complicity in the domination over women and nature in the name of mission. We must repent of this and work for the transformation of unjust structures within the Church itself as well as the wider society. In mission, we must work in partnership and with deep

respect for all God's creation.<sup>22</sup>

—Women's Consultation, Bossey, November 2008

## JUSTICE AND TRANSFORMATION

A note which is consistently struck in women's analysis of missionary engagement is the note of hope. Despite all that might cause us to be discouraged and despairing, through faith comes the confidence that every situation is capable of being transformed through God's grace. This vision of transformation energises many women today to struggle for justice in the relations of women and men.

By responding, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28) one could argue that the Syro-Phoenician woman was buying into her own oppression. Was she subtly using his expression of an existing bias so as to challenge Jesus towards his own transformation? Coming to today's realities, there are still a significant number of women trying to understand the meaning of the churches' mission wondering at who deserves bread and who can only get crumbs between men and women.<sup>23</sup>

—Fulata L. Moyo

When I build shelters for abused women, they call me a saint, when I ask why women are battered they call me a feminist.<sup>24</sup>

—Sarojini Nadar

When we contemplate questions like those raised in this chapter, none of us have done all that we could have done to make our communities of mission just and inclusive. The challenge remaining with us is how far we are willing to undergo transformation ourselves in order to become agents of transformation in the situations where we are involved.

Women and men can work effectively together in building and enhancing a healing, peaceable, and just world. Here are some guidelines and approaches to accomplish such goals:

- Respect and care for one another.
- Recognise and accept one's own strengths and growing edges.
- Reclaim, rediscover, and re-appropriate women's role, experience, gifts, perspectives, and "her story".
- Use a win-win approach rather than a win-lose one.
- Form and support groups and base communities with similar vision and goal for just, compassionate, healing world.
- Give priority to Christ rather than to culture in ethical decision making.
- Believe that humans have the capacity to change, by God's grace.
- Work harder and smarter in helping women find and reclaim their selfhood, and in dealing with their fears and yearnings.

—Christine Lienemann, Atola Longkumer and Afrie Songco Joye

**KEY TEXT: MATTHEW 28:1-10**

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come,

see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What are the implications for Christian mission of the fact that the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ were women?

What has been the relation of women and men in New Testament times and in the subsequent mission of the church?

How might the practice of Christian mission change if women were allowed to play their full part in shaping it?

### PRAYER

*I praise you, O God, that you have created humankind male and female, with complementary gifts and attributes.*

*Forgive me that I have failed to work for gender justice, that I have been complacent in face of discrimination on grounds of sex. I thank you for the special gifts granted to women, needed for the missionary task;*

*enable me to do all I can to allow those gifts to flourish.*

*Grant that in our time we may realise the vision of just and inclusive communities,*

*where women and men together build your kingdom.*

*For the glory of Christ Jesus, Liberator and Lord. Amen*



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*Youth and Mission***CHILDREN, THE NEW ENERGY FOR 21ST-CENTURY MISSION—BY  
BAMBANG BUDIJANTO**

The past decade has seen a significant awakening on the biblical and strategic importance and potential of children and youth as both objects of and agents for world transformation. Toward the early 2000s the Church witnessed the birth of several major initiatives, commitments and movements for and on behalf of children. Among them were Viva networks for Children at Risk, the Oxford Statement of Children at Risk (1997), the Godly Play Initiative (1997), the Holistic Child Development Program, the Child Theology Movement, Children's Prayer Movements, and the Transform World 4-14 window initiative launched in September 2009.

The Bible is full of stories of God using children to fulfil his purposes. There are many biblical accounts of God using children and young people to save the multitudes and even nations in very critical times in history.

For example, God used the counsel of Naaman's young servant girl in II Kings 5 to bring about the healing of Naaman's leprosy. Naaman was an influential leader whose healing prompted him to say, "Now I know that there is no God in

all the world except in Israel” (II Kings 5:13-15). Jesus made a reference to this story in his sermon early in his ministry days, delivered at his hometown, Nazareth (Luke 4:47).

Josiah became the 16th king of Judah when he was only 8 years old. The author of II Kings considered him a great reformer and the most committed king in Israel’s history. By the time he was 16 years old, he began to seek the Lord and commit to serve him wholeheartedly (II Chronicles 34:3-7, 33).

The story of the young and relatively unknown David defeating Goliath and saving the nation in one of Israel’s most humiliating days is another great example (I Samuel 17:33). A teenage orphan girl in captivity, Hadassah or Esther, who selflessly and courageously saved her people from extinction, continues to be remembered by the Jews even today, as they celebrate the Purim (Esther 9:29-32). In the New Testament, God used a young boy with five loaves of bread and two small fish to feed five thousand men (John 6:8-9).

God values children, accepts their worship and does not hesitate to deploy them to stimulate faith and obedience in children and adults alike.

- The story of Samuel gives a picture of God speaking directly to a child (I Samuel 3).
- Jesus underscored the ability of children to comprehend spiritual matters when he praised God the Father for revealing such truths to “little children” (Matthew 11:25),
- Jesus rebuked the chief priests and teachers of the law for questioning children’s participation in worship and their perceptive recognition of Jesus as they sang “Hosanna to the Son of David”, quoting from Psalm 8 “From the lips of children and infants you have

ordained praise” (Matthew 21:16; Psalm 8:2).

Throughout Christian history God has always used children. In the great historical revivals of John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, D.L. Moody, the French Huguenots and others, children played significant roles as active participants. The following stories illustrate the significant roles children and youth are playing today in mission and transformation.

Patricia is a 12-year-old girl living in the slum community of Santa Mesa in the Philippines. This community is known to be a breeding ground for thieves, criminals, and prostitutes. Patricia saw how the children of her neighborhood were rowdy, dirty, and disrespectful, so she started teaching 5 to 10 year olds the Bible. She gathers them together once a week and tells them about Jesus. She says she doesn't want them to grow up to be criminals, but to know about Jesus.

The small town of Poso, Indonesia has always been dreaded because of the bombings and massacres brought about by the conflict between the Christians and the Muslims. Moko (8 years old) travelled to nearby towns to preach God's word to the people. Moko also preaches about peace, reconciliation, forgiveness based on Jesus' command that people should love one another.

Many children and young people are no longer coming to church only to be entertained. They come to worship, contribute and be equipped for the ministry. Children are no longer seen as primarily the “mission field” but as effective agents of mission.

#### **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE—WHAT IS AT STAKE**

There are 6.3 billion people in the world; 2.1 billion are children under the age of 15. The vast majority of those who choose to follow Jesus take their decision between the ages of 4 and 14. These simple statistics reveal at once that evangelism among

children is crucial to the effectiveness of the church in mission. Yet it often seems to be given little priority. Barriers identified by a working group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization include:

- A fear that evangelism means manipulation (often arising from experience of poor practice);
- A belief amongst some that children are too young to respond to Jesus' call to follow, wrongly assuming that spiritual responsiveness is determined by age;
- An attitude that values children's evangelism as a "bait" to reach parents rather than as a legitimate enterprise in its own right;
- A stealthy erosion of children's ministry: in some Western countries, as many as 50% of churches are without children's ministry. In England 2 out of 5 churches have no children attending;
- An artificial distinction between evangelism and discipleship. This implies that the evangelist's responsibility is complete when the child's first response is made;
- An acceptance of the platitude "children are the church of tomorrow". This ignores their value in the church today and creates churches that are unattractive to children.<sup>25</sup>

Children want to belong, to participate. Are churches geared to encourage their participation? There is need to build intergenerational church communities where it is natural and enriching for children to be fully involved. This cannot be left only to a dedicated few who are committed to children's work. It will take active commitment from all members to form a community which nurtures the discipleship of people of all ages.

Traditional children's evangelism has imitated adult evangelism in

assuming a linear progression: first children must *believe* certain truth: then they will *belong* to a community of faith, and finally they will *behave* in a way that reflects Jesus. But is this a biblical pattern? The disciples responded to the call of Jesus to belong. In the belonging, they grew to believe, and at the same time, to adopt a way of behaving that showed they were followers of Jesus. The belonging was the “breeding ground” for belief and action.<sup>26</sup>

—Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Pattaya 2004

The most effective evangelists among children are children. Most young people who come to faith in Christ do so through the influence of their peers. Children have their full part to play in the body of Christ. It is important for Churches to recognise the “languages” which young people are using and to be intentional in finding ways to relate the gospel to their interests and concerns. Embracing modern media, particularly the internet, is key to entering the world of young people in many parts of the world today.

It is very evident in today’s world that not all children enjoy a happy family life or a stable environment. Many have been traumatised by conflict and/or displacement. Some have become street children. Many have been abused physically, sexually and emotionally. Some have been exploited as child soldiers, child labourers or child prostitutes. Many have been exposed to poverty and disease, including HIV and AIDS. There is a vast need for holistic outreach which ministers the love of God to vulnerable children in ways which meet all aspects of their situation. For the church worldwide the needs of abused and suffering children call for compassionate, committed and coordinated ministry.

The society that neglects its children is one generation away from destruction.<sup>27</sup>

—Margaret Mead

**YOUNG PEOPLE AS SHORT-TERM MISSIONARIES**

The advent of international air travel and modern communication systems has led to a vast mobilisation of young people to participate in overseas mission. Going on “mission trips” frequently features as a formative experience for young Christians. This brings an initial experience of cross-cultural mission to large numbers of young people. Such trips have their limitations. The strengths of classical missionary service—deep knowledge of language and culture and cumulative growth in effectiveness—will not be replicated in a short-term or part-time experience. On the other hand, a short-term trip can bring about spiritual growth in the lives of the participants. Moreover, the transformative short-term experience may well prove to be the seed-bed from which longer-term participation in the mission of Christ will grow.

As a missionary of the Episcopal Church, I worked in Sitio de los Nejapa, a poor community in rural El Salvador. It is a place of great need, and its residents have been grateful recipients of a small number of charity and development programs. Yet when the few community leaders try to mobilize support for their own efforts, or to encourage new leaders, they are met with indifference. Many community members, particularly women with little formal education, attribute this apparent indifference to, among other things, feelings of inadequacy or lack of ability. They do not advocate on their own behalf, they say, because they are looked down on or ignored by local officials; they cannot be leaders because they lack the skills.

Yet in weekly Bible studies, these women are able to encourage one another to value their own voices. In reflecting on passages such as Matthew 11.25 (“I thank you, Father ... because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants”) they begin to overcome their self-doubt and recognise their ability to speak for themselves. This new self-awareness, in turn, empowers them to collaborate

with leaders of the church and community to develop other programs, such as a weekly sewing class. The story of the women of Sitio de Los Nejapa is an example of discernment of the truth of the Gospel in the specific context of a community, and the concrete implications it may have.

—Andrew Thompson, Winner of the Edinburgh 2010 Youth Essay Competition<sup>28</sup>

Half of Mexico's population are under 22 years old. Criminal networks are constantly looking to recruit young people. Many youngsters become part of prostitution networks and drug cartels. Christian youth projects therefore try to protect young people from these dangers and give them a space to develop their identity.

I worked as an intern with *Oasis*, a project of Global Scope sponsored by Christian Missionary Fellowship (CMF) International. The team was working with two universities in the southern part of Mexico City. The project's location was a house—not a church—not far from the university campuses. The place was a comfortable space that students could use during the week to do their homework, attend Bible study groups, organise workshops or just have meetings. On Thursdays, there were worships where students could play instruments, act, pray, reflect together and have fun. There were also program activities in the area of social work such as: visits to old people's homes, orphanages, prisons, etc. The aim was not to invite people to a particular church or confession, but to reflect together on our faith in Jesus and support each other in our daily lives.

The main purpose of these two groups was getting engaged in the lives of the young people and their necessities—holistic mission. The idea is to live the Gospel right where the people are, in their specific situation. *Oasis* was an ecumenical project where different theological traditions showed respect for each other and worked together for a higher purpose

than proselytism. Believing in the same doctrine was never a precondition to work together. We need to learn mutual respect for our Christian traditions and know better our social, cultural and economic realities in order to be a missionary church. With so many different groups and interpretations of what is Christianity it won't be easy to agree, therefore we need to learn tolerance.

—José López Vázquez

Short-term mission involvement has been criticised for being superficial, ephemeral and a waste of resources. However, when it is built on a faith-based commitment to transformation, it is geared to bring lasting change in Christ's name, both to the missionaries and to those among whom they live and work. For this to occur it is hugely advantageous if the placement is not stand-alone but rather part of a long-term, sustained, trustful and wide-ranging relationship.

**A YOUTH VISION FOR EDINBURGH 2010—BY VINEETH KOSHY**

In a world torn by economic and social inequality, political turmoil, religious fundamentalism and ecological crisis, the ecumenical missionary movement is committed to heed the great dream of Christ “that they may all be one”. Serving as a united voice, as a catalyst for unity in the church and for life in all its fullness in the world, we need to endeavour to build relationships through diaconal work, hosting multilateral platforms for analysis and resource sharing, building the capacity of Churches and ecumenical organisations so as to fulfil our common calling of service. The centenary celebration of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference is a unique occasion to celebrate ecumenical unity, to understand the opportunities and challenges faced by the young people in their



own churches, to express solidarity, to commit ourselves together for meaningful engagement in mission to enable conversations among Churches and fellow interfaith pilgrims.

Youth is a state of life and mind when there is quality of thinking, predominance of courage and appetite for adventure. However, one of the alarming features of today's church participation and leadership is that the younger generation is in the exit-phase and there may be various reasons for justifying this exit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are distributed equally and widely in the church. Therefore it is quite essential that the spiritual experience of each member must be recognised and drawn into the common spirituality of local congregations. Thus the concerns of the church must be broad-based involving the youth, women and children. In interpreting the theme and mandate of the Edinburgh centenary, the youth have asked, "What does it mean to witness to Christ today?" Youth envisions the ecumenical mission from four different perspectives—to be creative, contextual, communitarian and compassionate.

### *Creative*

In these times the degree of change in society is accelerating, every new generation is radically different in culture from its previous generation. What is needed is a new approach, an unusual way of responding to the situation, a creative style of encountering the problems and challenges.

### *Contextual*

The rate of change brought about by a spreading global youth culture with all its modern distinctiveness renders traditional structures of religious expression obstructive in conveying their original meanings to young people. For an effective mission, the Churches must understand the soul and spirit of today's youth.

*Communitarian*

On account of the social and technological changes of the past two decades, youth spend more time alone than any other generation. They thus miss a coherent sense of community. In the eucharist our union with Christ also implies union with all those to whom he gives himself, including youth, women and children, the poor and hungry. We are thus called into a community open to all and reaching out to all.

*Compassionate*

Today's youth challenge the church to rediscover the lost and forgotten legacy of the compassion and equality of the early church. The core and essence of Christ's teaching was the sacrificial and life-giving mission for all humanity. The world needs, more than anything else, the touch of love, which can be concretely spelt out, in light of the experience of inter-religious relations, inter-faith approaches, peace, justice, understanding, collaboration, forgiveness, compassion in times of calamities and tragedies.

**IN CONCLUSION**

Youth envisions mission that humanises and develops individuals and communities of character, compassion, competence and conscience, committed to contribute to the creation and evolution of a counter culture to the present ruthlessly competitive models, by promoting collaboration and cooperation for the growth of all with mutual trust and sharing of available resources.

**KEY TEXT: I SAMUEL 3:1-11**

Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight

had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the young man. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle."

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How does God relate to children?

When priority is given to young people, what does this mean for the life of the church?

From the perspective of young people, what would be the most important step Edinburgh 2010 could take?

### PRAYER

*We praise you, O God, that you ever surprise us in your choice of instruments, calling the most junior and the least regarded to do your holy work.*

*We thank you that in every generation you have drawn close to children, and that in our world today your Spirit continues to awaken faith in young hearts.*

*Forgive us that we have often made your church feel old, and caused young people to feel that it is not for them.*

*Empower us by your Spirit to make the church a place welcoming to all, and especially to the children and young people who are close to your heart. For the sake of Jesus our Saviour. Amen*

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*The View from the Margins*

COMING TO TERMS WITH PLURALITY

At Edinburgh 1910 practitioners of Christian mission were fairly comfortable about being allied with the wealth and power of the Western world. Increasingly over the past one hundred years Christian faith has been espoused by the poor, the exploited and the oppressed. This has introduced a very different vantage point from which to consider the faith and its relation to the world. It has provoked a fresh reading of the Bible and a rediscovery of how strong is God's commitment to break the bonds of poverty and oppression.

In contrast to a view of sin which regards it entirely as a matter of personal morality, from the perspective of excluded and marginalised people it is the systemic and structural dimensions of sin which stand out most clearly. Likewise God's salvation is received not only as a matter of personal faith and repentance but as a transformative power which reaches to every dimension of life.

The experience of poverty and marginalisation is sharpened in today's world by:

- a deepening global economic crisis;
- a growing culture of violence, particularly targeting the marginalised;

- the increasingly disastrous impact of climate change on the poor;
- the large-scale migration of people in search of livelihood.

For a full understanding of Christian mission it is necessary today to attend to the analysis offered by those most affected by these trends. This means listening to “subaltern” voices, the perspectives of those who occupy an “inferior rank” in the prevailing system.

The voices of the marginalised, seeking to move their concerns to the centre of the ecumenical debate, will increasingly define ecumenical formation. The solidarity groups, bound together by race, ethnicity, gender, various orientations of opinions and practices on (for example) environmental concerns, indigenous issues and human rights interests, require fundamental changes in the powers, procedures and forms of being “ecumenical” as well as being “church”. Do these voices not mirror the signs of the reign of God?<sup>29</sup>

—Musimbi Kanyoro

The marginalised can be found in every part of the world. This chapter focuses on the “subaltern voices” being raised in India.

**DALIT EXPERIENCE: AN ANDHRA PRADESH CASE STUDY—BY  
JOSEPH PRABHAKAR DAYAM, PENIEL JESUDASON RUFUS RAJKUMAR  
AND SUNDER JOHN BOOPALAN**

As a contribution to Edinburgh 2010, some Indian Christians reflected on the experience of Dalit churches in the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The Dalit communities, previously known as the “untouchables”, are those communities which are considered “out castes” on the basis of the caste system, a unique form of rigid hierarchical social structuring based on notions of purity and pollution. Dalits have historically faced and continue to face some of the worst forms of social discrimination, cultural

repression and economic exploitation. The field study for the study project was undertaken at a village called Vegeswarapuram, a village 30km from the town of Rajahmundry in the West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh.

Understanding mission from the experiences of the people sometimes causes fundamental shifts in our perspectives on mission. One such fundamental shift in perspective which emerged during the course of our study was to understand mission as creating *conditions* that facilitated the empowerment of people at the margins.

### *A New Alliance*

Communities on the margins found in the establishment of the mission station and the presence of the missionary (the *Dora*) an advocate of their rights. They used this new alliance as a springboard to further their own attempts to break free from the caste system. They saw in the *Dora* an ally with whom they could further their own efforts for emancipation, not least because of the access that the missionaries had to the colonial administration. This colonial connection coupled with missionary establishments like hospitals, schools and hostels prompted the Dalit communities to shift their allegiance from their traditional landlords to these new *Doras*. They did so because in this new *Dora*, they found a patron who fanned the flames within for liberation and stood by them in situations of struggle. A powerful memory among local people is an occasion when a missionary pointed a gun at the local landlord for abusing a peasant. The access to education and job opportunities provided by the missionaries gave Dalits the opportunity to move away from their casteist feudal landlords and embrace more fully their vision of a new reality of autonomy and self-reliance.

*Education and Transformation*

Much of the transformative effect of Christian mission can be traced to the educational ministry of the Christian missions. Creating access to education for the Dalit communities, who were denied education under the caste system, was a strategic intervention which fostered the empowerment of the Dalit communities. The location of schools in Dalit colonies, training Indian leaders to take up responsibilities and including vocational training in the curriculum made an impact. The teacher played an important role in the life of the church.

Victor, a prominent Vegeswarapuram church leader, remembers the “two-glass system,” (the practice of having a separate water glass for Dalits due to the practice of “untouchability”) which was widely prevalent even in the year 1946 when he was a secondary school student. He recounts how they rebelled against this system as Christians and confronted the Kaapus (caste communities). According to him access to education created in them an awareness of justice issues and inspired them to confront oppression effectively. He says, “The missionaries gave us education and told us, ‘you have blood, they have blood; it’s the same blood’. This triggered in us the confidence to challenge injustice whenever we confronted it.”

*Changing Spaces*

A typical Indian village is divided into two parts. The main village or the *voor*, which is one part, is inhabited by the caste communities, while the other part, the Dalit colony, is segregated from the *voor* and is situated at a distance. Fields in between usually segregate the two parts. The village school, the temple, the administrative offices are all situated in the *voor*, thus ascribing social, religious and political importance to the *voor*.

In our field study at Vegeswarapuram, we were told that



initially the Dalit colony was more than a kilometre away from the *voor* (or the part of the village inhabited by caste communities). Mission work saw the relocating of this space by bringing the Dalit colony nearer to the *voor*. Today it is only a road which separates the two. From our interviews it emerged that this relocation is a matter of great pride to the Dalit community. Further, constructing a church building in the Dalit colony made a powerful statement. Symbolically, for the Dalit communities, having such a significant landmark as the church in their locality, was not only a re-location of the divine, rather it was a source of collective affirmation of identity, which also gave them an opportunity to play host to the other caste Christians.

#### *Church-Centred Mission and Social Justice*

Though the popular understandings of church-centred mission that emerged in most of our interviews and meetings with focus groups were proclamation (seen in terms of numerical growth) and pastoral care, along with these social justice and resistance to casteism were recognised as God's mission given to all people. There seems to be a multi-layered dimension in the understanding of the people when it comes to spirituality and activism. In our interviews it became clear that the church and the pastor are seen as facilitators more of pastoral care, than social change, though this may be a crude distinction.

Dalit Christian leaders of the village expressed discomfort about using the premises of the church for talking about social justice, though they discussed issues of social justice in the Dalit colony and were actively involved in issues of social justice, which they affirmed as God's work. One reason for this was the community's preparedness to take up force as a means of self-defence to resist the caste-based violence against them. For them

violence and Christianity were incompatible. Yet, adopting forceful means of resistance and threatening to take up violence if violated were inevitable as a powerful deterrent to caste-based atrocities against them. Hence proclamation, pastoral care and social justice are all recognised as part of the mission of God. The agency for this mission extended beyond the church.

*Dalits as Leaders in Mission*

This study project also helped us to consider the often-overlooked role of Dalits as the agents of Christian mission. It became clear that in the past overseas missionaries with their position of power played the role of primary agents of mission. However, though the mission stations were established by the foreign missionaries the actual proclamation of the Christ story, establishment of the congregation and the nurturing of the faith community were carried through by the native catechist/teachers and pastors. For example, the native catechist-teacher, as the name indicates, had a dual role which focused both on nurturing the faith community and in providing educational opportunities for as many children as possible. Under the leadership of the catechist-teacher, the community devoted great energy to the construction of a church in their area. This represented the restoration of their sense of self-worth and brought a greater sense of meaning to their own lives.

Hence, we can speak of the local Dalits as being the agents of mission and not merely the objects of mission. Dalits appropriated the “conditions of mission” set up by the missionaries like education, indiscriminate access to schools, hospitals, hostels and “holy spaces” like the church, which had symbolic value, to navigate their quest for equality, enhance their self-dignity and social status and further the mission of proclamation and pastoral care. The native communities were not passive, but, on the contrary were active in appropriating the

conditions of mission to navigate their own quest for liberation.

Understanding mission as having a midwifery role in a pluralistic context like India has significant implications because primarily mission does not become the monopoly of ecclesiastical Christianity. Mission transcends being an enterprise which can solely be in the service of the church. Rather, understanding mission as creating the conditions for liberation helps us to understand mission as a process which offers itself to further the liberative agendas of other organisations, groups and bodies which may have their base outside the church but yet are involved in the issues of justice. It becomes a catalyst in forging alliances. The Dalit movement in India has gained momentum to a large extent because of a culture of reciprocity of support. Dalit theology, Dalit literary and social activism and the various Dalit movements have drawn impetus for their work and have grown in confidence and in their persistence in this culture of convergence and mutuality. The fruits of missional activity are offered to others in the service of their agendas in so far as they serve liberative purposes and where other groups and forces are invited to partake in what has been achieved and give it further shape and direction.

Dalit entanglements with missionaries are much more complex than patron–client or coloniser–colonised relationships. The conditions created by mission were seen as a liberative-transformative space by Dalit communities for self-assertion and reclamation of their place in society. Dalit communities, which had no stakes in local power, viewed those in their own country who had power as “colonisers”. For them, their conversion to Christianity—an experience of which they were the primary agents—helped in their quest for freedom from oppression. In this the conditions of mission played and continue to play the role of midwife.

**MISSION AND POWER: FROM COMPLICITY TO TRANSFORMATION—  
BY M.P. JOSEPH**

*Mission and Empire*

The cohabitation of missionary enterprise with colonial domination in Asian, African, and Latin American nations was offered as a mutually beneficial relationship. The Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference demonstrated how missionaries regarded colonial rule as brought about by the providence of God. In this way the missions colluded with the colonial rule exercised by Western nations in large parts of the earth.

The cohabitation of empire and religion is not just a historical story but a current reality. The empire is a defining reality of the present time, represented by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and the multi-national corporations. They control and regulate the international financial markets, and thereby maintain total control over the world economy. Meanwhile, collusion with religion demonstrates the ingenuity of the empire. Emperor Constantine learned that the best strategy to kill resistance is not by destroying it physically but by incorporating it in the structures of power. In recent history, this strategy is being re-enacted. Religions have converted themselves into political formations as a result of domestication. Political Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and even political Buddhism are not just proposals any more but are manipulative constructs of power.

The prevailing belief system in our present age of globalisation can best be described as “money-theism”. Money-theisms replaced all other governing systems and placed money as the presiding deity of our time. Nation states, economic organisations and even religions reorient their activities and priorities to be in better service to money. All of life is subsumed

to the demands of money. Moreover, this system claims that the only agency with ability to provide satisfaction or happiness is money. Creating proximity to money has become the major spiritual search of the “so-called” globalised world. A primary challenge facing mission engagement in the present time is how to counter the displacement of God from having any influence in the organised lives of contemporary societies and to negate the process of deification of money and power.

Unfortunately, instead of countering “money-theism”, mission has been co-opted into the system by buying into the new colonial ideology of development. Since the 1960s, mission has been identified with development. Development agencies mushroomed almost in the same manner in which mission societies emerged in early colonial times. They compete with each other to ensure that people in all corners of the earth will believe in, and be linked to, the market principles of developmentalism. Production for the market, not sustaining life, is the secret of salvation in this development faith.

### *A Different Kind of Power*

Returning to the roots of Christian faith, we remember that Christ’s death on the cross was the outcome of announcing the kingdom of God as a counter project to the Roman Empire. In the kingdom of God the least and the marginalised occupy a respected space. The poor come to a new realisation that they are not alienated from God, but on the contrary, are blessed. Prisoners under the weight of economic and political power experience freedom and liberation. Peacemakers are honoured. The coming kingdom highlights the incompatibility between the pursuit of mammon and the love of God. By changing the social location of the poor, the kingdom brings about a radical remapping of power relations. That threat led Jesus to the cross.

A radical renunciation of power for the free gift of the love of God shattered the prevailing power structures which claimed legitimacy by invoking the name of God. The kingdom of God is a celebration of the powerless—women, lepers, the blind and the persecuted—and the assurance of the fullness of life rather than the fear, slavery and cruelty perpetrated by the Roman Empire.

This new reality of the kingdom found expression in the “table fellowship” that Jesus had with the tax collectors, sinners, and the vulnerable in Roman and Jewish social structures. The kingdom represents a reconciled society where hierarchies based on power, wealth, gender, social class or religious and spiritual authority have no place. Table-fellowship was a counter-cultural concept to the purity–pollution system that the Jewish establishment had devised to accelerated economic exploitation and social marginalisation. A concept of “holy” based on supposed purity was totally negated through the open invitation to the feast of life by Jesus.

In the cross of Calvary, the Roman Empire and its cohorts, including Herod and the Jewish religious establishment, were defeated. Rome failed to contain the subversive character of the kingdom of God which brought radical hope to the poor and the wretched of the earth. The kingdom of God continues to offer a head-on challenge to the empires of power.

**KEY TEXT: MATTHEW 25:31-46**

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared

for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” Then he will answer them, saying, “Truly I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Which categories of people were identified by Jesus as particularly calling for our attention?

How is our understanding of life and faith affected when we identify ourselves with the poorest and most excluded?

How is the practice of mission affected when its agents come from situations of poverty and marginalisation?

**PRAYER**

*We worship you, O God, for your great love embracing the whole world, and for the special eye you have for the wounded, the vulnerable and the oppressed.*

*We praise you for the good news of Jesus Christ bringing freedom from bondage,*

*binding up wounds, inspiring visions of justice and creating hope.*

*Enable me to stand with you on the side of the poor and the exploited,*

*give me courage to embrace your purposes of justice, whatever the cost.*

*Grant that your kingdom may come in our time,*

*drawing people everywhere into the new ways of relating which show Christ's presence.*

*For the blessing of your people and the glory of your name, through Jesus Christ. Amen*



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*Ecological Perspectives***THE SCALE OF THE CRISIS**

The early years of the 21st century have seen a growing awareness of the extent of the ecological crisis facing the earth. An increase in the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, brought about by human activity, has disturbed the delicate balance in the relationship between earth and sun, bringing change to the climate. The modern way of life, with its dependence on burning coal, gas and oil, is rapidly increasing the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. This results in warmer temperatures, causing snow and ice to melt and changing rainfall patterns.

As a result, growing numbers of people face shortage of water and scarcity of food. Low-lying areas, such as sea deltas, are threatened by rising sea-levels and recurrent flooding. Deserts are expanding and forests are frequently threatened by fire. Areas of high biodiversity are subject to threat. Loss of species occurs at an accelerating rate. Patterns of disease are changing. Air, soil and water suffer from pollution brought about by human industrial activity.

The threat posed by global warming is particularly acute for the poor, something which must arouse particular concern

among those sensitive to “God’s preferential option for the poor”. When natural disaster strikes—be it drought, flood, storm or fire—it is the poorest who are hit first and hardest. It is they who are most exposed to the adverse effects of accelerating climate change. Already some see the natural resources of water, soil and fresh air, on which their life depends, disappearing before their eyes. Ironically, it is those who contributed least to the causes of climate change who are suffering its worst effects.

In this context, Christians face the sharp question as to whether they are part of the problem or part of the solution. There can be no question that Christians have actively participated in the exploitation and pollution of the planet. The Western world, where historically Christians have been concentrated, has driven the exploitation of natural resources which is a primary cause of the environmental crisis in which we are now engulfed. With the benefit of hindsight it can be recognised that Western missions were complicit in the advance of modernity which has proved to be seriously damaging to the natural order.

In an economy and culture geared to short-term advantage and exploitation of natural resources, a major question is whether the human community has the will to confront and address the environmental crisis. The failure of the United Nations Climate Change Summit, held in Copenhagen in December 2009, to arrive at any binding agreement on action to combat climate change demonstrated the extent of the challenge. The radical change in lifestyle which would be required of prosperous Westerners is not one which any Government has so far had the courage to promote.

As Alastair McIntosh comments: “The question of whether technology, politics and economic muscle can sort out the problem is a small question. The big question is about sorting out the human condition.”<sup>30</sup> There needs to be a change of mind

so we understand ourselves to be valued not in terms of what we consume but rather in terms of such attributes as the quality of our human relationships, our ingenuity in reusing and recycling materials, and the character of our inner life.

### **RETHINKING MISSION**

It has to be conceded that Christian mission has usually been conceived in terms of the spiritual transformation of individuals and the new inter-human relationships effected through the salvation offered by Jesus Christ. It has been preoccupied almost exclusively with God's interaction with humanity. Concern for the natural environment has been secondary or absent. Yet a reading of the Bible in light of the contemporary environmental crisis reveals how much God's missionary purpose is integrated with ecological concern and responsibility.

There is need to recover the biblical sense that the God who acts in Jesus Christ to bring salvation is the same triune God who is the creator of the heavens and the earth. The redemption found in Jesus Christ is something for which the whole creation waits in eager expectation. There is therefore a serious distortion taking place if the human experience of redemption is understood in a way which ignores, or even damages, the natural order in which we are placed.

Taking account of the whole biblical witness leads us to see creation and salvation as closely interconnected in a movement which leads to the fulfilment of all things in Jesus Christ. To believe in Christ is therefore to be related in a new way not only to God but also to the created order. Salvation restores humanity to its proper role as the "steward" or "trustee" of God's creation, charged to care for it, sustain it and bring it to fulfilment. Christ makes all things new and those who follow him are charged to work for the transformation of the natural environment in the

direction of God's purposes.

This perspective leads to a rethinking of mission in a number of aspects:

- Salvation needs to be understood as not only personal but also cosmic in scope. God's saving purpose extends to the entire created order, with humanity having a pivotal place within it. Creation is not to be abandoned but rather restored when God's salvation is revealed.
- The evangelism of the church needs to be alert to the fact that the people to whom the good news of Jesus Christ is addressed are people who are rooted and grounded in the natural order. Particularly in today's context of growing awareness of environmental crisis, to strike a note of affirmation, care and hope in relation to the natural order is to offer a pathway to faith for people in the grip of despair.
- The Christian life needs to be reconceived as involving a lifestyle which is environmentally responsible and actively engaged in the renewal of nature. Particularly for Westerners this will involve repentance in relation to a way of life which has prioritised short-term prosperity at the expense of future generations and the people of the Global South today.
- In terms of identifying with God's concern for the weak and vulnerable, a priority in Christian discipleship must be solidarity with those most at risk from climate change. Those with mission at heart, across centuries, have championed the cause of the poor. In today's context this means actively combating the forces which make for climate change.

- The “new heavens and the new earth” for which Christians hope needs to be understood as the renewal of the created order rather than its destruction and replacement with something else. If God is committed to sustaining and renewing the creation, then participation in the mission of God will surely include care for creation as a very significant dimension.

Christ is the firstborn of creation and connected to the rest of creation by virtue of being one with the Creator. That said, Christ becomes the ecological ancestor as well as a relative of all that exists on Earth. In other words, it is through him, in him, and for him that all things exist. In this regard, the interconnect- edness of creation is founded on the power of Christ, who is both the Creator and the vital force behind creation. Christ is also the link that connects Earth to the Supreme Being.

—Kapyia John Kaoma

### **PRACTICAL ACTION**

Though the scale of the challenge may be intimidating, there are practical steps which can be taken by each individual.

- Christians can join with others in advocating decisive action to address the environmental crisis. They can join coalitions such as the worldwide “350” campaign which seeks to reduce the atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> to 350 parts per million, the maximum level that the earth can safely tolerate; or “Stop Climate Chaos”, a UK-based campaign which seeks action to prevent global warming from exceeding the dangerous threshold of two degrees centigrade.
- Church-based advocacy will lack credibility if it is not supported by action on the part of the Churches

themselves. Local churches can take the initiative to measure their carbon footprint and set ambitious targets to reduce it year on year through more efficient use of energy.

- Action can be taken at an individual and household level. Through decisive lifestyle choices we can reduce our carbon footprint by reducing our energy consumption. Simple steps like insulating our homes, using less fuel and making journeys on foot or by bicycle instead of using a car enable individuals to reduce the level of carbon emissions for which they are responsible. Reclaiming waste land, growing vegetables and eating local food represent action which is not only environmentally responsible but also personally enriching.

The land for St Mary & St John churchyard was bought by the church in a poor district of Oxford in the 1860s. It was planted with trees and shrubs to provide an attractive peaceful place where loved ones could be remembered. Unfortunately, 130 years later it had become a derelict, massively overgrown, no-go area. In 2000, on the initiative of a Community policeman, soldiers cut back the jungle, revealing the many, often dislodged and damaged, memorials. After consulting widely (and the churchyard having been closed for burials), the church began managing it for wildlife, with the aim of re-creating a quiet green space for all to enjoy. Old paths were re-surfaced, entrances re-opened, lighting installed, and a management plan commissioned to guide the clearing and planting. This required more consultation with experts and residents in the area, more fund-raising, and the recruitment of volunteers. Eight years on there is a wildflower Garden of Remembrance & Thanksgiving, a mini-labyrinth as a “rest-space” that welcomes people in from the busy main road, a variety of habitats for wild life, and

access to memorials that have artistic and historic value. On-site interpretation boards introduce visitors to both the wildlife and the local history, and there is an educational website: [www.ssmjchurtyard.org.uk](http://www.ssmjchurtyard.org.uk). Early on, the church registered as an Ecocongregation so that the work would be seen as celebrating and caring for God's creation. It is a great outreach project, involving people of different backgrounds and experience, and appreciated by many who have no connection to the church. The gratitude of people who are now able to re-visit their family graves has also been very moving.

—Ruth Conway

**MISSION AND EARTHKEEPING: THE STATE OF THE DEBATE—BY ERNST CONRADIE**

Thinking through ecological challenge from a faith perspective offers to the Christian tradition an opportunity for renewal and transformation. The scale of the issues ensures that every aspect of Christian self-understanding and engagement must come under scrutiny. Christian mission is not accepted. Over the past four decades numerous reflections on mission and earthkeeping have been published. In this contribution I will offer some brief comments on the state of the debate. I will identify three areas where there has emerged significant consensus, but also three areas where the underlying issues remain unresolved.

*Emerging Consensus*

- 1) The environmental impact of the history of cross-cultural Christian missions is highly ambiguous. The famous critique of Lynn White and others that Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for the environmental crisis, certainly applies to the history of Christian missions as well. Although one may

identify many commendable examples of projects around medical services, education and agriculture, the interplay between Christian mission, cultural invasion and the exporting of industrial capitalism to all corners of the world implies that Christian mission is inescapably associated with environmental destruction, at least by those standing outside the Christian tradition.

- 2) God's mission to the world, through Christ and the Spirit, includes an ecological dimension which may be expressed through various forms of Christian earthkeeping. Several South African missiologists have suggested a multi-dimensional understanding of mission that leaves ample room to include an ecological dimension as well, despite some early resistance to such suggestions. Such an ecological dimension to Christian mission is affirmed in numerous publications from all corners of the world.
- 3) The ecological dimension of Christian mission touches upon each and every mode of Christian witness, including worship, fellowship, preaching and service. A multi-dimensional understanding of Christian mission invites a recognition of various modes of Christian witness. In a growing corpus of literature each of these modes has been extended to address earthkeeping concerns. With respect to worship one may mention the celebration of various festive days and of a "Season of Creation", together with explorations of the ecological significance of the holy communion and baptism. The movement towards eco-congregations suggests that Christian fellowship calls for an ecological communion; Christians are called to



establish eschatological signs of being a “sustainable community”. There are now ample resources available that explore the ecological significance of preaching, Christian education and teaching.

A whole range of earthkeeping projects express forms of Christian service in the world. It may be helpful to list these in order to recognise such variety, depending on local needs and circumstances: schemes to offset carbon emissions, tree planting, water harvesting, organic vegetable gardens, recycling, indigenous church gardens and “living graveyard campaigns”. One may also mention outdoor youth and family activities to promote the love of nature, nature conservation projects focusing on habitat, wildlife or indigenous plants, job creation projects in the field of appropriate technology, the development of teaching material and networks to communicate such work to others.

Admittedly, such projects remain all too few and far between. The organisation is often hampered by administrative and financial problems, while the environmental impact of such projects is often not factored in. Such projects may certainly help to raise an environmental awareness, but their impact often remains shallow.

### *Unresolved Concerns*

- 1) Although a theological rationale for Christian earthkeeping is often discussed in the available literature and more often assumed, there remains considerable confusion in this regard. Why should Christians engage in earthkeeping in the first place?

The answer to this question is less obvious than is often assumed. Often people's deepest convictions are articulated in answering this question. Not surprisingly, a wide variety of answers may be provided and several of these are highly contested. Here one may mention the controversy over the term "stewardship", the attempts to retrieve the virtues of wisdom, simplicity, frugality and care, the struggles for liberation from oppression extended to the liberation of creation, the quest for eco-justice, the need for housekeeping within the "whole household of God" and so forth. One may of course also explain the need for Christian earthkeeping in purely functionalist terms, given the ambiguous legacy of Christianity, but also its widespread grassroots influence, for example among impoverished communities in Africa.

- 2) The ways in which the various modes of Christian witness are related to each other remain a point of controversy in reflection on Christian mission and on Christian earthkeeping alike. Given the various modes of Christian witness, where should the priority lie? Is this merely based on contextual considerations? Although there may be considerable consensus that God's mission to the world is to establish a sense of comprehensive well-being, the assumptions about the nature of salvation which are at play in missiological discourse are seldom confronted.

Three ways of understanding salvation have been appropriated to ecological concerns: a) the proclamation of God's victory over the forces of evil, death and destruction, often associated with

- prophetic charges for liberation and justice; b) the need to overcome alienation between human and non-human nature and to address the polarisation over environmental concerns through theological reflection on reconciliation, forgiveness, sacrifice and restitution; c) the extension of modern, liberal notions of moral influence to seek manifestations of life in sustainable communities amidst environmental destruction.
- 3) Christians involved in earthkeeping projects typically sense the need for inter-faith or multi-faith cooperation in this regard. This is understandable since ecological concerns such as climate change can only be addressed in common. However, there remains difference of opinion as to how Christian earthkeeping is related to earthkeeping in other religious traditions. Some regard Christian earthkeeping, at best, as one particular manifestation of an environmental movement that may offer a contribution, alongside other religious traditions, worldviews and philosophies, to a more general attempt to retrieve the kind of ecological wisdom that is required to address environmental devastation in the decades ahead. They may argue that the various religious traditions form part of the larger earth community and could and should contribute to a global ethos. Some assume a generic notion of the Supreme Being to emphasise that which the world religions have in common. Others regard a Christian earthkeeping ethos, praxis, spirituality and theology as one way of witnessing to the truth claims of the Christian tradition in its ongoing dialogue with other living faiths and worldviews. They argue that

the earth community, all its creatures, including humans, their cultures, languages and religions were created by the triune God.

This problem cannot be evaded easily. If Christians are urged to engage in earthkeeping in order to make a contribution to a collective effort to retrieve a generalised form of ecological wisdom from the world's religious traditions, it will only be supported by the few who are already convinced of the need for earthkeeping on other grounds. This suggests the need for further reflection on a deeper theological vision that could sustain Christian earthkeeping.

**KEY TEXT: ROMANS 8:18-25**

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

How should we understand our human place in the world which God has created?

What are the implications of the contemporary environmental crisis for Christian mission?

What practical steps can you take to relate your mission engagement to the natural environment?

**PRAYER**

*Creator God, I praise you for the wonder and the perfection of your creation, and for your gracious purposes to bring the whole created order to its fulfilment.*

*Forgive me that I have been heedless of your call to care for the earth, concerned only with my own needs, reckless in exploiting natural resources.*

*Let me enter, O Lord, into the eager expectation of your whole creation, as it awaits the fulfilment of your saving purposes in Jesus Christ.*

*And enable me to cherish the goodness of the natural world, seeking its sustenance and renewal through the way I live my life.*

*All for the sake of Jesus Christ, the firstborn over all creation. Amen*



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*Reconciliation and Healing*

## A GOSPEL OF RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation and healing are prominent biblical themes which have increasingly suggested themselves as expressing the meaning of mission for our time. A number of features of our contemporary world have played a role in this:

- Globalisation has brought the world closer but at the same time introduced conflict and tension into many human relationships;
- Modern communications increase the possibilities of interaction for some while excluding others, leading to fragmentation and alienation;
- Openness to spiritual questions is evident throughout the world yet the religious quest can lead in directions which lead to hostility and aggression;
- The militarisation of the world foments a tendency to see violence as a solution—when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail;
- The rise of Pentecostal-type spirituality around the world has brought a fresh awareness of the Holy Spirit and of the close association of the Spirit with reconciliation and peace.

These trends have prompted a fresh reading of the Bible where reconciliation is a strong theme throughout, coming to explicit expression in the letters of Paul. The Bible recognises the brokenness, enmity, fragmentation and distortion which mark our human life and announces the reconciliation and healing found in Jesus Christ. Closely interlinked in the biblical vision are reconciliation between humanity and God, reconciliation between different groups of human beings, and reconciliation of the entire cosmos.

Through Christ's substitutionary death "for us" (Romans 5:8; Galatians 1:4) reconciliation has been achieved once for all leading to forgiveness of sins, communion with God and new life in God's kingdom. This is all by the grace and love of God. The Christian narrative of reconciliation is thus based on and centred in the story of the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The messianic ministry of Jesus of Nazareth links his suffering with the suffering of all humanity, and is therefore an expression of the deep solidarity of God with an agonized, fragmented and tortured world. The cross is, at the same time, an expression of the divine protest against this suffering, for Jesus of Nazareth suffered as the innocent victim. He refused to take refuge in violence, he persisted in the love of his enemies and he made love towards God and his fellow-human beings the central concern of his life.<sup>31</sup>

—World Council of Churches, Athens, 2005

The reconciliation offered by Christ becomes an active reality through the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling the church so that, as a healing and reconciling community, it reaches out to all who are in need of forgiveness and reconciliation. Ultimately, commitment to reconciliation is anchored in the very being of the triune God where otherness, relationships and community characterise the life of the one God.



### TURNING ENEMIES INTO FRIENDS

The power of reconciliation with God in Christ is such that it not only resolves our relationship with God but, in doing so, makes us agents of reconciliation. It is in so far as practitioners of Christian mission have absorbed belief in the reconciliation achieved by Jesus Christ and its implications for our relations with our neighbours that they become potentially distinctive actors in a context of conflict. Out of their experience of faith Christians become the kind of people who can contribute to the creation of just, truthful and peaceful societies.

Theologians and church leaders from the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) and Sri Lanka met at Seremban, Malaysia from 8 to 11 June 2009 to consider the question of mission as reconciliation in pluralistic contexts. Facing up to a context of cultural plurality, religious extremism and socio-political conflict, they found that:

- Reconciliation begins with the gracious initiative of God in Jesus Christ. As we receive the forgiveness, reconciliation and peace found in Christ, we are drawn into a mission of reconciliation marked by the humility and vulnerability of Jesus.
- Reconciliation between God and humanity through Christ is inseparable from the work of reconciliation with fellow human beings and the whole creation.
- Division and prejudice within the church often obscure its reconciling calling. We need to confess our failings and find renewal if we are to be credible witnesses to the transforming power of reconciliation in Christ.
- We are called in Christ to be outgoing—forming relationships of trust and respect with people from other religious communities, accepting differences

with maturity, and cultivating dialogue and partnership even when progress is slow.

- All world faiths make universal truth claims and it does not serve authentic reconciliation for these to be minimised. Rather, we commend Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord while listening attentively to the truth claims advanced by other religious communities.<sup>32</sup>

In today's world, Christian mission often brings together people from different cultures, contexts and life experiences to engage in collaborative work. This creates the kind of human bridge which can link Churches, cultures and civilisations through faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, far from creating another exclusive, polarising community, the experience of discovering the identity of others through shared mission commitment tends to function as preparation and training for encounter with those who belong to other faith communities.

Another dimension to the reconciliation envisioned in the Bible concerns the broken and distorted relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. Human attempts to subdue and conquer nature have led to an environmental crisis that threatens the future of all. There is need to engender a renewed cherishing of life and respect for the integrity of creation. The reconciliation and healing promised in the gospel comprehend the entire earth and indeed the whole cosmos.

### **RECONCILIATION IN A WORLD OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES**

On all sides it is recognised that religion plays an important role in determining the political configuration of many contexts worldwide. As Philip Jenkins comments: "However much this would have surprised political analysts a generation or two ago, the critical political frontiers around the world are decided not by attitudes toward class or dialectical materialism, but by rival

concepts of God.”<sup>33</sup> Religious support for violence can very quickly subvert the imperative for peace and reconciliation which lies at the heart of biblical faith. If Christian mission is not able to function credibly as a force for reconciliation, then its claims are soon going to look hollow.

In the situation of increasing deprivation in which many communities find themselves in today’s world, ethnic and/or religious identity can often become a rallying point in the struggle for survival. Such sources of identity can also be exploited by unscrupulous politicians in order to secure their own power or advance their own agendas. As a result, the growth of an exclusive global economy has been accompanied by an explosion of civil wars, genocide and ethnic cleansing. The church finds itself sometimes identified with one side in a bitter ethnic conflict, sometimes thrown into antagonism with the adherents of another religion in the locality, sometimes a persecuted minority when another religious community asserts its dominance. Competition for increasingly scarce resources, in sectors disadvantaged by the advance of globalisation, drives people to seek strength in the solidarity of their own ethnic or religious community.

These trends all underline the importance of being able to engage with those who belong to another religion in ways which make for healing and reconciliation.

Religious differences are real and ultimate. Attempts to reconcile such differences in a theoretical scheme . . . violate the “otherness” of the other, and risk sacrificing the distinctiveness of each particular faith tradition for the sake of a new global religion.

Religious differences, as well as shared understandings, can only be discovered through attentive, empathetic listening to the “best” exponents of another tradition, collaborating with others in social and political projects of common concern, and honest,

vigorous argument.

The *other* is essential to our own pilgrimage. We do not know what we really believe, let alone how far our lives correspond to what we profess to believe, until we engage in dialogue with others, especially those who are profoundly different from us. It is humility that enables me to see the ways in which I may be prone to use my Christianity to conceal inconvenient truths about God and myself or to bolster my own ego in self-justification. Evangelism, if authentic, changes the bearers as well as the recipients of the Gospel.<sup>34</sup>

—Vinoth Ramachandra, Sri Lanka

Commitment to reconciliation and healing in today's world will involve serious efforts to understand other religious communities. Since the attainment of reconciliation will necessitate working with others, it is vital that we build up our understanding of how they envision healing and wholeness.

Several years ago I was engaged in a four-day dialogue with an Iranian Shi'ite in Germany. When I made a presentation on the reconciliation of the cross, she responded with anger, "I never knew the cross has anything to do with forgiveness and reconciliation. We Muslims consider the cross an emblem for killing Muslims." Immediately images of the Crusaders or more modern wars such as the Bosnian conflict came to my mind, I wept, as I considered such betrayals of the cross and asked her forgiveness for ways that the church has too often betrayed the meaning of the cross as God's reconciling embrace. After a three-hour lunch break it was her turn to speak and she said: "The last three hours have been the most transformational of my life, because your tears of repentance for the sins of the church against us Muslims has opened my eyes to a Jesus I never knew about. I do not know where this will take me, but I thank you, for never before have I experienced a Christian asking forgiveness of us Muslims."<sup>35</sup>

—David W. Shenk, USA

### THE HEALING OF MEMORIES

Closely related to reconciliation is healing. It is evident in the New Testament that Jesus' announcement of the coming of the kingdom of God was accompanied by acts of healing. Christian mission has sought to replicate the threefold ministry of Jesus – preaching (building up the life of the church), teaching (offering education) and healing (developing healthcare). The Churches, in their diverse contexts, remain committed to the ministry of healing today. A study prepared for Edinburgh 2010 explains why:

The Christian understanding of health and healing, and the Christian healing ministry is related to our Christian understanding of salvation. Biblically speaking, salvation is related to the realisation of God's kingdom, i.e. the "new creation" that the Hebrew prophets announced and expected as "shalom". Shalom can be described as an ultimate state of reconciled and healed relationships between creation and God, between humanity and God, between humanity and creation, and between humans as individuals and as groups or societies. Every single act of healing is a sign of the realisation of shalom.<sup>36</sup>

—World Council of Churches / DIFAEM 2010

In this perspective healing takes many forms within a holistic and integrated vision of human well-being. We focus here on the healing of memories.

It is an inescapable reality of human life, whether at family, communal or international level, that great wrongs are sometimes suffered. Christian faith is distinguished by belief in forgiveness—unconditionally received from God and unconditionally offered to others. Forgiveness, like nothing else, carries the power to set us free from the painful memory of the wrong which has been inflicted. Without forgiveness we remain locked in damaging relationships, twisted and distorted by suffering experienced in

the past. As the World Council of Churches has stated:

Traumatic memories of acts of wrongdoing or atrocity often will need healing if they are to be the building blocks of a different kind of future. To heal memories means that they lose their toxic quality. When that happens, memories do not hold us hostage to the past, but empower us to create a future where the wrongdoing of the past cannot happen again.<sup>37</sup>

Here is an example from apartheid South Africa:

I remember how things started to get separate in South Africa. My grandfather was a minister and over time our church members began to all be chocolate brown due to the Group Areas Act which separated whites from blacks. Apartheid started to operate within the country. I remember these white police officers from the army coming to ask where our parents were. They crashed through the door of the church house (manse as we call it) and began to load up all the furniture. My anger started from that day, it was deep and it grew in me and became part of my life. It was the first time in my life I realized that there were white people and they were different. This was my “first life”— meeting people who hated us. So, when I first went into ministry, I took it as a way of having a public place where I could beat the hell out of white folks. I was so filled with anger. My grandmother reminded me that I was created beautifully and God was so happy when each of us was born! This was my second part of my life (my ‘second life’) dealing with the issue of love.

Ministry became a place where we fought the system. Liberation theology became a way of assuring blacks that God was on their side. I served in Schoemansville, Sharpville and later after further studies, I was called to a white congregation called St. Giles. A different world. The people I had promised to beat the hell out of were now caring for me, but the law still had the Group Areas Act, which did not allow blacks to stay in

town. They had a manse, I had to stay there. White police officers used to drive there in order to harass me. Members of the Church protected me. One of the experiences I remember was when I had to baptize a white kid. Although it was illegal for me to baptize a white child in terms of the South African law, the Church did not bow to baal and its draconian laws. I went ahead and baptized a white child. What an experience, especially when you are oppressed.<sup>38</sup>

—Maake Masango, South Africa

When it comes to something that lies as deep in human experience as the healing of memories, the need to engage at a spiritual level becomes apparent. As Robert Schreiter explains:

Reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy. If reconciliation is principally God's work, then we are but 'ambassadors for Christ' (II Corinthians 5:20). It is in God's working through us that reconciliation is to be found. Reconciliation means in the first instance, then, the cultivation of a relationship with God that becomes the medium through which reconciliation can happen. That relationship expresses itself in spiritual practices that create space for truth, for justice, for healing and for new possibilities.<sup>39</sup>

The transforming power of the gospel becomes evident in many situations today when reconciliation takes effect.

The people in general and Chinese in particular in Peninsula (or West) Malaysia suffered greatly during the Japanese occupation during the Second World War from 1941-1945. The Chinese in Malaya hated the Japanese very much due to the oppression, suffering and aggression that the latter inflicted upon the former. Until today, there is still a deep-seated bitterness in the hearts of the Chinese against the Japanese. My grandfather and father who migrated from China to Malaya in the 1930s went through the pains. Their tormenting experiences created in me bitterness against the Japanese for a long time.

It was 1989 when I was doing my first graduate studies in Singapore, a Japanese student in the same college organized a short-term mission to Japan. He recruited me and two other students into the mission team. Throughout the mission trip, my heart was struggling between bitterness and forgiveness.

One of the major issues during that time was that the Japanese government (especially the education department) was trying to change the facts in their history books about their invasion of China and other parts of the South East Asia. I was furious every time I came across the report in the news or discussion pertaining to this.

With this hidden bitterness how was I able to share the message of the gospel of reconciliation with integrity and confidence? It was a painful pilgrimage. The breakthrough first came from the humility and sincerity that my Japanese college-mate exhibited. He and other Japanese Christian leaders whom we met during the trip were very critical of their government in this regard. They apologized sincerely to us (the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore) about the atrocities that their own people committed during World War II.

During the mission trip, I was constantly challenged by the message of reconciliation that Christ has accomplished and entrusted to us. I experienced the transforming work of God's Spirit. Healing began to take place, bitterness being replaced with forgiveness. I was liberated from hatred, and reconciliation became a reality, and true and intimate relationship was able to be nurtured between myself and Japanese.

On two occasions I invited the Japanese Glee Club Male Choir to come and sing at our church in Nilai. To see the Japanese worshipping together with us was a moving experience for many who attended the thanksgiving worship. Healing and reconciliation becomes a reality as we are willing to be true to the gospel, no matter how vast the chasm.

—Philip T.Y. Siew, Malaysia



**KEY TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:15-23**

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

How does the life and ministry of Jesus shape our approach to conflict and reconciliation?

What does it take to form relationships that make for reconciliation between communities which have been suspicious or hostile towards one another?

How can we cultivate a spirituality which makes us agents of reconciliation within the church, between communities, and extending to justice and restoration for the world as a whole?

**PRAYER**

*I praise you, O God, that the sun of righteousness has risen with healing in his wings;*

*that in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the power to set right every wrong. I worship you that, through his death on the cross I may be reconciled with you; and that the Holy Spirit works today to bridge every division and heal every wound.*

*Grant that, as by faith I am made right with you, so I may be shaped by your purposes,*

*so that I may be the kind of person who ministers reconciliation and peace.*

*In a fragmented and painfully broken world, where many are suffering, grant that your church may truly be a community of reconciliation and healing.*

*For the sake of Jesus Christ, the prince of peace. Amen*

## ***Resources***

### **WEBSITES**

Edinburgh 2010: [www.edinburgh2010.org](http://www.edinburgh2010.org)

Global Christian Forum: [www.globalchristianforum.org](http://www.globalchristianforum.org)

Lausanne Movement: [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org)

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity: [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils)

World Council of Churches: [www.oikumene.org](http://www.oikumene.org)

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## *Endnotes*

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2. Lamin Sanneh, “Christianity by Peoples and Languages, 1910-2010”, in Todd M. Johnson & Kenneth R. Ross ed., *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 222-23.
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## ENDNOTES

7. See, for instance, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 54; LCWE, 2004, available at [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org).
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9. See further, Association Francophone Oecuménique de Missiologie, *Figures Bibliques de la Mission*, sous la direction de Marie-Hélène Robert, Jacques Matthey et Catherine Vialle, Paris: Cerf, 2010, collection Lectio Divina.
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13. UBS–CELAM meeting, Guatemala City, 24-25 September 2007.
14. This chapter draws substantially on a paper entitled “Women and Mission: Reclaiming the Past for Today’s Visions” prepared by Christine Lienemann, Atola Longkumer & Afrie Songco Joye as part of a project to prepare a larger volume with the same title; and on pp. 245-52 of Balia & Kim, *Edinburgh 2010*, a section entitled “‘Who Is Not at the Table?’ Women’s Perspectives of Holistic Mission as Mutually Inclusive”, compiled by Fulata Moyo.
15. Lienemann, Longkumer and Joye, “Women and Mission”, p. 4.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
17. “Mission for All: Full Participation in the Mending of Creation”, final statement of the consultation on “Towards Edinburgh 2010: Women’s Perspectives on Mission and Theological Education in the 21st Century” held at Bossey Ecumenical Institute, Switzerland, 24-28 November 2008.
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19. Moyo, “Who is not at the Table?”, p. 246.
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